



4RAR(CDO)

# SHOCK TROOPS

4RAR(Cdo) will benefit most from the ADF's new Special Forces Direct Recruiting Scheme. CONTACT takes a look inside the unit and the inovative scheme.

WORDS CONTACT IN ASSOCIATION WITH SOCOMD  
PICS PTE BEN PEARDON, CPL SEAN BURTON AND SOCOMD

**A**fter WW2, Australia disbanded the M and Z Special Units and the Independent Commando companies that made up its first special forces units.

During 1955 in a bid to maintain the skills developed by M and Z Special Units, two reserve commando companies were raised.

These companies operated independently, training reserve and regular commandos and maintaining commando techniques. Commandos from these companies went on to assist in manning the SASR when it was raised as a company in 1957.

In 1995 Townsville-based 2/4RAR was split, with 4RAR moving to Holsworthy and re-roled from light infantry to commandos in 1997, becoming operational in November 1999.

The 2000 Defence White Paper reiterated the requirement and confirmed the Government's commitment to project Land 132 – the implementation of a full-time commando capability.

Project Land 132 has a budget of \$117 million comprising \$44 million for facilities and \$73 million for equipment, including M4 modular weapon systems, para-Minimi, sniping systems, Commando Watercraft, all-terrain vehicles and surveillance/reconnaissance vehicles.



# THERE IS NOTHING DISCRETE ABOUT A COMMANDO OPERATION, WHICH IS AN ACT OF EXTREME FORCE

off without incident and 4RAR(Cdo) re-deployed back to Australia in November, replacing their UN berets for commando berets and re set itself to giving Australia a full-time commando capability by September 2002. Even after recent high-profile deployments to the Gulf on Operation Bastille, a fair proportion of the ADF and the Australian public still have little understanding of the unique operational capability 4RAR(Cdo) offers as the nations newest strategic asset. Commando operations span the gap between conventional infantry and unconventional operations, principally focused on strikes conducted at long distances from Australia.

Assembling boats at any time is a laborious task but in the water it's extremely hard, physical work. An experienced amphibious operator says daylight water landings are easier compared to ground ones, but that's when the fun stopped. "Its bloody hard yakka in the sea – day or night – everything's a struggle and you can multiple that by 10 when the sea state is up." In addition to his insertion skills, which include static line parachuting, commando amphibious operations, airborne rappelling and military roping the modern commando has advanced infantry skills as well as specialist communications and first-aid skills. He is also trained in advanced urban, close-quarter battle skills, cliff assaulting and demolitions. During its recent Gulf deployment, 4RAR(Cdo) was deployed as the Quick Reaction Force for the Special Forces Task Group. Other responsibilities included the traditional commando role of combat search and rescue. These skill-sets do not exist in other Australian Defence Force units outside of Special Forces. Coming under the SOCOMD umbrella, along with the Incident Response Regiment, 126,152, 330 Signals Squadrons, SASR, and the Special Operations Combat Service Support Company, 4RAR(Cdo) have at times attracted unfair criticism. Critics say that 4RAR(Cdo) is an unnecessary niche capability, especially in a time when defence spending is under close scrutiny.

## RAMBO NEED NOT APPLY

Nowhere else in the ADF is there a greater emphasis placed on physical fitness than in Special Forces. For personnel taking their first steps towards SF entry, the standard appears daunting. A popular misconception is that by the time they attempt entry testing, applicants should already be marathon-running bodybuilders and part-time Olympians. 4RAR(Cdo) PTI, Cpl Glen Folkard says this is not true and he is keen to dispel the myth, believing it deters suitable applicants. "We're not looking for Rambo here. A lot of blokes arrive at selection and think they have to be super-man on day one. Relax guys – that's not what its about," he says. "But a strong aerobic base – through running or swimming for example – is essential. You must be able to do push ups, chin ups and dips. So, when it comes to bush and pack work the SF soldier is not a Neanderthal – he's got a more natural body shape." He says there are very few blokes in 4RAR(Cdo) who are 'monsters' and it's usually the shorter, wiry blokes who get through assessment easiest. "Most guys here are physical types anyway because the last two years has seen a massive emphasis on physical training. It's the nature of the beast, it's ingrained into the commando subculture – if you don't keep it up you'll fall behind your peers." Self-discipline is essential, with regular workloads demanding that soldiers do training in their own time. If you want to join 4RAR(Cdo), get some advice from SFTC, speak to an ADF PTI and start on the right program from the outset.



## CHOOKS. NO COMS, NO BOMBS

An integral part of any Australian SF unit is its highly experienced and respected signal operators – affectionately known as chooks. But why? It originated when one 152 Sigs Sqn sergeant in Borneo, didn't trust his troops to take their anti-malaria tablets and took to handing out the pills on parade. Grunts, seeing this, likened it to chooks, "pecking up" their tablets. The term was further reinforced in Vietnam with Sigs using a small morse key, which looked and sounded like a chook pecking at something. Then there's the visual reinforcement of seeing a signaller bent over, under pack, with two legs sticking out the bottom – like a chook.

