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Serving in Silence?

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Serving in Silence?

Australian LGBT servicemen and women

Noah Riseman, Shirleene Robinson and Graham Willett

[NewSouth]

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Cover images The Rainbow Wreath laid on Anzac Day 2017 at the Cenotaph in Sydney's Martin Place. The Rainbow Wreath showed pride colours and was an opportunity for DEFGLIS to remember the sacrifice of LGBTQI service personnel who served in silence alongside their brothers and sisters in arms. Lest We Forget. Matt Akersten

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Introduction

The rains cleared just in time for the 2017 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. A crowd of 200,000 onlookers watched more than 200 floats and 9000 participants march in a kaleidoscope of colour. The parade attracted floats from groups across the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, including sporting clubs, religious groups, charities, political parties, lifeguards, tradies, corporations, volunteer and non-profit organisations, HIV/AIDS support services, police, emergency services, cultural and ethnic societies, fetish subcultures and local governments. The First Australians and the 78ers – men and women who had been part of the first Mardi Gras in 1978 – led the parade. Amid this elated celebration were LGBT members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their allies, who proudly marched down Oxford Street in their uniforms. The contingent of Navy, Army and Air Force (RAAF) members, followed by family and other civilian supporters, strode in perfect formation to loud cheers from the jubilant crowd.

The next morning, some of that euphoria was dampened when revellers awoke to an opinion piece in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* by conservative columnist Miranda Devine. She condemned the ADF for allowing its members to march in uniform in Mardi Gras. This was not the first time an ADF contingent marched in uniform – they had been doing so since 2013 – nor was it the first time the ADF received criticism. Devine argued that Mardi Gras was a political event and therefore ADF members should not be allowed to march in uniform. She also attributed the ADF hierarchy's decision to permit its members to march in Mardi Gras as part of 'a radical social engineering experiment, rejecting what it regards as an outdated male Anglo culture and segregating its troops according to ethnic, religious, sexual and gender identities which are accorded special privileges as victim groups'.¹

Missing from Devine's opinion piece was a deeper understanding of why LGBT ADF members and their allies wanted to march in uniform, as well as why the ADF hierarchy has supported them. For marchers, it is primarily about showcasing their pride as members of both the ADF and the LGBT community. 'Cooper', a lesbian in the RAAF, explains why the uniforms became so important to their contingent. From 2008-12, 'It [the banner] literally just said, "Defence", and to be walking up the middle of Oxford Street and people going, "Oh yeah, Defence. What's Defence?" ... I just went, "Whoa, okay, there's still some things happening out in society with the military that people don't know about."' ² Army member Patrick Lockyer has marched twice in uniform; he says, 'for me, that's just an opportunity to show – or to demonstrate to others – that Defence is an inclusive workplace'. ³ Seeing LGBT Defence marchers has also had a positive impact on other service personnel. RAAF Leading Aircraftman Jake Smith said in 2015, 'Without seeing the march, I would still be in the closet and hating life.' ⁴

The emphasis on inclusion is the very reason that then-Chief of the Defence Force, General David Hurley, first approved the request to march in uniform. Defence believed visibility at Mardi Gras would 'send a strong message to serving ADF members that Defence leadership supports tolerance and inclusion of sexual orientation and gender diversity, thus promoting an inclusive culture and fostering a greater sense of pride in Defence'. ⁵ In 2015, the Navy, Army and RAAF's most senior warrant officers volunteered to lead the Defence contingent. RAAF Warrant Officer Mark Pentreath said: 'Why wouldn't I be proud [to lead the contingent]? These men and women are part of the team that is our future as an ADF. To me, marching in the Mardi Gras parade is no different to representing the Air Force at any cultural event that is important to our people such as White Ribbon Day, or International Women's Day.' ⁶

Marching in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade marks the culmination of a long series of significant changes in the ADF's attitude towards LGBT service people. The ban on homosexuality in the Australian Defence Force was lifted on 23 November 1992. The struggle for the right of transgender people to serve continued longer, with their open service only permitted since September 2010. Despite these relatively recent moves towards inclusion, LGBT men and women still signed up to serve their country in significant numbers in preceding decades. They were forced to conceal

their sexuality or gender identity and faced persecution and discharge if they were discovered. Many of these men and women displayed great resilience in navigating an institution that denied them the right to love openly or to live truly as their authentic gender. Many made their contribution at great personal cost.

Serving in Silence? gives voice to the LGBT men and women who have played an integral role in Australia's military history since the Second World War. These life stories of 14 men and women from different branches of service and different historical eras illuminate the changing ADF policies, practices and experiences of LGBT servicemen and women. We have selected these narratives from interviews we have been conducting since 2014 with current and former service personnel. Readers will note that we have not included any intersex people in this book – the 'I' often included with LGBT. The ADF never had policies about intersex personnel, and as such intersex variations have always been seen as medical conditions. Depending on a person's intersex variation, they may or may not have been allowed to serve, but would need to do so identified as either male or female. At the time this book was published, only one of our over 100 interviewees was intersex, which reflects their small percentage of the population at large (estimated at 1.7 per cent by **Intersex** Human Rights Australia – formerly Organisation Intersex Australia) and within the ADF. Because of some of the sensitive issues discussed in that interviewee's story, they preferred it not to be included.

The 14 rich life stories allow us to explore complex questions. On the surface, that LGBT people would opt to join an institution that explicitly banned their participation is perplexing. How might we understand their participation? What was it like to serve in combat roles in places such as Vietnam, while still hiding a central part of their identities? What opportunities did service offer to find other men and women similarly attracted to the same sex? Did homophobia, transphobia and sexism intersect? What toll did hiding their sexuality or true gender identity take? We map the impact of homophobia and transphobia, both subtle and overt. We consider the emergence of LGBT service organisations that have supported efforts at institutional change and provided valuable support to members. We ask the key question: how inclusive has the ADF become towards its LGBT members?

Commented [NR1]: Apparently they changed their name last month – good thing I checked!

LGBT military service, past and present, challenges stereotypical ideas about the military, soldiers and Australia's Anzac mythology. Military sociologists describe armed forces as institutions that 'celebrate male power, particularly the male warrior, and devalue all things feminine, produce the kind of masculinities and femininities that are asserted in national gender hierarchies'.⁷ The ADF has traditionally reflected (white) values of martial masculinity, which trace back to the Anzac legend, shaping ideas of Australian identity and nationhood.⁸ For over a century politicians have exploited the Anzac legend to suit their agendas and promote their worldviews. Yet, it has been especially since Prime Minister Bob Hawke that the politicisation of Anzac has morphed into what the *Australian National Dictionary* defines as Anzackery: 'the promotion of the Anzac legend in ways that are perceived to be excessive or misguided'.⁹

In recent years numerous historians including Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Graham Seal, David Stephens and Mark McKenna have bravely challenged the Anzac legend's stranglehold over Australian history, drawing attention to politicians', veterans' and pundits' (mis)use of the ANZACs and military history. Such public figures have falsely constructed Australian nationhood and identity as growing out of a series military engagements performed by heterosexual white males. This militarisation of Australian history not only misconstrues the experiences of war, but also marginalises other narratives of Australian history, whether they be about Indigenous people, women, immigrants, sexual minorities or other groups.¹⁰

Of course, as historians such as Carolyn Holbrook highlight, the Anzac legend has always been contested and reshaped: from service personnel who did not 'fit' the archetype; from civilians associated with the military or wars but who were not enlisted personnel; from anti-war groups and peace movements; from Indigenous and ethnic minorities; from women; and more recently from historians against the militarisation of Australian history.¹¹ As Anna Clark's research interviewing 'ordinary' Australians in five communities reveals, the meanings attached to Anzac Day are still diverse and contested for various reasons.¹² Some groups challenge the entire Anzac mythology itself, and others seek to make Anzac more inclusive. Essentially, if being part of Anzac represents membership as Australian, then groups ranging from Indigenous, to women, to Vietnamese to Greeks all desire their piece of Anzac and want their military histories to

be recognised and honoured.¹³ Each group presents its own set of challenges to what Graham Seal describes as the Anzac mythology's 'stereotypical representation of the ideal Australian as a tall, tough, laconic, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, hard-gambling, independent, resourceful, anti-authoritarian, manual labouring, itinerant, white male'.¹⁴

As this book shows, LGBT people have been serving in the ADF in a variety of capacities throughout history. The presence of personnel who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender – as well as women more generally – expands the gendered and heterosexist perceptions of the ADF and Anzac legend. Gay and bisexual men confront stereotypes of what it is to be 'masculine' and destabilise constructs of diggers and the Anzac legend. They also defy dominant constructs of homosexual men as camp, weak and feminine. There were anxieties within the military hierarchy about lesbian women since the Second World War because these women were seen to transgress the bounds of what was considered socially acceptable femininity. The Defence hierarchy also argued that the presence of lesbian women would negatively impact public perceptions of the services. Yet, as this book demonstrates, lesbian women have long made a rich and extensive contribution to the ADF, and their rightful inclusion in Australian military history provides a more complete and accurate appreciation of the nation's past. Transgender people, too, destabilise gender binaries and challenge widely held views about sex and the body, so military hierarchies have traditionally been resistant to permit transgender service. There is a surprisingly long history of transgender people serving in the Australian military because its very masculine nature was attractive to those individuals trying to deny their authentic gender identity.¹⁵

Even as we shed light on LGBT Defence histories, we remain conscious that any challenge to the dominant construct of the Anzac legend and popular conceptions of the ADF are bound to meet resistance. For instance, when the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) posted on Facebook about LGBT inclusion as part of 2017 Wear it Purple Day, the comments section exploded with a mix of support and homophobic/transphobic abuse. One indicative comment stated: 'I was a cadet and find this politically [sic] correctness a joke. We joined based on our merit to perform our duties. Not some sexual deviance which it is.'¹⁶ Over the years, comments opposing the ADF's participation in Mardi Gras have ranged from the blatantly homophobic ('Still

shame and disgraceful to male gays marching. How repulsive, grosse [sic] and unhygienic ... '), to misunderstanding the nature of the parade and the ADF marchers ('I don't think it is appropriate for the uniform to be paraded in a sexual manner or in any manner other than what it was designed for').¹⁷ On another occasion, when the Defence LGBTI Information Service (DEFGLIS) arranged rainbow wreath-layings on Anzac Day in 2015, one comment on the *Gay News Network* stated: 'What if I was to drop a bombshell? There were no gay Anzacs lol. There weren't any "homosexuals", sodomy is a behaviour haha. Keep your fantasies in house and stop defaming the Australian Army.'¹⁸ Such comments are indicative of both the endurance of a particular exclusivist digger mythology and LGBT service personnel's ongoing struggle for inclusion in the Anzac legend.

