



On Saturday the 18th June 2022, Kokoda Barracks, the Army's "tree change" establishment at Canungra in southern Queensland, hosted Legacy's fifth annual Combat Challenge.

Brendan Cox, the CEO of Brisbane Legacy invited us along and we're glad we went, not as participants in the gruelling event, but as humble observers.

In teams of four, those fit, young and eager enough to put their bodies through this torment would complete the 7 km course at Kokoda Barracks, consisting of obstacles, bush trails and soldier exercises, all the while raising funds to support Legacy Brisbane and their work supporting veterans' families.



Kokoda Barracks was established in 1942 as an Army jungle warfare training base. In 1948, after the end of WW2, it was closed but with the emerging perceived threats looming in south-east Asia, was re-activated in 1954. Between 1955 and 1966, 9,500 troops were trained at Canungra for active service in the Malayan Emergency and the Borneo Conflict. Then from 1962 to 1972, every unit that went to South Vietnam completed a period of rigorous and realistic Battle Efficiency training at Canungra before departure overseas.

Since then it has had a number of roles, from the School of Tactics and War Admin, Army Promotion Training Centre and in 1984 the school of Military Intelligence. In 1994 the Defence Intelligence Organisation, the Air Force and Navy amalgamated as the Defence Intelligence Training Wing.

Today it is the home of the Defence Intelligence Training Centre and the Australian Army Land Warfare Centre.

Compared to a noisy flat Air Force Base, it is a haven. Situated on 6,000 hectares of hilly picturesque virgin bushland, the 800 people that live and work there share the land with koalas, kangaroos, platypus and all sorts of birds and lizards/snakes. You could hardly call it work! On a warm sunny week-end it is only a short drive to the beaches on the Gold Coast or about an hour's drive up to Brisbane.



On that Saturday 63 teams, each comprising 4 participants, began arriving at the Base from 7.00am, were met in a car park outside the perimeter where pre-registered names were ticked off, people were herded towards a fleet of busses then transported down to the assembly area where those game enough to “have a go” were given their departure times.



The assembly area.



L-R: LtCol Wendy Say, the CO of Kokoda Barracks, Brendan Cox, CEO of Legacy Brisbane, WO Steven DiJullio – at the assembly area.



After registering and being given their allotted departure times, it was a short walk to the Start/Finish area, which at that time of day was just a little bit chilly.



Start/Finish area.

Legacy had arranged for a variety of food and drink marquees with the Rapid Relief Team (RRT) of volunteers being one. RRT provided a very welcome hot coffee and bacon and egg breakfast muffin for participants and spectators alike.





Established by the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church in 2013, RRT offers quality catering assistance and tangible support to charities, government and emergency services confronting some of humankind's greatest challenges. RRT adapts their benevolent support services to meet the need at hand. Whether it be fire, drought or even a global pandemic, RRT volunteers bring hope to people in their time of need. The RRT serves people across the globe with teams in Australia, the United Kingdom, North and South America, the Caribbean, Canada, New Zealand and across Europe. Very welcome indeed.

As there were 63 teams, it was decided to send off several teams at the same time. The initial run was easy, just a circuit of the Base, on paved roads, little did they know what was coming next. Click the pic to see the start.





After their “warm up” lap around the block it was time get real. This is where they picked up a “load” to slow them down a bit. Each team of 4 had to pick up and carry a bag of sand, a weighted ammunition box and a log of wood which was shared between two of them. Once loaded up, it was down a small grateful slope, across the weired Coomera River then the start of their gruelling up-hill battle.



Apart from providing a body of cold water which Army uses to “toughen-up” its troops, water is taken from the weir and treated in the on-Base treatment works for use on Base.