During April 2000, 4RAR(Cdo) were warned out for peace-making duties in East Timor in 2001. Training for this mission was temporarily halted during this period, however, as Bravo Company and HQ 4RAR(Cdo) were deployed to north Queensland as a quick reaction force for Operation Plumbob, the evacuation of foreign nationals caught between warring ethnic factions in a simmering Solomon Islands. In April 2001, 4RAR(Cdo) deployed as a light-scale infantry battalion group to East Timor during the country's most precarious period since INTERFET – that of post-independence elections. In testament to efforts of the whole battalion group, the potentially explosive elections passed

Primarily organised, trained and equipped to conduct strike operations, the unit is capable of being inserted into a target area by a variety of air, sea or land insertion methods including specialist advanced parachute techniques. One specific skill is beach parallel parachuting. In this technique commandos parachute into the ocean and swim to a beach-landing site through the surf zone. If commandos can't get close enough to the coastline they can use an insertion method called parachute load follow. This involves parachuting into the sea behind bundled deflated Zodiacs which are assembled in the water in preparation for the team's arrival soon after, also by parachute.

Maj-Gen Duncan Lewis disagrees and says that 4RAR(Cdo) has increased the flexibility of Australia's Special Forces but are a different animal compared to SASR. "The commandos are major muscle movers. They are heavily armed, operate in large numbers and are designed to fight. They are deployed to reach out and apply a great deal of concentrated military force and then return home," he says. "SASR are a different. They are an organisation designed for a more surgical approach to warfare. They operate in a more discreet fashion compared to the commandos because there is nothing discreet about a commando operation – which is an act of extreme force."



Stomping into the future, 4RAR(Cdo) doesn't forget its roots and has deliberately strengthened its ties with the 4RAR Association, who are regular guests at Holsworthy, including at the battalion's recent birthday parade.

Veteran's of past South East Asian wars stood in huddles talking with commandos.

"It's a different ball game, a different type of job from my day but these boys must go hard, I wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of 'em," one Veteran mused while examining a display of high-tech equipment.

He lent closer, out of ear shot of the others, and whispered as if sharing a secret, "When I heard what these young fellas go through to get that Green Beret... Mate! I bought him a bloody beer!" he said with a hint of pride as he acknowledged a commando across the table.

**W**hat would you say if someone offered you a job that paid damn well to do the all the high-tempo, adrenaline-junkie challenges you currently pay good money to do on weekends?

The Australian Defence Force is offering just such a job to fit young men with a taste for adventure. But make no mistake, entry standards are second to none.

If you've been put off by the thoughts of an 'standard' career in the military, now is your chance to grab your spot at the sharp end – Australian Special Forces.

The Special Forces Direct Recruiting Scheme (SFDRS) has been developed to meet Government requirements to increase the capability and force structure of Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) – specifically, 334 additional commando positions including a number in support.

This opportunity for direct entry into Special Forces is based on a similar successful concept currently operating in the US but it's not an entirely new idea to Australian Special Forces.

Commando Training Courses Senior Instructor at the Special Forces Training Centre (SFTC) Capt Damien McMahon says 1 Commando Regiments' Simpson Platoon ran a successful trial last year recruiting candidates to the General Reserve

and says he has no problem with thinking outside the square to find potential new commandos.

"The SFDRS has a lot of potential, a lot of merit, so ultimately – why not?"

If you think, however, that this scheme is some sort of back-door, shortcut to Special Forces, you'd be well off the mark. The scheme has its critics, of course, but, it would seem potential SFDRS applicants have a very high standard to meet.

Starting with the basic enlistment process, applicants face a much more stringent physical, psychological and security checking regime than their regular Army counterparts. For example, SFDRS applicants must attain 'beep-test' level 10 compared to 7.5 for regular enlistees.

Of the more than 900 enquires for the scheme thus far received by Defence Recruiting, roughly 100 of those have progressed.

However, the scheme's target appears to be on track with 45 applicants having commenced the first stage of training – the standard six-week recruit-training course at ARTC Kapooka.

With a further 125 positions to be

## THE ISSUE OF US MAINTAINING STANDARDS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE

filled in the financial year 2004-05, a second full-strength platoon will commence training this month, with a third course starting in May also expected to be full. The scheme's backers anticipate that between 70 to 80 per cent of applicants will stay the distance and earn the coveted Sherwood Green commando beret.

Training at Kapooka will follow the standard template, but special-forces aspirants will train together and receive added motivation from Special Forces staff posted to ARTC not to lose sight of their goal.

After ARTC, the applicants begin 12 weeks of infantry Initial Employment Training (IET) at the 'grunt factory' – Infantry Centre, Singleton – with standard instruction from commando and infantry platoon staff.

After successfully completing IETs, applicants are posted to 4RAR(Cdo) but only take the short walk to the SF Training Centre, also at Singleton, where they begin an eight-week accelerated training course on the long, challenging path to fully fledged Australian Special Forces status.