The stories included all come from the post-Second World War era, and we take this approach for several reasons. First, it is from this contemporary era that we have had the opportunity to collect oral history interviews. Second, moving further back in history is difficult because we cannot access personal testimonies, and records relating to homosexual or transgender activity are sparse. For the First World War, the little information available derives from newspaper reports – particularly tabloids like *Truth* – about servicemen arrested for indecent assaults, buggery, or unnatural offences. Peter Stanley's research has also shown that, where available, discipline files occasionally reveal servicemen charged for homosexual behaviour.¹⁹ For the Second World War, there has been more research, especially from Yorick Smaal, Graham Willett and Ruth Ford. Smaal has uncovered cases of homosexual servicemen cruising for sex in Brisbane, as well as forming intimate relationships with each other on the frontlines. Smaal and Willett's joint work found that particularly in Papua New Guinea, commanders were sometimes less punitive towards same-sex activity than might be assumed. Ford's research uncovered lesbian subcultures in the women's services and the ways women were able to form relationships in secrecy, whilst the military was always anxious about such possibilities.²⁰

While we acknowledge that the LGBT presence in these conflicts deserves further historical attention, the nature of those wars and the service experiences are distinct from the post-war Defence establishment. For instance, Australia's First and Second World

War participation consisted primarily of purpose-raised armies; only in 1947 did the Army become a permanent regular force. From 1951–1959 and again from 1965–1972, most 20-year-old Australian men were required to register for national service. In 1976, the ADF formally amalgamated the Navy, Army and RAAF, with the new role Chief of the Defence Force Staff (later changed to Chief of the Defence Force) overseeing the three services. The post-war era has seen Australia involved in international coalitions with traditional partners the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States, as well as through United Nations peacekeeping forces.²¹

The post-war era also saw more opportunities for women. Women's services had existed during the Second World War but were disbanded by 1948. Fearing another total war and wanting to free more men for combat roles, the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) was established in 1950, Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) in 1950 and Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) in 1951. The WRAAF disbanded in 1977, and in 1978 the cabinet approved the full integration of women into the other services. This process was completed with the final disbandment of WRAAC and WRANS in 1984 and 1985 respectively. Opportunities for combat-related roles opened through the 1990s, and in 2011 when cabinet approved opening all remaining combat roles to women by 2016.²²

As historians such as Graham Willett, Robert Reynolds, Rebecca Jennings, Garry Wotherspoon and Shirleene Robinson have documented extensively, the post-war era was also a time of great change for LGBT Australians.²³ Police entrapment and prosecutions of gay men were common in the 1950s and 1960s, but still gay men would visit beats or find other underground ways to express themselves sexually. Silences surrounding lesbianism often made it difficult for same-sex attracted women to articulate their feelings, but still some lesbians managed to find each other and form subcultures in major cities. The organised push for homosexual law reform began in the ACT in 1969 and, more prominently, through the founding of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP) in Sydney in 1970. The first state to decriminalise homosexual acts was South Australia in 1975, followed by the ACT (partially in 1976 then fully in 1985), Victoria (1980), the Northern Territory (1983), New South Wales (1984), Western Australia (1989), Queensland (1990) and Tasmania (1997). Gay and lesbian protest movements

and commercial scenes emerged in the 1970s, especially in Sydney and Melbourne. The first Mardi Gras in June 1978 was the culmination of a day of gay rights actions – a celebration that ended when police turned on the participants, arresting 53 of them. Mardi Gras then became an annual demonstration; in 1981 the parade moved to summer and organisers voted to shift its emphasis away from political protest, and more towards a celebration of the gay and lesbian community. The 1980s also witnessed the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, which hit gay men especially hard. Yet, through organisations such as the Victorian AIDS Council, the AIDS Council of New South Wales and counterparts in other states, the LGBT community rallied to provide home care, health services and safe-sex education programs.

Attitudes towards gays, lesbians and bisexuals have progressively grown more tolerant since decriminalisation, with characters appearing on television and movies, celebrities coming out of the closet and openly gay and lesbian politicians being elected to state and Commonwealth parliaments. Attitudinal shifts have been mirrored with legislation at state and federal levels gradually recognising same-sex de facto benefits ranging from immigration, to child-custody and access to IVF, through to pensions and inheritance, and at last the legalisation of same-sex marriage in December 2017. Governments have been slower to support transgender rights, with state jurisdictions legislating requirements for recognition of one's affirmed gender identity, and gradually extending anti-discrimination laws to cover transgender people since the mid-1990s. At the Commonwealth level, a major reform was in 2003 when a court ordered the recognition of 'X' as a valid gender identity on passports. The Commonwealth government also amended the *Sex Discrimination Act* in 2013 to include sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status as protected categories. It has really been only in the past five years that transgender visibility, especially through personalities such as American celebrity Caitlyn Jenner and Australian ex-servicewoman and cricket commentator Cate McGregor, has forced policy rethinks and influenced attitudinal shifts.

Service personnel have been part of these societal shifts in the last 70 plus years, as the ADF, too, has changed its position towards LGBT participation. We have grouped the 14 stories in this book into three phases. The first period, from the end of the Second World War until 1973, entailed formalisation of anti-LGB policies and practices.

Regulations were arcane, but practices varied when dealing with suspected homosexuals, ranging from tolerance through to persecution and expulsion. The second phase, from 1974 to 1992, entailed a more consistent and hostile Defence approach to policing sexuality through witch-hunts, surveillance and interrogations. Even in this context, Defence members continued to pursue strategies to express themselves amidst an environment where any slip-up could mean the end of their careers. The final phase, since the lifting of the ban, has seen a mixture of continuing hostility, tolerance and acceptance. The stories in the final section show brave pioneers who fought for equal rights, visibility and for transgender inclusion. The final two stories show the way the ADF has, especially in the last decade, gone out of its way to showcase inclusion of LGBT members.

This book by no means represents a complete history of the ADF and LGBT people, nor does it present the perspectives of all who have served. Yet, we have selected these stories because of the very diversity they reveal within these dominant narratives. It is our hope that these stories will stimulate further discussion about the role LGBT Defence members have played and continue to play serving Australia.

¹ See Miranda Devine, 'The Army should be non-political. So why is it at Mardi Gras?' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 2017, <<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/the-army-should-be-nonpolitical-so-why-is-it-at-mardi-gras/news-story/57693da79c45f2e75073a9cf9b2a19ba>>, accessed 28 March 2017.

² 'Cooper', interview with Noah Riseman, 23 September 2016.

³ Patrick Lockyer, interview with Noah Riseman, 18 September 2016.

⁴ 'Service Warrant Officers to March at Mardi Gras 2015', 11 February 2015, DEFGLIS, <www.defglis.com.au/index.php/news/168-service-warrant-officers-to-march-at-mardi-gras-2015>, accessed 29 March 2017.

⁵ DEFGLIS Administrative Instruction No 011/012-Amendment 1: Parade – Sydney Mardi Gras Parade on 02 Mar 13, 21 February 2013; Noah Riseman, "'Just Another Start

to the Denigration of Anzac Day”: Evolving Commemorations of Australian LGBTI Military Service’, *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 48-49.

⁶ ‘Service Warrant Officers to March at Mardi Gras 2015’.

⁷ ‘Objectives and Methods’, *GENCIMIL – Gender Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations in Changing Security Environment*, <<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/civmil/objectives-and-methods/>>, accessed 30 June 2015.

⁸ Ben Wadham, ‘Brotherhood: Homosociality, Totality and Military Subjectivity,’ *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 76 (2013): 216.

⁹ David Stephens, ‘Anzac and Anzackery: Useful future or sentimental dream?’ in *The Honest History Book*, ed. David Stephens and Alison Broinowski (Sydney: NewSouth, 2017), 121. See also Frank Bongiorno, ‘A Century of Bipartisan Commemoration: Is Anzac Politically Inevitable?’ in *The Honest History Book*, 106-19.

¹⁰ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010); Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press in association with the API Network and Curtin University of Technology, 2004); David Stephens and Alison Broinowski (eds), *The Honest History Book*.

¹¹ Carolyn Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014), 91-124.

¹² Anna Clark, ‘The Place of Anzac in Australian Historical Consciousness,’ *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 19-34.

¹³ Frank Bongiorno, ‘Anzac and the Politics of Inclusion,’ in *Nation, Memory and Great War Commemoration Mobilizing the Past in Europe, Australia and New Zealand*, ed. Shanti Sumartojo and Ben Wellings (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2014), 81-97.

¹⁴ Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 10.

¹⁵ Noah Riseman, ‘Transgender Policy in the Australian Defence Force: Medicalization and Its Discontents,’ *International Journal of Transgenderism* 17, no. 3-4 (2016): 141-54.

¹⁶ Phillip Gassy, comment dated 22 September 2017 on Australian Defence Force Academy Facebook Page post from 28 August 2017, accessed 20 October 2017.

¹⁷ Darron Webb, Facebook comment on Royal Australian Air Force post, 14 March 2013, accessed 28 March 2017; Angela Georganti, letter to the editor, *Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney), 30 December 2012, 78.

¹⁸ Comment from 'Anthony', 22 June 2015, on 'DEFGLIS to commemorate LGBTI service', *Gay News Network*, 10 April 2015, <<http://gaynewsnetwork.com.au/news/national/defglis-to-commemorate-lgbti-service-17250.html>>, accessed 2 July 2015.

¹⁹ Peter Stanley, *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force* (Sydney: Pier 9, 2010), 141-44.

²⁰ Yorick Smaal, *Sex, Soldiers and the South Pacific, 1939-45: Queer Identities in Australia in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Yorick Smaal and Graham Willett, 'Eliminate the "Females": The New Guinea Affair and Medical Approaches to Homosexuality in the Australian Army in the Second World War', in *The Pacific War: Aftermaths, Remembrance and Culture*, ed. Christina Twomey and Ernest Koh (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015), 233-50; Ruth Ford, 'Lesbians and Loose Women: Female Sexuality and the Women's Services During World War II', in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81-104.

²¹ See Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²² See Noah Riseman and Richard Trembath, *Defending Country: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Military Service since 1945* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2016), 96-98.

²³ See Graham Willett, *Living out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000); Robert Reynolds and Shirleene Robinson, *Gay & Lesbian, Then & Now: Australian Stories from a Social Revolution* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2016); Robert Reynolds, *What Happened to Gay Life?* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2007); *From Camp to Queer: Re-Making the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015); Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney: A History* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2016).

Section 1:

Silences and Discretion, 1944–1973

Before the Second World War, the Australian services did not have a formal policy on homosexuality. This is not to say that it was acceptable to be gay; rather, men caught for homosexual behaviour would be punished under other rules, such as ‘disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind’ or the all-encompassing ‘conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline’. These charges could also be used to prosecute transgender behaviour such as dressing in clothes associated with the opposite sex. The Australian Army devised an explicit policy on homosexuality only when they realised that they had a ‘problem’. In 1943, US Army Investigators in Port Moresby contacted Australian Army Headquarters to report that several of their soldiers were having sexual intercourse with Australian servicemen. The Australian Chief Medical Officer interviewed 18 men, who received honourable medical discharges.

Australian military officials subsequently debated whether to treat homosexuality as a disciplinary or medical/psychological matter. The final directive issued to New Guinea commanders in June 1944 was a mix: cases involving public obscenity, sexual assault or minors would warrant disciplinary action. Other cases would require advice as to whether the accused could respond to medical treatment, otherwise ‘the member concerned should be considered for immediate discharge from the army on medical grounds, and a medical board arranged accordingly’.²³ The documents never provided a rationale for why they should expel gay men, which is not surprising given the 1940s discourse about homosexuality as a sexual perversion. This policy became the template for how the Australian armed forces dealt with homosexuals until November 1992.

The policy relating to homosexuality specifically referred to men, and as such the rules were silent about the status of lesbians in the women’s services. During the Second

World War there were certainly anxieties about lesbianism, but there were never any clear policies or procedures, and formal investigations were rare. Authorities worried: while there was a need for women in the services, what kind of woman would want to enlist? In response to fears about the masculinisation of the sex, regulations and education courses for servicewomen consistently emphasised their femininity. There were occasional discharges for women caught kissing or otherwise involved in intimate relationships with each other, but generally the treatment of suspected lesbians was at the discretion of individual commanders.²³

There was an absence of discussion about homosexuality in the services in the post-war period. This is not surprising given homosexuality was treated as a taboo subject and the military had no desire to be involved in any sort of scandal. On occasion the topic of homosexuality in the services would appear in newspapers, both tabloid and non-tabloid. Among the big headlines from *Truth* (Melbourne) in the 1950s are: 'RAAF ace dismissed from service for disgraceful affair with AC1' (23 March 1950) and 'Vice Shock in Army Camp' (23 June 1956). Smaller articles might mention a soldier charged for sodomy or gross indecency, usually caught in a capital city visiting a beat. These newspaper reports reveal that while the military records may be silent about homosexuality, the presence of homosexuals was undeniable.

