

# Special Forces - Australia

Part Two of a series that takes a look at Special Forces units around the world. This month we look at Australia.

The special forces of the Australian Defence Force are units of Special Operations Command and associated units of the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force that conduct and/or support special operations to advance and protect the national security of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The special forces of Australia have a lineage to a variety of units raised in the Second World War such as the Independent and Commando Companies, Z Special Unit, Navy Beach Commandos, and the Coastwatchers.

Australian special forces have most recently been deployed to Iraq in Operation Okra as the Special Operations Task Group, as the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan, in Afghanistan in support of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service and regularly for counter-terrorism pre-deploy to locations of major domestic events throughout Australia in readiness to support law enforcement.

## 1st Commando Regiment

The 1st Commando Regiment (1 Cdo Regt) is an Australian Army Reserve special forces unit part of Special Operations Command with an integrated structure of regular (full-time) soldiers and reserve (part-time) soldiers, which together with the full-time Australian Army

2nd Commando Regiment, provides the Commando capability to Special Operations Command.

Raised in 1955 it is the oldest unit within Special Operations Command and in 2008 deployed to Afghanistan to become the first Australian Army Reserve force element on combat operations since World War II.

The primary role of 1st Commando Regiment is to provide a scalable and deployable mis-



## 1st Commando Regiment

sion command headquarters to Special Operations Command (SOCOMD).

In addition, the Regiment is manned, trained and equipped to provide commando force elements up to a company size, as well as providing high quality, competent individual commandos to round out, reinforce and rotate with other SOCOMD capabilities.

In recent years, the Regiment has frequently deployed

on operations, providing small detachments and individuals to peacekeeping missions in the region and deployed operationally in up to company sized combat elements to Afghanistan.

The Sherwood Green Commando beret is worn as the primary form of head dress, formally recognising Commando qualification. The Army sought permission from the Royal Marines to wear the green beret which was provided on 27 July 1955 by the Commandant Royal Marines. The first green beret awarded in Australia was presented to Captain George Cardy of 1st Commando Company on 14 July 1956.

Members wear a Garter Blue lanyard on the left shoulder of dress uniforms in common with the other combat units of SOCOMD. In 1992, distinctive black and green commando parachute wings were adopted and are now worn by all parachute qualified commandos.

The Regiment consists of a headquarters, two commando companies and a signals squadron with a strength about 450. It is organised as follows:

- Regimental Headquarters located at Randwick Barracks in Randwick, New South Wales
- 1 Commando Company (1 Cdo Coy) located at HMAS Penguin in Balmoral, New South Wales
- 2 Commando Company (2

Cdo Coy) located in the historic Fort Gellibrand at Williamstown, Victoria

- 301 Signal Squadron (301 Sig Sqn) headquarters at Randwick Barracks and elements of the squadron are located with 1 Cdo Coy, 2 Cdo Coy, Canberra and the Special Operations Engineer Regiment.

Each commando company has six platoons, including a headquarters platoon, three commando platoons, a reconnaissance platoon and a training platoon together with a signals troop and integral combat service support.

Combat elements of the Regiment typically operate in platoon to company sized force elements. These will be force tailored by requirement and may not fit any doctrinal size or command and control. The signal squadron has the largest full-time contingent in the Regiment.

Reserve support roles include clerical, logistics, transport, medical, intelligence, linguistics and information systems.

## 2nd Commando Regiment

The 2nd Commando Regiment is a special forces unit of the Australian Army, and is part of Special Operations Command.

The regiment was established on 19 June 2009 when the 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) was renamed. It is based at Holsworthy, New South Wales.

The 2nd Commando Regiment often trains and deploys with the Special Air Service Regiment, is highly regarded

by coalition special operation forces abroad, and has been involved in operations in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, where it was used in a direct action war fighting role.

It has also been involved in a number of domestic security operations including the 2006 Commonwealth Games and the 2014 G20 Leaders Summit.

Following the renaming of the unit, a new badge was chosen to reflect the history and traditions of the Independent Companies that served during the Second World War, by including the distinctive "double diamond" unit colour patch



## 2nd Commando Regiment

shape in the regimental badge, along with the traditional commando knife.

The unit's motto is *Foras Admonitio*, which is Latin for "Without Warning". Qualified commandos are awarded the Sherwood green commando beret. Distinctive commando parachute wings are worn, depicting a parachute backed by a pair of black drooping wings on a green background. The Australian Army stiletto dagger is also worn on ceremonial occasions. A garter blue lanyard is worn.

The regiment consists of a headquarters, four commando companies, a logistics support company, an operational support company and a signals squadron. It is believed to currently be organised as follows:

- Regimental Headquarters
- A Company
- B Company
- C Company
- D Company
- 126 Signal Squadron
- Operations Support Company
- Logistics Support Company

## Clearance Diving Branch

The Clearance Diving Branch is the specialist diving unit of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) whose versatile role covers all spheres of military diving, and includes explosive ordnance disposal and maritime counter-terrorism.