The accelerated course has been designed to give applicants the basic skill-sets that an infantry soldier would have gained after one to two years experience in an infantry battalion. These skills are required to pass the Special Force Entry Test (SFET) and are the necessary building blocks to really start absorbing special-operations training on the Commando Training Courses.

Applicants who fail to meet the grade will be given options at a number of decision points to pursue either an alternate role in the ADF or return to civilian life.

Special Operations Commander – Australia Maj-Gen Duncan Lewis is adamant that applicants will be required to meet the same exacting standards as those joining Special Operations Command through traditional avenues.

"The issue of us maintaining standards is not negotiable," he says.

"But, SOCOMD development means we need more high-quality applicants – and we need them now. Therefore we have had to widen the pool of potential applicants through the introduction of the SFDRS. We're trying a different approach to find more people – and offering them the chance of a lifetime in return.

"We're hoping to attract people with drive, determination and high levels of intelligence who see service in the Special Forces as the ultimate challenge. We can promise them a high-intensity lifestyle, great training and, best of all, the chance to work with a group of like-minded and dedicated professionals."

Maj-Gen Lewis says that SOCOMD is looking to recruit Commandos and Special Forces signallers

### COMMANDO SKILL SETS

COMMANDO IN PLF INSERTION KIT

RECON PATROL MEMBER

OFFENSIVE FIRE SPECIALIST

LEAD CLIMBER

COMMANDO STATIC LINE PARACHUTIST

AMPHIBIOUS OPERATOR

SNIPER PAIR

URBAN OPERATIONS ASSAULTER



## RAY SIMPSON VC DCM COMMANDO

Ray Simpson, an exceptional Aussie Commando, was born in NSW in 1926 and joined the Army in 1944 with 2nd AIF.

He served with the RAR in Korea and Malaya, and later joined the SASR.

While he was with 1 Cdo Regt and attached to the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, his actions saw him later awarded the Victoria Cross.

In a battalion-scale operation on 6 May 1966, the 232nd Company of the Mobile Strike Force, under Simpson was moving through jungle in II Corps area near the borders of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. When one of his platoons became heavily engaged with the enemy, Simpson led the remainder of his company to its assistance. As the company moved forward, one platoon commander, WO2 M.W. Gill, was seriously wounded and the assault began to falter. Simpson, in the face of heavy enemy fire, moved across open ground and carried Gill to safety.

He then crawled forward to within 10 metres of the enemy where he lobbed grenades into their positions, ordered his company to withdraw and, with five others, covered them.

Four days later, contact was again briefly made with the enemy.

At first light the next day artillery pounded the enemy positions and when the battalion moved forward they found the bunkers unoccupied.

The battalion probed ahead with WO2 A.M. Kelly leading the 231st Company. In the first burst of fire from the next contact, Kelly was wounded and the battalion commander,

US Capt Green, was killed when he went to assist. Simpson quickly organised two platoons and led them to the location of the contact. Simpson moved forward through withering machine-gun fire in order to cover the initial evacuation. The wounded, including Kelly, were evacuated with Simpson covering. The action ended indecisively next day when the battalion was evacuated.

Simpson received his VC during an investiture in Sydney in 1970. The United States also awarded him the Silver Star and the Bronze Star For Valour.

Ray Simpson VC DCM died of cancer in Japan on 18 Oct 1978, while posted to the Australian Embassy and is buried at the Yokohama War Cemetery.



**I WOULD SEE MOST  
CONSOLIDATING  
SKILLS AT  
4RAR(CDO) BEFORE  
ATTEMPTING SASR  
SELECTION**

39 passed and 30 were ultimately selected, he never once considered opting out.

"I did whatever I had to do to get over that finish line," he says. "Becoming a commando was my goal and I didn't want to let my mates down or get left behind."

And it's been well worth the effort, he laughs, adding, "We get to do the fun stuff all the time – shoot lots of bullets, fly around in choppers, scream around in boats – that's the shit, mate. That's what I joined for."

Pte Nick Thelan who, at 18, was one of the youngest soldiers to become a fully qualified commando, echoes this sentiment.

After four years at 4RAR(Cdo) he says his career highlights have so far included deployments to East Timor, the Gulf, and recently qualifying as a sniper, "So things are going pretty good."

"I work with a good bunch of blokes. We experience things that civilians can't, plus we get paid a well for doing real-time, high-tempo work.

"My advice to SFDRS guys starting out is, look after your feet and look after your mates."

"Go-on, throw your hat in the ring."

for service in 4RAR(Cdo) but is also seeking a few high-grade applicants for service in SASR.

"If we think they have what it takes we'll offer them a chance at SASR selection but I would see most consolidating skills at 4RAR(Cdo) before attempting SASR selection a couple of years down the track."

Completing his barrier testing and Commando Training Course in 2002, Pte Ben Sykes says that after 24 days of assessment, which 65 men started,