After the Second World War, only the Navy devised policies that specifically targeted homosexuality. From at least 1954 the Royal Australian Navy adhered to the British Royal Navy's Admiralty Fleet Orders against 'Unnatural Offences'. These rules were published as a separate Confidential Australian Navy Order for the first time in 1966, relatively unchanged from their previous incarnations. Among the unnatural offences were 'buggery' and 'act[s] of gross indecency with another male person'. The orders justified the need to expel homosexuals thus: 'The corrupting influence of such men is widespread, and their eradication from the Service is essential if the Navy is not to betray its trust towards the young men in its midst who may be perverted by them.' The policies on Unnatural Offences emphasised the importance of evidence so that men would not claim homosexuality merely to discharge. As such, the policy authorised invasive anal and penile examinations for physical evidence of penetration.

In 1969, the Navy adopted a new policy on 'Abnormal Sexual Behaviour'. This order explained: 'The individual who is a confirmed practising homosexual has no place in a disciplined Service – he is a potential security risk and a corrupting influence.' This policy set up a framework which would prove problematic, but rhetorically useful for Defence officials in later years. The document distinguished between 'confirmed homosexuals' who needed to be discharged, versus 'An Isolated Instance of Homosexuality', which commanding officers might consider experimentation, often under the influence of alcohol. In the latter cases, commanding officers had discretion not to dismiss sailors. The distinction between the two categories was difficult to prove, but still having it in policy provided commanding officers with leeway to protect particular service members.

Post-war policies, too, were silent about women, but there was much more heightened activity within the services targeting lesbians. This is significant as lesbianism was never a crime in Australia the same way that homosexual activity between men was. The targeting of lesbians was due to fears that the military environment was attractive to lesbians and lesbianism might impact the public image of the force. Furthermore, the same stigma and prejudice that homosexual men faced confronted women too. Basic training during this era even cautioned women against the dangers of venereal disease and lesbianism (which were hardly likely to go together). Investigations were common in the women's services during the 1950s–1970s: surveillance, intimidating interviews, compelling suspects to name other lesbians and usually dishonourable discharges. These so-called witch-hunts became the template for the next phase of the military ban from 1974. Because there were no specific regulations against women's homosexuality and the military wished to avoid publicising such cases, lesbians and bisexual women would usually be prosecuted under other rules with discharge reasons such as 'conduct prejudicial to the corps'. There were inconsistencies across and within the services, and unit commanders had significant discretion.²³

Even with these policies and practices against homosexuality in place, oral histories suggest that homosexual encounters were common – including a major gay subculture at the Navy officer training base HMAS *Creswell*. Discretion was important: so long as sailors were inconspicuous, commanders would often turn a blind eye. In the Army as

well, oral histories suggest that discretion could often protect male soldiers from investigation. Women across the three services describe a subculture and numerous lesbian and bisexual women serving in this period also. When testifying at Western Australia's 1974 Honorary Royal Commission into Homosexuality, a Major-General reported that over the period 1969-74 there were 44 cases of homosexuality investigated in the Army, with 21 confirmed discharges. He did not have statistics for the RAAF or Navy, although Navy estimated an average of approximately eight per year. This admittedly incomplete data reveals the inconsistent practices across and within services, where rank, commanding officers and gender could all intersect to produce different outcomes protecting or persecuting suspected gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Brian McFarlane

Brian McFarlane is different from most of the other ex-service people interviewed for this project. He lives a relatively quiet life in the country and does not associate as part of the LGBT community. He was a career officer who served in the Army for 25 years, including active service in Malaya and Vietnam. Brian has written extensively about his early life and service, self-publishing a book entitled *We Band of Brothers: A True Australian Adventure Story*. It was another Vietnam veteran who served under Brian at the Royal Military College, Duntroon who first put us in contact; this other veteran suspected that Brian was ‘a bit of a poof’, and turned out to be right. Brian has always been happy to talk about his military career, but this was the first time he has been so open about his personal life. His story echoes those of many other gay or bisexual servicemen, particularly older men, who have remained private about their sexuality.

Brian was born in Arncliffe, not far from Sydney Airport, in December 1932. Sexuality was not a common topic of discussion in 1940s Australia, especially in a large, observant Catholic family. Like many other gay or bisexual men, Brian did feel some attraction to other boys, but he could not pinpoint it as sexual. It would be after Brian turned 18 and was working at a major automobile service station in Kings Cross that he had his first sexual experience. In his book, Brian merely describes the encounter with ‘a blond’ as ‘a meaningful encounter which, whilst very much a one-off as it turned out, broadened my horizons considerably and for the moment satisfied the curiosity and urges emerging at that time in both the body and psyche of a lad of my age’.²³ Brian confessed in his interview that ‘the blond’ was in fact a young man whom he met at a pub near his work.

After this encounter it would be years before Brian had another sexual experience with a man. When asked why, he simply indicates that while he absolutely loved it, life got in the way when he was in the Army and was constantly on the move. He also cites the challenge of communication in the days before easy telephone calls, let alone email

and Facebook. Yet, there was probably more to Brian's hesitancy to explore his sexuality. After all, other men forged secret relationships in 1950s Australia. For many more gay and bisexual men there was always the possibility of visiting beats for sexual gratification, or the underground gay scenes of parties, cafes and bars in the major capital cities. Brian had no interest in these. His narrative suggests that he consciously aimed to avoid physical and emotional intimacy for fear of what part of him it might expose, or fear of rejection. That hesitancy would influence Brian for the rest of his life.

Brian's military career commenced around the same time as his encounter with the blond. He had been a sergeant in the school cadets and at age 17 spent about six months in the Citizen Military Forces Reserve in an artillery unit. In mid 1951 Brian was called up in the very first intake of the new national service scheme. The Menzies Government introduced national service in 1951, citing the general threat of communism. It was in place until 1959 and then re-introduced in late 1964. Brian and most other 18-year-old males were required to undertake 176 days of military service training. National service is most often remembered for its unpopular associations with the Vietnam War, and it did become a lightning rod for protest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the first incarnation of national service in which Brian participated, it was relatively uncontroversial.

Brian's national service was with the 12th National Service Training Battalion in Singleton in the Hunter Valley. Notwithstanding an unpleasant living situation, Brian thrived in national service. Brian's company commander saw his leadership potential, writing, 'Has displayed qualities of leadership during NS training. Is quiet and appears to lack confidence but possesses good command and his knowledge of basic training subjects is very fair.' The commanding officer suggested that Brian apply to attend the Regular Army Officer Cadet School at Portsea. Brian liked the idea of joining the Army permanently because it was a secure career with a steady, reasonable income. He was accepted to commence Officer Cadet School in January 1952.

Training was an intense period of hard work and constant activity. Cadets had not only physical training but also lectures on military history, tactics and strategy. The officer cadets took cold showers all week and were given the luxury of hot water on

Saturdays. The graduation in June was a satisfying experience; Brian's family came down and his mother pinned the pips on his shoulders. Three months of Infantry Corps training followed, carried out at the School of Infantry, located at that time at Seymour in central Victoria, then on to the 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka. Brian commanded a platoon of about 45 recruits, constantly in the field supervising them. He took a genuine interest in the recruits' lives; his favourite part of the job at Kapooka was sitting on the steps of the barracks huts as the recruits did their Saturday cleaning chores, and he would engage them in conversation. Brian writes, 'The saying is that there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers. The bad officers generally become that way because they do not know or do not care what the soldiers are up to and thinking.'²³ Brian would see many recruits come and go, and several came up to him later in their careers to say that they remembered him because he took an interest in their lives.

In 1960 Brian completed an Indonesian Language course at the RAAF School of Languages. Then followed another instructor role – this time in Weapon Training and Topography at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Cadets from that era similarly remember Brian fondly for socialising with them, sometimes taking them drinking or eating. Steve Gower writes of Brian:

Perhaps he appreciated the company of we cadet footballers, rather than being the junior officer in his mess down in Duntroon House ... he would ensure we all returned safely to the barracks afterwards and were kept away from the prying and zealous eyes of the duty officer. Accordingly, I came to view him most favourably – a quite splendid and sensible fellow!²³

It is intriguing that a person so private, and so uncomfortable with his sexuality, took such an interest in the personal lives of the other men. Perhaps this was a way for Brian to seek emotional intimacy with other young men, while avoiding the risk of getting too close with any one person or acting on physical attraction.

From the 1950s to 1970s Brian served in numerous command positions around Australia from Holsworthy to Duntroon, Canungra to Watsonia. The domestic postings collectively reveal much about Brian's sexuality and the Army's treatment of gay and bisexual men during this time, while his overseas postings are more telling about the

experiences of active service during the post-Second World War era. Brian was always conscious of homosexual spaces and even gay Army officers. For instance, Army officers of all persuasions would sometimes visit the Sportsman's Bar at the Australia Hotel in Melbourne, and the Long Bar of the Australia Hotel in Sydney – both rather upmarket, but frequented on Saturday mornings by 'respectable' gays in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, Brian did not generally attend such bars, nor did he ever visit beats. In fact, Brian only recalls one sexual encounter with a civilian while he was serving at Duntroon in Canberra. Brian's religious upbringing is likely to have played a role in his choice to repress his sexual desires. In 1954, Brian's commanding officer wrote in his annual report: 'I believe he found the extremes from the quiet of a religious home background somewhat overwhelming.'

Brian's annual confidential reports provide insights into how officers viewed his personality and behaviour. One point that appears in a few reports is his disinterest in sports, a marker that Brian did not fit into the expectations of masculinity for an infantry officer, but also for Brian the consequence of inadequate coaching and encouragement in his large school classes. Other reports describe Brian as being almost too devoted to the Army at the expense of developing a healthy work-life balance; a 1968 evaluation at the Australian Staff College stated, 'I think he takes in more than he gives out and that he has not developed his full potential, possibly because he may be inclined to regard the service as a way of life rather than a profession'. What comes across even more strongly in the reports was an officer who was more than capable at commanding troops, but whose stubborn personality had a hint of arrogance. Just a sample of excerpts from his annual reports read:

'He can produce reasoned answers, but at times his reasoning is faulty because he over-values his own views' (7 December 1953).

'... has good leadership and man management qualities. He must learn to accept the decisions of his superiors without question. A good officer who has the ability to succeed' (31 July 1958).

'He should guard against giving the impression of being pompous and a little smug. He is neither of these things; in fact he is a little uncertain of himself' (31 July 1962).

Over time, as Brian climbed the ranks and earned more responsibility, the reports became more affirming of his capabilities and the outcomes he achieved. Brian's personality could both help and hinder his professional development. His strong will sometimes came across as arrogance, and it would be when he was given more significant command roles, where he could prove himself, that arrogance became interpreted as confidence.

Brian's first major overseas deployment was as part of the Malayan Emergency. The Malayan government had been combating communist insurgents since 1948, and in 1950 Australia became involved by sending a small contingent of RAAF aircraft and personnel. In 1955, Australia stepped up involvement by sending an infantry battalion, 2RAR, to join the 28th Commonwealth Brigade alongside British and, later, New Zealand units. After 2RAR, other battalions followed on two-year tours, some twice, before the force was withdrawn in 1969. During the Emergency, the Australian infantry units regularly went on patrols into the jungle, guarding villages of 'friendly' locals and monitoring for possible enemy contacts in the rubber plantations.