The Branch has evolved from traditional maritime diving, and explosive ordnance disposal, to include a special operations focus.

The RAN has used divers on a regular basis since the 1920s, but it was not until World War II that clearance diving operations came to the fore, with RAN divers working alongside Royal Navy divers to remove naval mines from British waters, and from the waters of captured ports on the European mainland.

The skills learned in the European theatre were brought back to Australia, and used in the war against Japan. After the war, RAN divers were used during the clean-up of Australian and Papua New Guinea waters of defensive mines.



### Clearance Diving Branch

In late 1966, Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT 3) was established specifically for deployment to the Vietnam War to assist the overworked United States Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal units, and to give RAN personnel experience in clearance diving work in an operational environment.

Sending CDT 1 or CDT 2, in full or in part, would have impacted on the teams' existing commitments, along with the continuity of training and postings.

CDT 3 was formed from available personnel; this was sufficient to keep a six-man team on station in Vietnam from early 1967 until early 1971, with six-month deployments.

CDT 3 was disbanded at the end of the Vietnam War, but the designation is reactivated for overseas wartime deployments, including in 1991 for the Gulf War, and again in 2003 for the Iraq War.

The Clearance Diving Branch consists of:

- Clearance Diving Team One (AUSCDT1); assigned to the east of Australia and

based at HMAS Waterhen in New South Wales

- Clearance Diving Team Four (AUSCDT4); assigned to the west of Australia and based at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia

For overseas operational deployments, the designation of Clearance Diving Team Three (AUSCDT3) is used for a specifically formed team.

### Special Air Service Regiment

The Special Air Service Regiment, officially abbreviated SASR though commonly known as the SAS, is a special forces unit of the Australian Army. Formed in 1957, it was modelled on the British SAS sharing the motto, "Who Dares Wins".

The regiment is based at Campbell Barracks, in Swanbourne, a suburb of Perth, Western Australia, and is a direct command unit of the Special Operations Command.

It has taken part in operations in Borneo, Vietnam, Somalia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as many other peacekeeping missions. The SASR also provides a counter-terrorist capability, and has been involved in a number of domestic security operations.

The SASR first saw action in 1965 as part of the British Commonwealth force stationed in north Borneo during the Indonesian Confrontation. The SASR troopers operated alongside their British and New Zealand counterparts in operations aimed at stopping Indonesian infiltration into Malaysia, taking part in Operation Claret.



### Special Air Service Regiment

#### Vietnam

During the Vietnam War, Australia sent troops to Vietnam as part of the country's commitment to SEATO (South-east Asia Treaty Organization).

Based in Nui Dat, the SASR was responsible for providing intelligence to both the 1st Australian Task Force (1 ATF) and US forces, operating throughout Phuoc Tuy Province as well as Bien Hoa, Long Khanh and Binh Tuy provinces.

From 1966 SASR squadrons rotated through Vietnam on year-long deployments, with each of the three Sabre Squadrons completing two tours before the last squadron was withdrawn in 1971.

Missions included medium range reconnaissance patrols, observation of enemy troop movements, and long range offensive operations and ambushes in enemy dominated territory.

Operating in small groups of four to six men they moved more slowly than conventional infantry through jungle or bushland and were heavily armed, employing a high rate

of fire to simulate a larger force on contact and to support their withdrawal.

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During its time in Vietnam the SASR proved highly successful, with members of the regiment known to the Viet Cong as *Ma Rung* or "phantoms of the jungle" due to their stealth.

In a six-year period the Australian and New Zealand SAS in Vietnam conducted nearly 1,200 patrols and inflicted heavy casualties on the Viet Cong, including 492 killed, 106 possibly killed, 47 wounded, 10 possibly wounded and 11 prisoners captured.

Their own losses totalled one killed in action, one died of wounds, three accidentally killed, one missing and one death from illness.

Twenty-eight men were wounded. During the period of its deployment 580 men served in the SASR in Vietnam.

### South African Navy

On 12 April 2001, an SASR troop conducted a boarding of the fishing vessel *South Tomi* using two RHIBs launched from the South African Navy vessel SAS Protea in international waters 260 nautical miles (480 km) south of Cape Agulhas, South Africa.

On 29 March, the Togo registered *South Tomi* fled the AFMA fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* after being detected poaching Patagonian toothfish near Heard Island and McDonald Islands in the Southern Ocean. The *South Tomi* fled towards Africa with the South African government agreeing to a request to provide a South African Navy vessel for an intercept.

The SASR troop was flown on a commercial flight to South Africa. *South*

*Tomi* was boarded after a pursuit of 6,100-kilometre by the *Southern Supporter*.

### Operation Slipper

In October 2001, the Australian government announced that it was sending a special forces task group built around an SASR squadron to participate in the campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan designated Operation Slipper.

After staging through Kuwait, 1 Squadron arrived in Afghanistan in December 2001 with the other SASR squadrons rotating in at approximately six-monthly intervals.

The SASR's main role in Afghanistan was to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance of al-Qaeda and Taliban positions, activities and capabilities. SASR force elements also