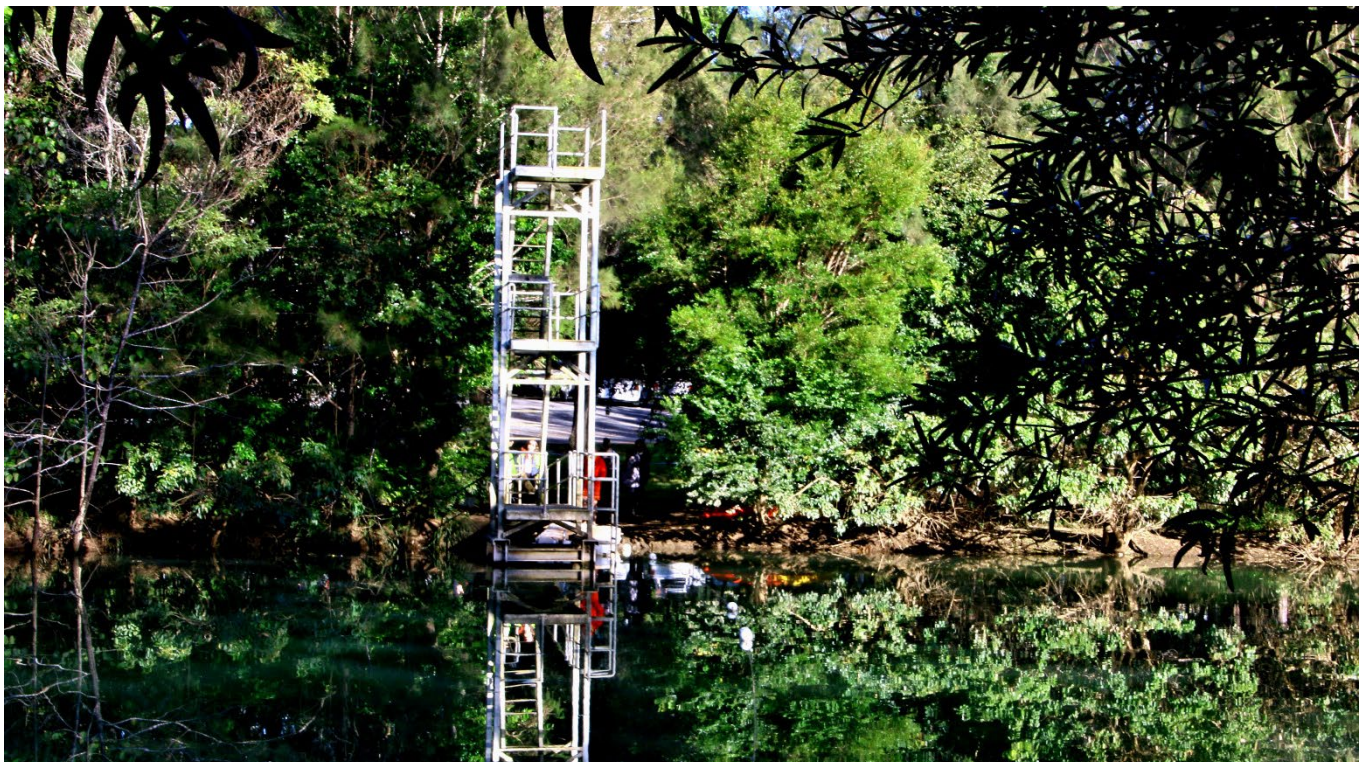




Normally one would expect that big burly blokes would be the best to carry the loads but not so, the young ladies, who were a part of most teams and who were half the size of some of the blokes, kept up with and in some cases, bettered their male counterparts. Girl power - great to see.