Brian arrived in Malaya in mid 1956 and was posted to command 9 Platoon of C (Charlie) Company. On his very first company reconnaissance patrol into the rubber plantations, Brian's patrol was ambushed by Communists collecting taxes from the local rubber tappers. Because radio contact was poor, his company commander ordered Brian back to the road to commandeer a police car, head back to battalion headquarters and bring reinforcements. Brian's role for the latter half of his 16 months in Malaya was to form a set of teams to track down and kill the enemy. Brian says, 'We Australians had been taught at Kota Tinggi how to see a trail, if somebody walked across a lawn, you could tell. I can still do it today, I can tell where people have walked or been and that sort of thing.' Brian returned to Australia in 1957.

Brian's next overseas role was in Papua New Guinea, then still an Australian colony, as a member of the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) during 1963–65. PIR, formed in 1951, consisted of Papua New Guinean soldiers to defend the colony in the event of another foreign invasion. Until the late 1960s the officers were all white Australians like Brian. Through the course of the 1960s, around Brian's time of service, PIR was gradually seen as an opportunity to advance the education and socio-economic status of

Papua New Guineans, as well as to prepare the colony for independence. When Papua New Guinea did gain its independence in 1975, the two battalions of PIR became part of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force.²³

Brian arrived in early 1963, assigned as the adjutant of PIR at its headquarters in Port Moresby. During his three years in Papua New Guinea, Brian went from the role of adjutant, to 2IC of a rifle company in Wewak, then 2IC of another company in Vanimo on the border with West Papua. He was then promoted to Major and commander of a company of the 2nd Battalion of PIR. Those same reports that commented on Brian's cynical, arrogant attitude also heaped praise on his leadership in Papua New Guinea. The July 1964 review stated: 'As second in command at the VANIMO outstation he ably supported his company commander. Together they are a most effective team. MCFARLANE has developed a sound understanding of Pacific Islanders and he commands their respect. He is imperturbable in a crisis.'

That same ability to command the respect of his men and to stay calm in a crisis would serve Brian well in the most challenging active service of his career: Vietnam. Brian's first one-year tour commenced in June 1966, shortly after the occupation of the Australian base at Nui Dat in the Phuoc Thuy province of South Vietnam. Australia had sent its first advisors to Vietnam in 1962, but it was in 1965 when Australia stepped up involvement by sending an infantry battalion. From 1966, the combat element of Australian soldiers would be based at Nui Dat, with a smaller contingent of medical corps, other support services, RAAF and Navy based in the coastal township of Vung Tau. Brian's role from June 1966 to June 1967 was to command Charlie Company: one of the four rifle companies in 6RAR. Within days of his arrival, he was already leading his men on their first patrol to the town of Long Phuoc, clearing Viet Cong tunnels, avoiding sniper fire and fighting with Viet Cong while patrolling his company perimeter.

Brian was in Vietnam for Australia's most famous engagement of the war: The Battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966. One platoon of D Company, 6RAR, contacted a Viet Cong patrol in the rubber plantation of Long Tan, about 4 kilometres east of Nui Dat. When they pursued the Viet Cong, they became engaged in a fierce battle amid the horrendous sound of artillery fire and in low visibility produced by the smoke and haze

mixed with the torrential rain. The 108 Australians had come up against perhaps 1000 Viet Cong. When the battle ended a few hours later, there were 18 Australian dead and 24 wounded, compared to estimates of up to 50 per cent fatalities amongst the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars. Brian's was the only one of the four 6RAR companies that remained behind to protect Nui Dat. They were spread thinly along the eastern perimeter of the taskforce, facing the Long Tan battleground. Brian was listening intently as the events at Long Tan unfolded. He remembers: 'And for five or six hours, having all that artillery going over our heads in itself was a pretty big strain on my troops ... Together with my staff, I just sat there in my command tent and listened to all the radio nets, the artillery net, Harry Smith's company net, every radio we had we used, just to listen.'

Though Brian's company did not suffer any casualties at Long Tan, early in his tour he did lose one soldier and a combat engineer attached to his company. Brian says, 'And after they were killed, I decided, and determined, that I wasn't going to lose any more soldiers in someone else's war.' Brian adopted a strategy used by the Americans: heavy use of artillery and airstrikes in front of his soldiers' positions to clear out any enemies, rather than risk the lives of his men. Brian argues that Australian attitudes, born in operations where ammunition was in short supply, frowned upon such a tactic and possibly because of cost they wanted to preserve ammunition. His commanding officer questioned him about this approach on one occasion, with Brian's explanation readily accepted. Brian clearly earned the respect of his superiors, as evidenced in his annual report of 30 April 1967: 'Maj McFARLANE is a very competent and experienced regimental officer. He is loyal and thoroughly dependable. He is one of the most experienced company commanders in 6RAR. He has commanded successfully with firmness and decision ... He accepts responsibility readily and has the capacity to remain calm under stress'. Brian also had the respect of his men, who recognised that he was prioritising their lives and wellbeing.

Brian did a second tour in Vietnam from September 1970 until the final withdrawal of Australian troops from Nui Dat in December 1971. In quite a different role, Brian was initially commander of the 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit, training soldiers who arrived as individual reinforcements before they were dispatched to their

assigned units. He describes the training thus: 'We did helicopter training, hot insertions and extractions, and the reinforcements observed the effects of artillery firing close, other large weapons, rocket launchers etc. and airstrikes.' From April 1971 Brian was the senior operations officer at Taskforce Headquarters and reported directly to the Commander. Brian wrote the orders for the final withdrawal of the Task Force from Nui Dat and supervised the operation from an armoured command vehicle on the day. He was at Nui Dat in the beginning and was there at the end – a total of 809 days in Vietnam.

Much of Brian's writing and testimony about the Vietnam War presents the diggers as upstanding, top blokes, while he condemns the journalists, politicians and anti-war movement for undermining their efforts. Many Vietnam veterans share these attitudes, seeing themselves as victims of politics in Australia, and their service as wrongly tarnished in the dominant public memory of the war. Numerous historians have written about the ways that pop culture and media coverage of America's Vietnam War have clouded understandings Australia's role in the conflict. Many veterans have (re)constructed memories of returning home at night, or being spat upon, or having paint thrown at them, even though the evidence suggests that such incidents tended to be isolated rather than the norm.²³ Similarly, many popular assumptions about soldiers committing atrocities in Vietnam falsely derive from the American conduct of the war and media coverage of events such as the My Lai Massacre.²³ This is not to say that Brian subscribes to all of these pervasive mythologies; rather, Brian's book and interview align with a wider Vietnam veterans' agenda: to present their role in Vietnam in a positive light, and as heirs to the Anzac legend of soldiers forging the bonds of mateship while fighting valiantly against tough odds in someone else's overseas conflict.

Brian's narrative therefore downplays the more salacious aspects of the Vietnam War. For instance, the township of Vung Tau was where Australian troops would have a few days' rest and convalescence leave. Vung Tau was known as a site of licentiousness where Australian troops partook in excessive drinking, got into fights with the locals and had relations with Vietnamese sex workers (evidenced by the high rates of venereal disease). Brian did not partake in such activities, but he was prone to turn a blind eye to his men's excesses. More often than not, if the Australian Military Police charged his

men for transgressions in Vung Tau, he either would find them not guilty or guilty and admonished. He explains why:

My diggers hadn't committed the crimes of the century. As had always been drummed into us during all our training: 'The aim of the Infantry is to Kill the Enemy' and we were doing just that whilst also doing our best not to be killed ourselves. On the very odd day off the diggers had, they were just releasing the extreme tensions of being in combat 24 hours a day, seven days a week for months on end.

When asked whether perhaps his blind eye approach acted as an enabler for bad behaviour, Brian said, 'probably'.

Brian believes the business owners and residents of Vung Tau were merely interested in ripping off the Diggers. His response to bad behaviour at Vung Tau also aligned with his general approach to work in the Army: the job is what matters, and personal conduct outside completing the job, understandable to the superior officers of combat troops, is irrelevant. Such an attitude should, one would think, support the right for open LGBT military service. Instead, though, Brian believes that gays, lesbians and bisexuals should be discreet. He states:

Gay people should get on with the job and not unnecessarily push their sexual preferences in their everyday work. Don't push it in the faces of those who may not understand. After all, it is not the norm. That is how gays have existed in harmony with workmates all over the years. A gently-gently approach in the workplace and hopefully through efficiency and an ability to get on with people around them will result in acceptance of gays as good-guys and girls.

Brian is not alone in this attitude; several interviewees shared similar sentiments. Most tended to be men who served in the 1970s and were career servicemen who successfully kept their sexuality secret for decades. Brian and these other ex-servicemen do not believe LGB people should be kicked out for their sexuality. Rather, because they could repress their sexuality or were comfortable not discussing their relationships or their out-of-work activities, other LGB members should act the same. Such an attitude does not consider that others may not be as emotionally resilient, content to be secretive, or even

that heterosexual service people would never be held to such expectations of secrecy about their out-of-work lives.

Brian cites the examples of at least nine gay officers in Malaya and Vietnam who served with distinction while keeping their sexuality a secret. While Brian heard about some of these men's sexualities through the rumour mill, others' identities were being shared through an emerging network of closeted gay officers. Brian recalls:

On my second tour [of Vietnam] an officer arrived who had been serving in Papua New Guinea. I had a letter from an officer in Papua New Guinea who I knew who said he was coming, he's a really pleasant young chap. Please look after him, and yak, yak, bullshit, bullshit. And without actually saying so, I got the message, because I always suspected the guy in New Guinea was gay.

Brian says he never spoke about his sexuality with this or any other officer, but clearly they were beginning to figure each other out. In present-day parlance, their gaydars were picking up particular signals: bachelors, reserved personalities, perhaps with a disinterest in sport or an interest in the creative arts. Brian found that the officers who did turn out to be gay or bisexual were generally competent, amusing and popular, often displaying no more stereotypes of homosexuality than their contemporaries.

Brian makes an interesting observation about homosexuality in Vietnam: 'Overall, there was no overt gay activity, and if there was anything going on discreetly, it would not normally have been disclosed by contemporaries.' Brian's observations reflect a pattern across a dozen interviews with gay and bisexual Vietnam veterans: same-sex behaviour was rare in Vietnam. There are numerous explanations for this. First, there were gay or bisexual servicemen similar to Brian who, given their upbringings and the social mores of the era, repressed their sexual desires. One gay veteran even had sex with a female sex worker in Vung Tau because all of his mates were doing it. There were also men serving in Vietnam who did not realise they were gay until years later. For others who were aware of their sexuality, there was the challenge of finding willing sexual partners as well as the time and privacy. In a 1988 article in gay magazine *OutRage*, Vietnam veteran Bill commented: 'In Vietnam you had no opportunity to be alone with

anyone. Our time was controlled. No privacy whatever.’²³ This was particularly true for the majority of troops who were based at Nui Dat.

Where Vietnam veterans’ interviews mention homosexual behaviour is primarily in the specialist units based at Vung Tau. Rumours were always afoot that the Medical Corps was a ‘nest of homosexuality’, and members of the RAAF recall several servicemen partaking in oral sex or hand jobs. Sometimes servicemen with authority – such as commissioned or non-commissioned officers – would find sexual gratification from American soldiers. Dr David Bradford recalls one amusing anecdote when the regimental sergeant major brought an American private to his tent for some very loud sex. In a much more problematic example, a RAAF veteran went to Vung Tau to find sexual pleasure with American troops, only to end up being raped. Such tales stand out in Vietnam veterans’ narratives, but still these same-sex experiences tend to be isolated examples within wider tales of there being little homosexual activity in Vietnam.

It is, of course, likely that there were much more same-sex encounters happening than was reported or known to the gay and bisexual interviewees. Militaries, particularly in warzones and before the integration of women, are sites of what is commonly known as situational homosexuality: same-sex activity happens when people spend prolonged periods of time in a single-sex environment with few other sexual opportunities. Bill gave one example in the 1988 *OutRage* article: ‘I was fortunate in that one of the tasks I was given required me to spend time locked in a hut with another soldier. A chance in a million ... So sex with me became his only outlet. That’s how it happened. For some months we had sex in the hut’.²³ Brian also speculates about situational homosexuality in his interview: ‘One of the reasons why these people would be assessed as being gay, or be getting off, is loneliness. They’d probably just want to be in the same bed with somebody for the warmth of friendship. Not even necessarily to be having it off. Probably never were. But I think loneliness was the thing that used to get to people.’

A common thread permeates the testimonies about Vietnam, and which would become more pronounced in Brian’s memories of homo/bisexuality in the Army post-Vietnam: turning a blind eye was common if the actors were discreet. Of course, as with all examples, this was not universal. One officer in Vietnam who had a decorated career

of service in Malaya and Papua New Guinea awoke from a drunken party in February 1968, heavily hungover and in the lock-up. He was interrogated for over 32 hours before a priest finally revealed that he was being charged for homosexuality. Years later, the veteran learned that he was alleged to have put his arm around the waist of a serviceman and attempted to digitally penetrate the man. The accused serviceman had no memory of any of this and believes he would never behave in such a manner.²³ Regardless of the merits of the case, what distinguishes this example of a man kicked out for homosexual behaviour in Vietnam is that it was alleged to be non-consensual.

Brian had more to say about the subject of homo/bisexuality in the Army from his time serving at Victoria Barracks on Oxford Street in Paddington in 1969. This was just a stone throw's away from the emerging gay scene on Oxford Street in Darlinghurst/Surry Hills, which by the late 1970s would be the epicentre of Sydney's gay life. There was a gay wine bar across the street from Victoria Barracks called Enzo's. Brian recalls seeing several Army captains there, and on another occasion running into two brigadiers and a colonel from Canberra at Patches nightclub. Brian recalls: 'I went over and said, "Hello, what are you gentlemen doing here?" (or something like that). And then I said to the bar manager, "Another bottle of champagne for these gentlemen." I always used to try and make people wonder what my influence was or, how I came to know all these people.' On another occasion, a group of straight officers took Brian to see the drag performance at Les Girls in Kings Cross – famous site of the transgender cabaret artist Carlotta Spencer. Those visiting Victoria Barracks from Canberra usually found the only decent Sydney nightlife to be the gay scene and did not appear fussed about being seen there.

What is intriguing about the period from 1969 until the end of Brian's Army career in 1975 is that his bisexuality had, essentially, become an open secret. Brian states:

Most people thought I was gay, and also thought I had a fair bit of money, and a lot of contacts. In a lot of ways, that probably helped. I don't know ... But overall, on the gay thing, I didn't want to be put upon, so I just toughed it out and said to myself, 'Well up yours, I don't give a stuff what you think.' That's it. And had I been given the boot from the Army, well that wouldn't have been the end of the earth, I could've got a job somewhere else I suppose. Would've been disappointing.

Brian walked a fine line, but he walked it effectively. Several factors probably saved him from being targeted and kicked out for homosexual behaviour. Even though he was frequenting gay circles, he was not actually broadcasting the matter. Brian speculates about the forces' attitude towards homo/bisexuality during this era:

All during my time, and no doubt from time immemorial, people were not dismissed from the Defence Force just for being gay. But like anybody else of whatever sexual proclivity, a person could be dismissed for doing something that might bring the service into disrepute, or was patently illegal (as buggery used to be) and was caught at it by someone unsympathetic.

Other testimonies from men who served before 1974, particularly officers, reinforce this point: the forces were not yet embarking on witch-hunts targeting gay or bisexual men, so generally it was only when homosexuality came to military police attention that an investigation commenced.

Interestingly, while Brian was conscious not to flaunt his sexuality, his reputation for knowing where to have a good time attracted the interest of several straight officers. In one amusing story, while Brian was serving at Holsworthy in western Sydney, a senior officer told a young officer new to Sydney to talk to Brian about the delights of the town. He immediately asked to come out with Brian that Friday night. Brian recalls:

So I took him straight to the wild gay bar at The Rex which didn't seem to upset him. And then somebody said, 'Oh Brian, we've got a party going. And do you want to come?' And I said, 'Oh I have to bring my friend.' They said, 'Oh, yes please, we want him and not you.' And so off we went to this party, and after a while, I looked around and this guy had disappeared. And I thought, 'I wonder where he is.' And shortly afterwards, one of the gay ones plus this young fellow came back into the room. I said to my young friend: 'Where have you been? You haven't been doing anything naughty, have you?' He said, 'Oh, any port in a storm, Sir.'

That young officer later married, had kids, became a lieutenant-colonel and remained friends with Brian.

Brian exercised significant restraint and, unlike this particular officer, did not often act on his 'high libido'. In the early 1970s Brian had only one or two sexual encounters,

neither of which were with Defence members. As Brian's reputation for being gay spread, other gay officers tried to flirt with him. Brian describes one such encounter that took a lot of will to resist:

One very handsome young man, a captain, came into my room one night at Victoria Barracks stark bollocky naked and stood there having a conversation with me whilst I was actually in bed. A very severe test of my self-restraint I must say, as at the time I could think of no other intention that could have been in his mind but to jump into the cot with me. But I ignored that temptation as well, because I thought no, that's not going to be a good idea for long-term relationships.

Stories such as this imply that homosexuality, whether situational, experimental or authentic, was more widespread in the 1950s–1970s military than records would suggest. Because it was still a taboo subject rarely discussed in mainstream Australia, so too was the military mostly silent about homosexuality. The silence could be disempowering for those wishing to find a language to express their desires. There was also the ever-present fact of illegality inhibiting any official sanction/tolerance of the gay way of life. Yet, for officers such as Brian, who were discreet and also rarely acted on their sexual desires, such an environment provided the opportunity to live in a celluloid closet.

Brian left the Army in 1975 when offered a private military contracting opportunity in the Middle East. In a two-year role as Chief Operations Officer for Northern Oman, Brian was primarily involved in reorganising the logistics of the mercenary army hired to supplement The Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces to defend the country from a Soviet-backed invasion by South Yemen. When Brian returned to Australia in late 1977, he had saved sufficient money from his career and a series of investments, and did not need to work full-time. He spent time on yachts on Sydney Harbour, and cruised around the world for three months in 1978. Brian became a sailing instructor with the Royal Australian Navy Sailing Association, a member of the the Army Sailing Club and the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia. Brian took up odd jobs in Sydney over the years, including selling advertising space for the *Wentworth Courier*, security supervisor at the Hyatt Kingsgate Hotel (the building with the famous Coca-Cola sign), and designing and quoting for built-in wardrobes and shower screens. Brian did the latter job until his knee, damaged at Nui Dat during his first Vietnam tour, became weak and he

left that job in 1990. Brian enjoyed this miscellany of jobs immensely and all those people of many stations in life he met along the way. Brian then moved from Sydney to Bundanoon, then in 1996 to Bowral, and now to the Macarthur region to be closer to family. Since then, Brian has primarily been involved in sailing and other hobbies, such as the extensive researching and writing of *We Band of Brothers*.

Brian's post-service career happened at a time when homosexuality was becoming more discussed, debated and, in places like Sydney at least, accepted. Brian was never involved in any gay rights movements, and he mostly stayed out of the social circuit of Oxford Street. He did go to private gay parties, and he also had a long-term relationship with an ex-Naval officer, also a Vietnam veteran, named Graham. They met at a barbecue at the home of a gay (but married) reserve brigadier while Brian was still in the Army. Twenty-three year old Graham and another mate arrived and, as Brian describes it, 'they were party-stoppers with their startling good looks and pleasant mien'. Graham and Brian grew closer as friends and forged a business partnership as flippers – purchasing property, doing it up, and selling it for a higher rate of return, whilst Graham began his stratospheric rise in the business world to become senior vice president of a major global company. Graham and Brian lived together and had a non-sexual, but intimate relationship. Brian does not apply a label to describe this relationship, but Brian's family 'all loved Graham; he came to many family get-togethers and was treated like a brother'. Graham moved overseas for work, and the relationship continued with Brian visiting him in the United Kingdom to stay at his splendid company house in the Thames Valley. In Australia, Brian looked after Graham's houses. In early 2011 Graham died of a heart attack at age 62. The way Brian succinctly puts it: 'I had lost my soul-mate of 40 years.'

Whereas many of the other ex-service personnel in this book paid little attention to military matters once they discharged, Brian certainly retained an interest. He used to march on Anzac Day in Sydney, leading the 6RAR contingent, and he has also been a member (albeit a quiet one) of both the Returned and Services League and the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia. He regularly attends unit reunions and participated in the 1987 Welcome Home parade for Vietnam veterans – a joyous reunion with many comrades. He also attended the opening of the Australian National Forces Vietnam

Memorial on Anzac Parade in front of the Australian War Memorial in 1992. Brian says that while they never talk about it, 'I think from some strong indicators that some, if not all of my company suspected I was gay. It was never mentioned, but I had a very strong feeling.' Brian is comfortable not talking about his sexuality or relationships. He still believes that the topic of sexuality is irrelevant to military service – meaning that LGB Defence members should 'shut up and get on with soldiering ... I don't think being gay has anything to do with being a soldier'.

Brian still retains an old-school attitude towards both the purpose of the military and the expectations of those who serve. He states:

I believe that the Defence Force is there to kill the enemy, and keep Australia safe. Its primary task is not to make every single member happy in their lives, particularly when they don't want to conform to the requirements of the main purpose of the job they're in. It did not happen in the old days and no doubt will not be achievable in the future. If some people for whatever reason don't like the environment, they should get out of the Defence Force.

Brian's comment is not dissimilar to the famous 2013 remarks of former Chief of Army, General David Morrison (and scripted by his transgender speechwriter, then-Lieutenant Colonel Cate McGregor):

If we are a great national institution, if we care about the legacy left to us by those who have served before us, if we care about the legacy we leave to those who, in turn will protect and secure Australia, then it is up to us to make a difference. If you're not up to it, find something else to do with your life. There is no place for you amongst this band of brothers and sisters.

Where Morrison and Brian clearly differ, though, is in their interpretation of what that Army 'environment' should look like.

Many (though not all) veterans of wars such as Vietnam share Brian's viewpoint about the ADF today as a 'politically correct' institution. Indeed, there are also gay ex-servicemen who share that standpoint, though predictably the majority of currently serving LGBT members have a different perspective about the importance of inclusion. Brian's views are driven by his own experience in the Army, and for that reason they are

not surprising. Perhaps the most fitting description of Brian came from his final annual report in 1974: 'Maintains a high standard in everything he undertakes and at times his frustration is apparent when others do not meet his standards. Sets a good example and has demonstrated on many occasions the manner in which a staff officer should operate.' At times, when pushed in his interview to think about how other service personnel in different situations may have fared, he expressed some flexibility in his attitudes. But fundamentally, Brian's own words fittingly summarise his sense of the Australian Army then and now:

On reflection, I think I would prefer to have served with all the really hard, tough guys I did serve with over the years, and not in an environment of harping political correctness with everybody wanting things all their own way. The sense of real brotherhood I experienced was all encompassing, at least in the Infantry, and I am still in touch with men I served with 60 years ago.

Carole Popham and Christina Dennis

Carole Popham and Christina Dennis served in the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) during the 1960s. While it is a time that they both look back on with varying emotions, the greatest legacy they have taken from their time serving is their enduring relationship. Knowing that they risked being posted apart – or being forcibly discharged if their relationship were discovered – they opted to leave the WRAAF of their own volition, making the decision to reveal their relationship to officials. Leaving together proved to be the right decision. This year marks their 50-year anniversary as a couple. Their story is a remarkable one, a moving account of a shared life. It shows how women were able to find both opportunity and each other in the services at a time when civilian lesbians struggled with isolation and invisibility, but also brings to light the risks that a relationship posed to career advancement and military retention and the sacrifices that had to be made to stay together.