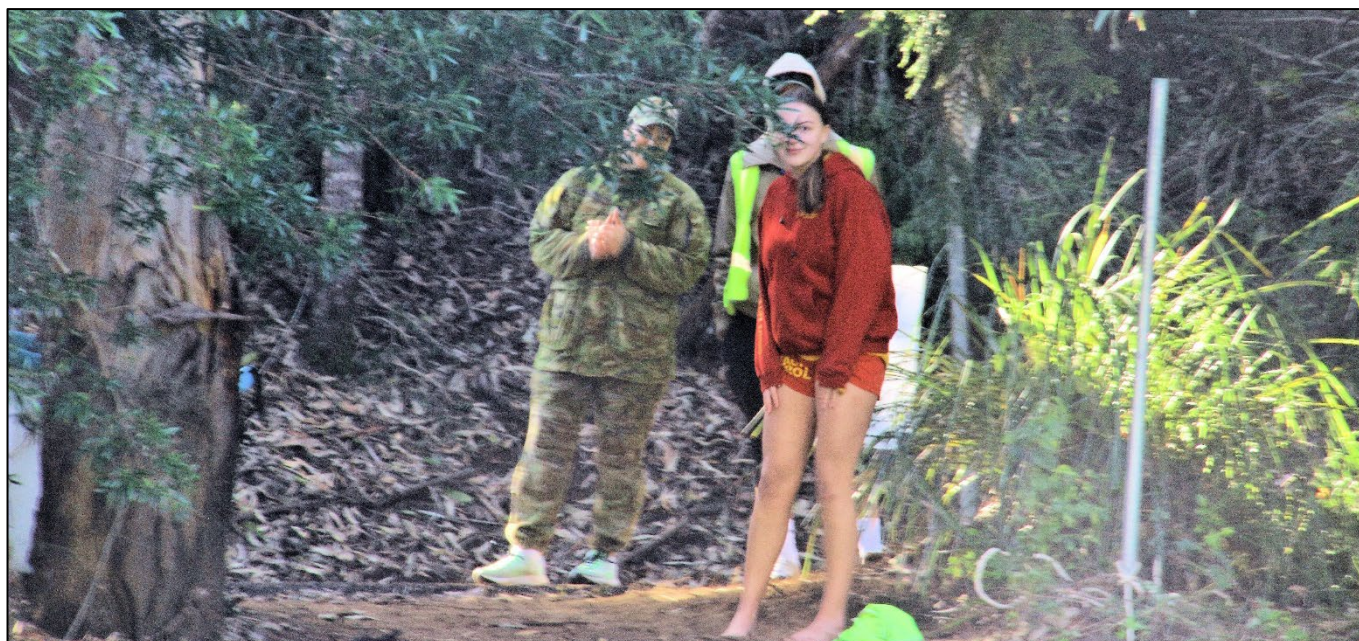


Legacy had set up a number of cold-water stops, as refreshers for those in the event, but early in the morning, with the temp not far north of zero, there weren't a lot of takers.





After completing the hill-climb circuit, they got back to the water stop, deposited their loads, some grabbed and strapped on a life preserver and jumped into the water for the cross-river swim.



The young lady in the red swimmers was one of the volunteer life guards, ready to leap into the cold water and assist if any of the cross-river swimmers got into difficulties. She had her fingers crossed all morning hoping she wasn't needed.



After surviving the river crossing and emerging from the river, cold, wet and shivering, there was no towel waiting to dry the body, instead they were greeted by an Army bloke who grabbed their life preserver and sent them packing in the direction of what Army calls "A Confidence Course" but which a normal person would call a torture course.



The obstacle course was quite a shock to a lot of the participants, some of the elements were quite a way off ground level and tested a few with a fear of heights. Top marks to those that overcome their fears and completed the course. Each element was overseen by a regular Army bloke, offering advise on how tackle it and who would normally consider this course a bit of a cake walk.



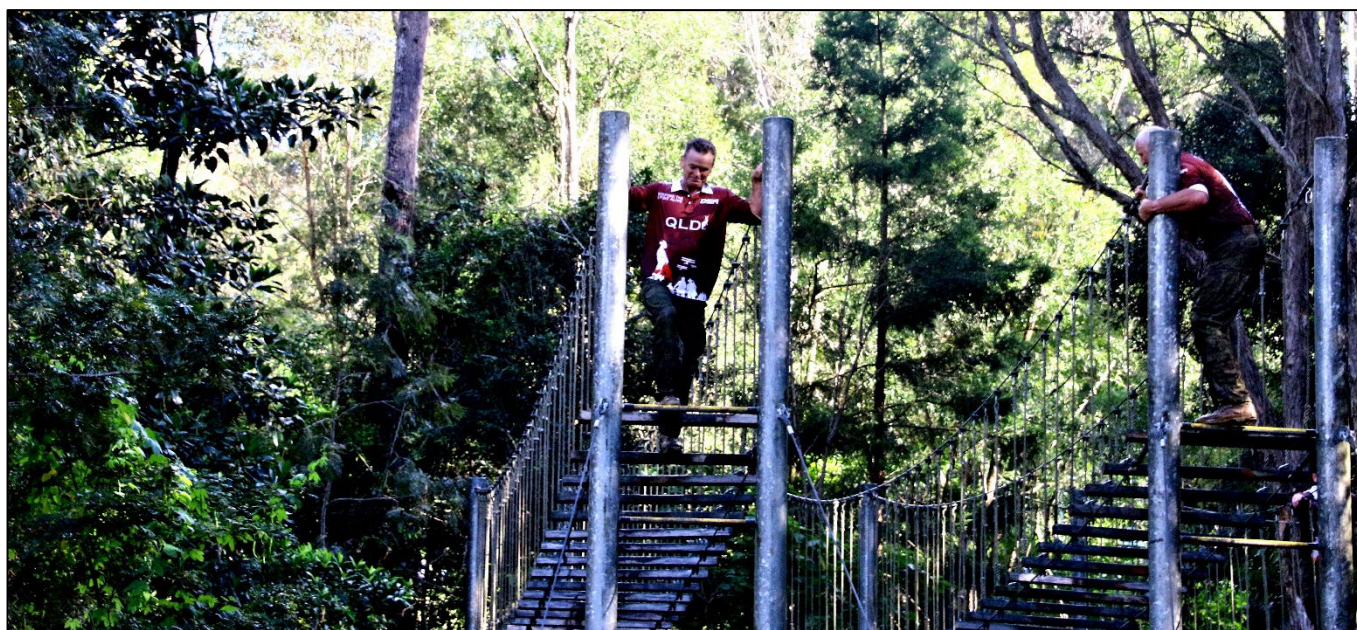
Thinking they had dried out a bit since their river crossing, contestants were in for a bit of a shock. Army had placed some cold-water pools as exits from several of the elements. After leaving the



crawl-through pipe and water dunking, it was a wet, muddy and slippery down hill walk to the swing bridge, another element to test those with height problems.



Some bolted across it like it was 2 inches off the ground, others, like I would, very gingerly trod the boards, hanging on for dear life.





And while those 250, some would say foolhardy, persons were out there testing themselves to the limit, we spotted 2 blokes from the Kedron Wavell Services Club sunning themselves and feasting on one of the delicious pizzas on offer.



Andrew Kelly and Phil Lillibridge.



Another couple who seemed to be taking it easy were these two.



[Bonnie Boon](#) and John "Sambo" Sambrooks.

Both are ex-Air Force and wanted to have a look at the way the average Army bloke and blokette spent their day. In the early 1990s, Bonnie spent 6 years posted to the School of Military Intelligence at Canungra, running the Photo Interpreter Courses, so she had a fair idea. Sambo who thought hard work was getting out of bed and having to walk down to the hangar was shocked and couldn't believe anyone would want to do all this under their own free will.



The Boeing Group – very happy to have finished.



Then 1 hour, 6 minutes and 23 seconds after they had set off, the FK Grunts Group crossed the finish line – a mere 7 seconds ahead of second place and 1 minute 13 seconds ahead of third. This was obviously no picnic, groups took the whole event very seriously. (I couldn't cover that distance on level ground in that time)



Most pulled up well, all were able to run up the hill to the finish line, but there were a few who cramped up, though who could blame them.



For their efforts, all competitors were given one of these priceless dog tags, surely an heirloom which would remain in the family for decades.



With the contestants all home and up in the latrines for a warm shower and change of clothes, everyone else just sat around, listening to the Army Band, eating and drinking and enjoying the marvellous surroundings.