Carole

Carole was born in Sydney in 1942 as the last of four children, with two older sisters and an older brother. Although she was born in New South Wales, she grew up in Townsville, in north Queensland. As military historian Douglas Gillison has noted, during the Second World War, Townsville's population expanded rapidly as the town became home to Australia's biggest Air Force base, with both Australian and US troops. During this era, military personnel outnumbered civilians at a rate of three to one. Carole remembers the military presence meant it was very common for locals to host servicemen: 'We had an American, an Englishman and an Australian young lad and I can remember them being at home quite a bit, so there was that military presence around.' After the war, the RAAF

presence continued. With a wry smile, Carole notes her older sister 'married a RAAF bloke' which meant for her, there was no escaping the military presence.

As a child, Carole was 'probably a bit of a tomboy ... there were no pressures to conform as far as childhood went'. Once she reached her teenage years though, 'they start thinking that maybe you should start settling down but we were all encouraged to try and do whatever we wanted to do and be whatever we wanted to be'. Growing up in north Queensland in the 1950s and early 1960s, she remembers career options were limited:

The other thing is, at that time, we were talking '50s and basically, '50s and early '60s, if you grew up in the country, you weren't exposed to a lot of the things that you could be, so, your career horizons focused on the doctor, the dentist, maybe an editor of a newspaper, because there was usually a local newspaper, but they were very sort of ordinary things, and it's not until you actually got away from up there you realised what a range of occupations were open.

Despite the limitations of a small town, she 'always had a sense there was something more to life, but it wasn't going to be up there'.

Growing up in a military town, in the aftermath of the Second World War, it is perhaps not surprising that the services were attractive to many of Carole's generation. Women had obviously served in the auxiliary services on the home front as well as serving as nurses, and a female school friend had raised enlistment as a career option: 'At primary school there was a group of us who used to knock around together, and [a friend said], "When we grow up, we should all join the services"'. Initially, Carole thought the Navy was an attractive option but later on 'I realised that the Air Force was probably better'. She thinks it is possible she made this conclusion because one of her sisters married a Flight Sergeant who was a signaller, and 'I thought he was pretty cool'. Furthermore, 'there was a certain romance that came out of the Battle of Britain' and growing up, men who served in the Air Force were everywhere in Townsville.

Carole did not enlist immediately, however. After finishing school, she began a degree in pharmacy in Townsville: 'The first year was fun, had a whale of a time'. This was also a time when her sexuality crystalised. It was not entirely unexpected, as she had experienced a number of crushes on female friends growing up. At university she 'was

fairly serious in a minor sort of way' with another girl. Her 'most magnificent' father, who must have sensed something happening between the two women, tactfully made sure he coughed loudly at the back door if he saw Carole's motor scooter parked with two helmets: 'I'm sure it was to give us a chance to sort ourselves out if we weren't exactly the way we should have been.'

While her personal life was proceeding well, Carole was starting to have doubts about pharmacy as a career. During the second year of her course, she spent three months in Brisbane, before coming back to Townsville. She found that the occupation of pharmacist was evolving to require those who undertook the profession to act 'more like a storekeeper' than undertaking the scientific, compounding role the profession had traditionally demanded. At this point, when she was questioning whether pharmacy really was the occupation for her, Carole had taken apart her Vespa, then putting it back together she decided to take it out for a spin.

On what turned out to be a fateful test run in 1962, she passed 'the recruiting office in Townsville, and I just pulled over and went up, and I was absolutely covered in grease and I walked into the recruiting office and I said, "Have you got the papers? I think I might want to join the Air Force"'. During this era, until 1977, women who wanted to join the Air Force served separately from men in the WRAAF. The Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) and Women's Royal Australian Navy Service (WRANS) would continue until 1984 and 1985 respectively. The male Squadron Leader recruiting officer gave Carole a look, which suggested he did not believe she would be back, but still gave her the forms. However, she went home, determinedly 'filled out the papers and I said to Mum and Dad, "You can either sign them now, or I'm going back to uni and as soon as I turn 21 in August, I'm out of here"'. Her parents did sign the forms, and Carole then underwent the testing process to find out what occupation in the WRAAF she would best suit.

She did so well at her initial testing that she was capable of being allocated to any occupational branch. 'At that stage, they were short of service police, cooks and psychology', so they decided Carole should undergo further testing, possibly for commissioning. Once she arrived, she was warned that psychology was 'dead-shit

boring' so turned down the role for education 'because I certainly wasn't going to be police or cook'.

Carole was officially sworn in on 8 January 1963. Her recruit training took place at Point Cook in Victoria in January and February of that year. From the start, it was made clear that homosexuality in the WRAAF was not permitted. Carole remembers receiving a lecture as a rookie on sexuality, warning the servicewomen 'not to have anything to do with anybody who's gay, that was not on, in fact you have to report them, because it's tut, tut, tut'. In fact, she actually received a warning herself on her recruit course as suspicions had been raised about a close friendship she shared with another recruit from north Queensland. Although there was nothing more than friendship between the women, she was told 'you're not to associate with her anymore', which Carole thought 'was pretty bloody pathetic'.

Christina

Christina grew up just under 350 kilometres north of Carole, in Cairns. She was born four years later, in 1946. She remembers a 'pretty ordinary sort of childhood, really'. She had two brothers and lots of cousins. It was a happy family life. Being based further north than Carole in Cairns, Christina was further removed from the military presence that dominated Townsville. Both her parents had left school at relatively young ages. Her father served during the Second World War but it was not something he discussed. Exposure to the broader world was somewhat limited: 'Back then, in the '50s and even into the mid '60s, you had radio, but you didn't have any television up there ... and you just weren't exposed to all those sorts of things out there in the world'. While she remembers her childhood as a fairly typical one, she remembers the WRAAF and the military held appeal as a way of leaving Cairns, 'a fairly small town back then'.

While Christina did not question her sexuality growing up, she remembers thinking that:

There was something more to life than just getting married and working in a bank or whatever, and that was really the reason I joined the Air Force. I just knew there was something else out there, and I just didn't want to be like my girlfriends at school

who were married by the time they were 17 or 18, and kids and that sort of stuff, that didn't interest me at all.

From around the age of 16, Christina had thought of joining the services when she reached the age of enlistment as a career option. At the age of 17, while she was working in the post office as a telephonist, she had the opportunity to participate in an exchange to Launceston with another girl from Cairns. The two went to Tasmania for six months while two girls from Tasmania were sent to Cairns: 'I think that was when I really decided, "Yeah, I've got to get out of Cairns, there's more to life than just being here."'

When she returned to Cairns, aged 17 Christina was eligible to join the WRAAC but felt the WRAAF was a 'better option'. This meant she had to wait until she was 18 to enlist. As soon as she reached this age, she arranged for her parents to sign the papers. They were supportive, both thinking 'that it was a good opportunity to get out and see the world, and do things'. Although she had been working as a telephonist, Christina was keen to take on new employment opportunities in the Air Force, aiming for a position as an aircraft plotter, monitoring aircraft movements. She was told that she had missed her chance as there would not be another course for another 12 months but she could enlist straightaway as a telephonist and re-muster later as an aircraft plotter. This was somewhat misleading though, as telephonists were always in heavy demand in the WRAAF and it was extremely difficult to re-muster once you had been allocated an occupation. Nonetheless, in August 1964, the year after Carole had joined the WRAAF, Christina was also serving.

While service in the WRAAF did open up wider employment avenues for women, WRAAF servicewomen were still treated very differently to the men who served in the RAAF in terms of opportunities and pay. Carole points out that:

Things are very different, if you look back at what the service was when we were in. The women's service was restricted to certain musterings, and that's it, there was really just support staff. Being a WRAAF officer meant that you were just either behaving like an administrator, or a wet nurse to a whole heap of females.

There were further limitations. It was not until 1969 that women in the WRAAF could continue serving after marriage and 1974 that pregnant women were permitted to remain in the services.

After completing her recruit training, Carole was posted to the Base Squadron Education Section at Point Cook in Victoria. Her initial posting should have been to Headquarters Operational Command Education Section. However, the Recruiting Officer made an error and failed to apply for the appropriate security clearance for her. The RAAF addressed the mistake and arranged for the clearance. During this process they did not find out about her sexuality but did discover that one of Carole's 'best mate's father was a communist' which 'didn't go down too well'. Still, her clearance came through and she was moved to Headquarters Operational Command Education Section, which was located in the old Lapstone Hotel in the Blue Mountains. The WRAAF women lived in barracks in Penrith and were bussed to work each day.

When she was based at Penrith, Carole established a relationship with a barmaid at a local hotel. This woman had actually been 'turfed out of the Air Force in one of the early witch-hunts, so that was an interesting relationship for a while'. Remarkably, Carole believes an officer in charge was aware of the relationship and chose to overlook it. As the woman Carole was dating worked at the hotel until 10 at night, Carole would usually drive down to see her after she finished work and return to her base around 2 or 3 in the morning, well past the time that she should have been back at the base. One day, the officer in charge of the WRAAF, 'a young thing', hauled Carole up and said, 'When are you going to get that muffler on your bloody car fixed?' Puzzled, Carole asked why this was an issue. The officer in charge responded, 'because I keep hearing you coming in at all hours of the early morning. It's okay with me but you might be in trouble if someone else hears it. So for God's sake, get it fixed.' Carole points out that she 'knew exactly where I was going and what I was doing'. This woman may have been straight herself but was an example of someone who was 'fairly tolerant' and 'just didn't buy the hype' surrounding homosexuality in the WRAAF.

While there may have been some who kept an open mind about homosexuality, the consequences of the wrong person finding out were severe. Carole knew witch-hunts

were conducted periodically. She laments the depletion of talent that occurred as a result: 'They lost really good people.' There was a somewhat limited pool of women the WRAAF was able to draw on in the long term in this era. Once heterosexual women married, they were not eligible to remain in the WRAAF. There were some career-minded heterosexual women who managed to avoid marriage and discharge. It was lesbians, provided that they were not discharged on the grounds of their sexuality, who were extremely unlikely to marry and thus provided an excellent return on the investment the military had put into their training.

Carole points out that many women joined the WRAAF at an 'age group when people really are starting to question their sexuality, if you're not comfortable being straight'. She notes that the witch-hunts almost certainly caught women who were bisexual or were experimenting with their sexuality, along with women who may have been more certain of their lesbian identity:

If you happen to be in that experimental stage when they decide to do a witch-hunt, you were labelled, and so there were probably a lot of people who really weren't gay, who got the flick because they were supposed to be gay, and it'd be interesting to know what happened to some of the ones who weren't quite as gay as they might have thought they were, because there was no concept back then of bisexuality, you either were one or the other, and I reckon there probably would have been a reasonable number of bisexuals that I encountered along the way.

While she was not based in Sydney itself, Carole did see glimpses of the bohemian and gay scene that was developing there in the 1960s. The colourful tenor of the emerging gay scene is captured in *Camp Nites, Sydney's Emerging Drag Scene in the '60s*. Carole remembers 'the early days of the Purple Onion, and Les Girls, and that sort of stuff'. The scene was mainly in the inner-city area and Darlinghurst. On 'Sussex Street, there were a couple of pubs that were okay'. She remembers Kings Cross was mostly notorious for prostitution and male homosexuality.

Career-wise, Carole was not particularly keen to attain a commission, believing the role of a WRAAF Officer was limited and not what she was looking for in a career. When an opportunity came up to apply, though, she felt compelled to apply for her mother's sake, who had always pressed her to strive to reach the top. She confided in her

WRAAF officer, who happened to be the woman who had warned her about her muffler, that she really did not want the promotion. Fortunately, from Carole's perspective, her interview with the Commanding Officer did not go well, as it was predominantly based on current affairs such as the Indonesian conflict. His question was so long and rambling that she lost concentration and, after answering the first part of the question, had to look him in the eye and tell him that 'I can't remember the rest of what you asked.' With a degree of satisfaction, Carole notes, 'I didn't get it, which I was quite pleased about.'