Paul Power, the President of Brisbane Legacy thanked everyone for coming and making the day such a success. To enter, each team was required to raise a minimum of \$2,500. When all dues were in and counted, the total amount raised was \$171,800. Sky-Fleet Hino were the Champions, having raised a total of \$9,184.





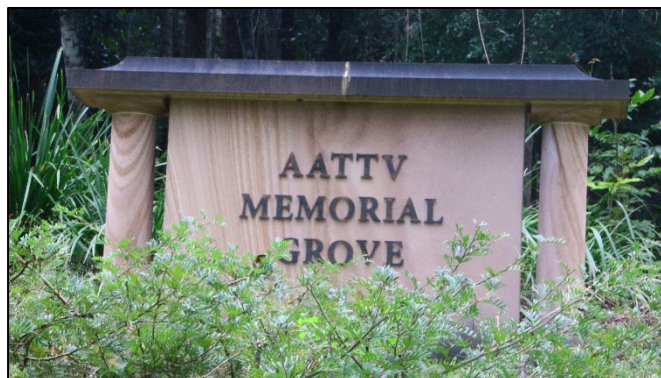
In 1969/70, both Sambo and I served with 35 Sqn (with the Caribou aircraft in Vung Tau – 1st RAAF unit in, last out) and we know the importance of Kokoda Barracks during that period. We asked LtCol Wendy Say (That's WgCdr in the real money) if there was a chance we could see the Vietnam Memorial while we were on Base. Although it was off limits to spectators, LtCol Say graciously agreed to show us and she herself walked Sambo, Bonnie Boon and myself up the hill then past the memorials to what is known as "The Grove".





The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (the AATTV) is THE most decorated Australian War unit in military history. It contains four Victoria Cross recipients - indeed, ALL the VC recipients from the Vietnam War came from this unit. 1006 Officers, Warrant Officers, Sergeants and Corporals served in the unit. Each member has a tree planted for them at "The Grove". Most of the members who served in this unit have decided that they want their ashes to be buried under their tree at Canungra. It is 'their home'.

480 members are already resting there.



Most Vietnam veterans who went through the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra would have been instructed by staff who had served at least one tour of duty as a member of AATTV or who would subsequently go on to serve with The Team.

Unfortunately, members of the public aren't able to freely visit "The Grove" and pay their respects. The AATTV would like the Australian Federal Government to declare this site a national war memorial and thus enable the public to honour these men who not only gave so much to the war effort, but also were vilified so vehemently upon their return.

The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) was the first Australian Army unit to serve in Vietnam (1962) and the last to leave (1972). AATTV consisted entirely of volunteers who advised, trained and commanded a variety of indigenous forces during the war in Vietnam.

The AATTV "Memorial" at the Australian Army Land Warfare Centre, Canungra, Queensland, is not a memorial in the strict sense of the word, as it is built on army land. Technically, it is referred to as the "Home of the Australian Advisers".

It had its origins in 1992/93 when a rain forest hardwood timber grove was named the "AATTV Memorial Grove", in honour of the AATTV by the Commandant of the Land Warfare Centre. The Home of the Australian Advisers overlooks the timber grove and was officially unveiled and dedicated in 1996.

The home is a small Asian-style building containing a polished granite wall on which is engraved the names of those who served in AATTV. The building is of a simple and practical design to provide visitors with a serene and comfortable retreat where they can spend their time in peaceful reflection with their memories. The Home was funded by private subscription and donations of sculpture, materials and technical skills.



Bonnie Boon, John Sambrooks, Trev Benneworth, LtCol Wendy Say.



The names of all the men who served with the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, are engraved on the black granite wall at the back of the building.



The Grove of Trees, each one represents the men who served with the Army Training Team. Click the pic to watch a 2 year old Current Affair story on the grove.

Unfortunately, when we got back to the Start/Finish area, it was a bit after midday and time to leave. It was back onto the bus for the trip up to the car park then head for home.

Thanks to Brendan Cox at Legacy for inviting us and a huge thank you to LtCol Wendy Say for being so sympathetic and understanding and for accommodating the wishes of a couple of old blokes.



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