In early June 1964, she was posted to Richmond Base Squadron Education Section. The base was enormous and undergoing new aircraft arrivals. There was an understanding that the Flight Sergeant there needed assistance, and as Carole understood 'what needed to be done and the priorities involved', she was sent there. When she was based at Richmond, on her breaks, Carole used to make regular trips to Sydney's northern beaches to visit her sister and help her with housework, as she had bad asthma and was struggling. On one occasion, a young officer came to Carole and asked if she could give another young officer a lift. Carole was happy to help. On Friday night, as the woman got into Carole's car, the officer who had arranged the lift asked Carole to 'take care of her. She's all I've got'. Carole reflects on this today, thinking that the other officer had worked out Carole's sexuality and had felt she could be open about her relationship with the other woman: 'I guess the gaydar worked a bit.'

Carole notes that lesbian women did not just date exclusively within the Air Force: 'At Richmond, one of the girls there was on with a Navy girl.' The inter-services sporting events were a popular way to meet others. People from other services were often posted on the base for various courses. Stereotypes about each branch of service abounded: 'The impression was that the Army were real butch-dyke types, Navy were less so and the Air Force were fairly discreet. So there weren't many who really got tangled up with the Army girls. They left the Army to themselves. But Navy-Air Force combinations weren't that unusual.'

One incident that occurred at Richmond did have significant implications for Carole. She was working under incredibly stressful conditions, 16-hour days almost seven days of the week with a new Flight Sergeant and Squadron Leader – who both

lacked experience – and only two lads fresh off recruit training as her support staff. One weekend, when she was grappling with this situation, she went to a party and under stress, ‘went off my face at some bloke who was making passes at my bird’. On the Monday, she reported to the RAAF hospital, where the staff told her they thought she would have cracked under the enormous pressure they could see she was under some time ago. As a result of the incident at the party, Carole was sent to an Honorary RAAF psychiatrist, Dr John Ellard, who fortuitously happened to be a trailblazer in the field in Australia.

Carole discussed her sexuality with Dr Ellard, who proved to be a progressive thinker for his time. Upon his death in November 2011, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that ‘for several decades Ellard was a leader of psychiatry. He improved immeasurably community respect for the practice of psychiatry in Australia. The uncommon quality of common sense never left him.’²³ In the 1960s, when most psychiatrists in Australia were treating homosexuality as a medical condition to be fixed, Carole recalls he ‘was really good, because his whole attitude was, “it doesn’t matter who you love, it’s the capacity to love that’s important”’. This statement at a time when homosexuality was rarely discussed – and certainly not considered to be a normal part of human sexuality – must have provided a rare affirmation. From the time with Dr Ellard, Carole remembers: ‘the important thing was being empowered to say “I don’t have to try and pretend I’m something I’m not. I am. This is me. Take it or leave it”’.

After finishing recruits, Christina was posted to Base Squadron Radio as a Telephonist at Richmond, arriving in October 1964. While Carole and Christina got to know each other well enough to ‘say hello’ in passing and lived in the same barracks block, because of shift work, they did not encounter each very much. Carole recalls thinking Christina ‘was that nice young kid from the switch room’. As she worked shifts, Christina used to get blocks of three or four days off, so she would get away from the base and head into Sydney for her leave.

In April 1966, Christina was posted to Base Squadron Radio as a Telephonist in Townsville. By this point, the two women were friendly enough that Carole offered an invitation for Christina to visit her parents for dinner, so that she would have somewhere

to go when she wanted to leave the base. In April 1967, Carole was posted to the Officer Training School at Point Cook to run the Education Section and to assist in training the officer candidates. The Sergeant there was posted to Vietnam, and although it was a male establishment, the Director of WRAAF agreed that Carole should go to Point Cook because none of the male corporals or above were considered capable.

In May 1967, the two women were once again stationed at the same base when Christina was sent to Base Squadron Radio as a Telephonist at Point Cook. When the other women working on switch found out that Carole already knew Christina, they asked what the impending arrival was like. Jokingly, Carole told them she was 'a real dragon', which did mean that the women were 'quite wary and behaved perfectly' when Christina arrived. This time, the two women occupied different blocks and still only knew each other on a superficial basis.

In November 1967, both women were attached to RAAF Base Edinburgh, just outside of Adelaide, to do a non-commissioned officer (NCO) training course. Carole suggested to Christina and another stewardess that they drive to the base in Edinburgh. Christina sat up front with Carole, while the other woman in the back seat fell asleep. Christina and Carole 'got chatting and sort of got to know each other a bit better on the way over there'. When they arrived, they teamed up with two other women they knew from earlier and divided their duties 'so one of us was cleaning all the shoes, the other might have been ironing for all of us'. During the time away, the two women talked often. Carole remembers that when they returned to Point Cook, 'We saw a lot more of each other'. In early December 'the lightning bolt struck and we were smitten'.

Carole notes that forging a relationship with someone in the same service did carry risks, but there were also benefits, including having Christina close to her. No longer did she have to sneak out from the barracks. 'I got a lot more sleep, for starters', she laughs. One of the greater challenges was having to conceal their affection: 'You had to be a bit more careful. It was the hardest thing for me. I come from a very touchy-feely family, and having a relationship with distance in it was not easy.'

While Carole had been aware of her sexuality and had previously had relationships with other women, the experience was new to Christina. She remembers:

I mean, I was never interested in getting married. I hadn't really had a boyfriend before I joined the Air Force, and I was just interested in doing my job, and seeing what was in life ... and it wasn't until after I went to Point Cook and Carole was there, and we went to Adelaide together, on a course, that we sort of got together, so Carole, really, has been my only partner.

We ask Christina whether embarking on the relationship was frightening, given both the stigma that surrounded homosexuality at this time and the risks that women faced if they were caught together. She is quick to respond:

No, I wouldn't say it was frightening, it just seemed natural. I mean, I knew we had to be careful, and we used to go off base, and have weekends off, off base, but, no, I wouldn't say it was frightening, and I really didn't think about it in terms of that we might get caught out or anything like that.

While they had to exercise caution on the base, trips to bed and breakfasts in Melbourne or to the theatre provided opportunities for romance. Carole remembers the two spending weekends in a bed and breakfast in the city where 'two sisters that ran it ... couldn't quite make out what was going on with us. But it didn't bother them anyway.' As it was close to the city, it allowed the two to walk across parks, to the gardens to the city. Carole remembers: 'We had something of privacy there, didn't we?'

In June 1968, the two women arranged to take simultaneous leave, Carole to Townsville and Christina to Cairns. As Carole describes it, 'I conned my parents into a trip to Cairns to meet Chris and her folks.' This family encounter unearthed an unexpected revelation when Carole's mother and Christina's father worked out that Christina's paternal great uncle Joe had been married to Carole's maternal great aunt Annie. Christina spent a week in Townsville before the two women had to return to Point Cook, and it was there that she received a telegram, informing her that she was being posted to Pearce in Western Australia. In late June 1968, she went to Base Squadron Telephone Switch at that location.

While Christina was posted in Western Australia, the two women regularly wrote to each other, coming to realise that their chances of being posted to the same location again looked 'slim to non-existent'. Carole was eligible to leave the WRAAF at the end

of January 1969, but Christina had to serve until August 1970. The two women missed each other terribly, being posted on different sides of the continent. It became increasingly obvious that leaving the services might offer a way for the two women to be together. Carole raised the question: 'Chris, do you want to get out?'

The decision to leave was not one to be made lightly. Carole notes that 'the life, the career suited' her in the WRAAF. Christina agrees: 'Yeah. I liked the life. I enjoyed the services.' Ultimately, though, she wanted to do different things: 'One of my other things was that a telephonist wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of life.' While she was finally offered the chance to train as an aircraft plotter, she had already been a corporal for over 12 months and taking up the option would have meant taking a back step in her career, losing rank and losing pay.

The decision to leave was probably hastened by rumours Carole had heard that the periodic witch-hunts, which dogged lesbian servicewomen, were about to start up again and go through the Victorian bases. She did not want Christina to 'have to go through that'. Sadly, not wanting the letters they had exchanged to be discovered, the two women felt they had to destroy them. Carole remembers:

I said to Chris, 'Get rid of them straight away,' and I used to keep mine while I was still reading them, in the glovebox of my car, I had a lockable glovebox. When I got the hint that things were going to turn, and when we decided we were going to make the break, I disposed of all of those. So that's the sad part for me, is that we don't have that courtship record. But if you had stuff in your room, and you were silly enough to leave it around, they would find it, because they would tear the place apart, absolutely tear it apart, nothing was unturned.

With this in mind, Carole contacted the WRAAF officer and 'came out'. She remembers: 'I actually went into her and I said, "Look, I'm terribly sorry to do this on your watch, but I'd like to get out, and I want Corporal Dennis out as well", and she sort of looked at me, and there was a hint of, "Yeah, I thought so", sort of recognition.' This was 'the only time' Carole had to come out in this way. The women's families already knew about their relationship and accepted it without raising it with them. In an ironic twist, Carole knew the officer she told about her sexuality was also gay, but did not mention this when she raised her own sexuality. She 'actually apologised to her for doing it on her watch'.

Carole remembers that ‘just going in and saying “I’m gay” wasn’t enough. You had to prove it, more or less, which is a bit embarrassing’. Often men would sit in for the interview as well. For her exit interview, ‘the bird that interviewed me was as camp as a row of tents’. The woman was Dutch and her command of the English language was not excellent. This added a strangely comedic element to an interview that was naturally stressful: ‘She wanted to know if we masturbated to organism, and I was just laughing so much inside, that I didn’t bother correcting her, and it really was comedic.’ Carole emphasises again her belief that ‘I had a fair feeling that they were about to start a witch-hunt because, I don’t know. You just got little vibes that things weren’t too cool.’ The service police pressed Carole for information on others who might be gay, and she replied, ‘Well, I don’t know, because I’ve never slept with anybody else.’ Carole emphasises firmly that ‘I wasn’t going to shop anyone, no.’

Christina remembers her exit interview being less aggressive than Carole’s. Carole had tried to protect Christina from the interrogation she had experienced. Carole recalls: ‘I just laid the parameters. I said, “I don’t want her grilled, it’s sufficient enough that I’m telling you that we’re on and that’s the end of it.”’ As a result, Christina says ‘basically, all they asked me was “Who else was gay?” and I said, “I don’t know, because I don’t know anyone else”, and they really didn’t push me or anything like that’. Carole’s premonition that a witch-hunt was underfoot turned out to be accurate. In 1968 she believes that around a dozen women serving in the WRAAF were forced out on the basis of their sexuality.

One of the benefits of serving in the WRAAF was that the discharge certificates the women were issued simply stated ‘On Request’. Carole elaborates: ‘The worst discharge, the dishonourable discharge, is “Services No Longer Required”. The one that’s nice is “On Request”; they just don’t bother to say on whose request.’ For women in the WRAAC and the WRANS, the discharge given for homosexual conduct was usually ‘Service No Longer Required’. Carole notes:

With the Air Force, it was ‘On Request’, so it was that amorphous thing that didn’t mean anything, and you knew that’s what you’d get, and it wouldn’t really affect your future employment, whereas, ‘Services No Longer Required’ was a bit of a

well, why weren't they required? And ...we knew we'd get an 'On Request' discharge.

Carole was officially discharged on 9 November 1968, which gave her time to rent the two women a flat and obtain some furniture before Christina was officially discharged on 29 November 1968. Christina arrived in Melbourne on the morning of 30 November 1968. Carole 'promptly locked us out of the flat in excitement'.

Both women went on to have successful careers after they left the WRAAF, reinforcing the capabilities they had shown during their time serving. Carole had begun the process of looking for another position before leaving the WRAAF and was offered a role with the CSIRO as a film librarian: 'It was good, because I finished with the military on the Friday, and I started with them on the Monday, which was continuous service, so, I didn't lose any long-service-leave.' Christina initially secured a job quickly as well, as a typist in an accounts department. She went on to serve as Stock Control and Computer Systems Manager for a major oil company. Carole became increasingly involved in the Technicians Association Union at the CSIRO. After ten years of doing work as State Secretary, the Federal Vice President, President and then General Secretary, she decided it was 'full-time or nothing'. So, she 'spent about 20 years with the union, one way and another, and then I went back into CSIRO, because that was only a secondment across, and I retired from there'. Before retiring from CSIRO, she was a Senior Human Resources Management Consultant specialising in policy development and developed the CSIRO relocation policy and produced the Removal Policy and Conditions Manual.

While Carole and Christina describe a relatively easy transition from the WRAAF to civilian society, one where their sexuality did not hold them back and they were able to forge very successful careers, they were all too aware that other women could suffer terribly as a result of their sexuality. Carole notes: 'away from the military, back in the '60s and '70s, a lot of occupations, a lot of employers, if you were gay, that was it, you were out'. After the couple had left the WRAAF, they met a female couple who worked in a lolly factory. One of the women, who was from Tasmania, was illiterate. Carole stresses: 'they were terrified – and I am not saying worried – I am saying terrified, that they'd be found out because it would be their jobs. And what else could they do?

Especially [the woman] who was illiterate. It was really sad'. Christina notes things ended extremely sadly, with one woman committing suicide. Later in the interview, Carole returns to this case, expressing her hope that the contemporary world would have been a much kinder place for the two women: 'I think in this day and age, they would not have gone down the track that they had to go down.'

Carole and Christina continued to forge a life together at a time when lesbians were rendered largely invisible by broader Australia society. They decided to purchase their own home in 1974 and moved in at Easter 1975. There were initial issues in securing a bank loan, as Carole remembers: 'Two single women, they wouldn't talk to us'. In a stroke of luck, it happened that the accountant at the local bank branch was a gay man. He wrote a glowing recommendation for the two women. They were the first single women to gain a bank loan from that major bank. They have been active members of their community and gained unquestioned acceptance and recognition from a wide range of people.

They have never felt the need to particularly announce their sexuality or relationship. Carole tells us: 'You didn't actually tell people. The interesting thing is, we have never come out, because we never were in, we just were'. Christina continues, 'Yeah, people either accepted me the way I was, or they didn't'. In the 1970s and 1980s, even showing public affection could be risky. Carole remembers 'it was a case of it being so severely frowned upon that you wouldn't do it'. They relate an incident where they drove north to Stanthorpe in the early 1980s, and had pre-booked a double room, but when they checked in the motel owner took one look at two women and instead insisted 'on a single or twin'. While things have changed and the need to be as discreet has shifted, there are still moments when they are reminded there is still a distance to be traversed.

The two women have lived through significant social change in their lifetimes, particularly with regard to the way gay and lesbian people have been treated. Carole emphasises: 'You've got to realise, it's not that long ago since they stopped things like aversion therapy, and stuff like that. When you look back, that was bloody barbaric, but it was still going on into the '70s'. We ask whether she feels hopeful about the future for

LGBT people. 'I think there's always going to be pockets of resistance, particularly from the religious fundamentalists, but there's a much more liberal approach from most people.' Both women's families have been accepting of their relationship, though some things were not spoken about.

As our interview draws to a close, we ask whether the women are happy that the WRAAF was a part of their lives. Neither hesitates in answering 'yes'. For Carole, 'the Air Force brought me back to earth because you had to deal with so many different people. And the other thing was, I think the Air Force is great for discipline. I don't regret it at all.' While there is no regret about leaving, they do not dwell on their time spent in the services. They occasionally attend air shows and keep a watch on what the services are doing.

Yet, there is a distance between their time in the Air Force and the lives they have since led. The services have been slow to recognise their female service members and the Returned and Services League has a reputation for being a very male-dominated environment. For both women, there is also a sense that their time in the services has passed and that there is not much to be gained by dwelling on it. Carole reflects on this.

I think I tend to compartmentalise. When you're done with something, you're done with it, and you can look back on it, but you don't dwell on it, and I think that's a bit of a protection mechanism, I guess, in a way, it sort of locks off any unpleasant experiences, and puts them into a compartment where you can visit them when you want to, but you don't have to be confronted with them all the time.

Christina adds, 'I don't need to keep going back to that'.

When they resigned from the military, neither could have predicted the future of their relationship. Yet, when we spoke to them, they were approaching the anniversary of 50 years together. We ponder the significance of their decision to leave to be together. Carole notes, 'Well, it's interesting that when I trotted into the office and said I want out, [the WRAAF officer] said, "Are you sure about this?" and I said, "I've never been more certain about anything in my life", and I was right.' Christina adds, 'Yeah, I knew it was serious and it was a life-changing decision, I guess. I guess at that age, I assumed it would be for a long time.' We ask what has been the key to their relationship success.

Christina answers: 'It's just give and take and talking. And it's got to be the willingness to make it work and keep it going.'

Their lives together today are full. There has been travel. Volunteering is a significant component. Carole says, 'I think it's just part of life. You've got to give back.' When we spoke, they were enjoying training volunteer guides at the zoo, which allowed them to assist in their shared passion for animal welfare and conservation. They also support both through charities. Christina tells us that they both 'particularly love cats' and their cat, Jim, was a delightful presence throughout our interview. They also enjoy culture and visiting art galleries. Carole has found the local library amenable to expanding its collection of lesbian material, which makes it easy to read a reasonable selection of fiction.

As we reach the conclusion of our interview, Carole emphasises her belief that 'the biggest mistake the Air Force ever made, or the services ever made, is that in the process of getting rid of gays, they got rid of their best operators'. As we reflect on their careers, there is no doubt that this is true. Yes, despite the military's loss in not accepting its gay, lesbian and bisexual service personnel, Carole and Christina share a story that is extraordinary and touching. They met at a time when lesbianism was heavily stigmatised and when women still had to contend with sexism. Despite the military making it clear that homosexuality was not tolerated, they managed to find each other. They have built a shared life together and they have prevailed.

Julie Hendy

On 14 December 1967, 21 year-old Australian Corporal Julie Hendy arrived in Singapore. She was part of a small and select group of ten women who were making Australian history. They were the first members of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) to serve in an overseas theatre since the formation of the Corps in 1951. So momentous was their posting that the Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, issued a press release for the occasion, and photographs were taken of the women exploring Singapore.²³ While Julie was clearly considered one of the best and brightest in the women's services, her time in Singapore and in the WRAAC ended suddenly and dramatically in 1968 when her sexuality was discovered. She was quickly sent back to Australia and discharged in a matter of days with a certificate stamped 'Retention in the Military Forces not being in the interests of those Forces'. While prejudice meant the WRAAC lost her considerable talents, her remarkable personal resilience meant she was subsequently able to establish a highly successful life and career after the WRAAC. Julie's story captures the way lesbian women were stigmatised within the services in the 1960s. It also demonstrates the contribution that lesbian women have made to Australia's military history in capacities yet to be fully acknowledged.

Julie was born in the Sydney suburb of Burwood in 1946. She had a pleasant and peaceful childhood, with a younger brother and loving parents. Her father, who had served in Palestine and the Middle East during the Second World War, 'was a very easy-going, placid sort of man'. When Julie was around seven, he built the family a house at Homebush, which was where Julie grew up. Her father worked at the gasworks and her mother, a bright woman, 'ran a little shop as a tailor'. She was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, although Julie's father was not. Julie remembers such a lovely childhood and family environment that it was not until much later in her life, when she grew to know more about other people's childhoods, that Julie realised that not all families were as happy as hers.

Julie was not terribly interested in school. Because she was bright, though, she managed to fudge the things that she could do very well and made 'my way through school' until she was able to leave at the age of 15 'because I wasn't the least bit interested'. She managed to obtain a job in the taxation department sealing envelopes, but found that 'terribly dreary'. She elaborates a little more: 'I went and got a job, as a girl did in those days, you got a job, put things in your glory box and got married. Only I didn't.' Instead, in late 1963, in a significant departure from what was expected from young women at that time, she began the process of applying to join the WRAAC.

The idea of enlisting came from a friend Julie had in the taxation department, whose mother had been in the women's services during the Second World War. The two friends discussed joining either the WRAAC or the WRANS together. As Julie was prone to seasickness, they ruled out the WRANS as an option, leaving the WRAAC. She says, 'So we were going to join together. And so it was very much somebody else's idea but it captured my imagination because Seventh-day Adventists really, if you didn't get married you had to be a nurse or a doctor.' Neither of these options held any appeal for Julie: 'I wasn't going to be a doctor because I couldn't do school, and I didn't want to clean other people's bottoms. And I certainly didn't want to be a missionary. So that was about it. So the Army was a terrific idea.'

The WRAAC, like the WRANS and the WRAAF, operated as a separate female-only branch of the Australian military until integration occurred from the 1970s onwards. As historian Janette Bomford has pointed out, in the climate of the late 1940s and early 1950s, a separate women's corps segregated from men 'was the only way women would be accepted into the army'.²³ Its formation in 1951 had primarily been intended to address the shortage of male service personnel during the Korean War. During the 1960s, the Australian government undertook actions that increased the strategic importance of the women's services and saw women in the WRAAC undertake increasingly important work. In 1964, the Menzies Government reintroduced national service. In 1965, it expanded the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam. There was a growing need for women who could enhance the capabilities of the forces at a time when servicemen were deployed overseas.

Before Julie could enlist in the WRAAC, there were some challenges that had to be negotiated. Perhaps the most substantial was convincing Julie's mother to let her join the WRAAC. As Seventh-day Adventists, Julie's mother and her mother's family 'were opposed to the Army and opposed to war; they're pacifists'. Julie had to engage in 'a bit of a twisting of an arm to get into the Army. But as all my friends said, my parents never said no'. The other challenge was negotiating the WRAAC's enlistment process. In 1961, the WRAAC had lowered the age of entry from 18 to 17, and growing numbers of young women were waiting for general entry.²³ In December 1963, Julie successfully completed the aptitude, the IQ and the psychological testing required. She was accepted into the WRAAC and assigned as an Operator in Signals Corps. In January 1964, Julie began her training as a recruit at WRAAC School.

Historian Ruth Ford has pointed out that there was a major witch-hunt conducted to expel lesbians in the WRAAC in 1964–65, at the very time that Julie was going through WRAAC School and later learning signals. When she signed up, though, she was still not fully conscious of her sexuality, and was not aware of this purge. The WRAAC School, where recruits were trained, was based at Georges Heights, Mosman, a beautiful location overlooking Sydney Harbour. There was little time to appreciate the splendour of the scenery. Training was 'quite formal', teaching the new recruits 'how to march, how to understand military stuff and to acculturate you into the system'. While Julie initially found the formality and ranking quite amusing, by week five, the severity of some of the sergeants had 'terrified the bejesus' out of her.

Having grown up in a loving and close home, the move into a hierarchical and rigidly controlled environment must have been somewhat challenging. Julie recalls that, initially, she was 'always getting into a little bit of trouble'. It was not intentional; it was just that Julie was imaginative and 'a bit dozy'. She remembers: 'I got extra duties because I'd done something wrong. And I was always being yelled at on the parade ground because I was going in the wrong direction.' Her infractions were always minor and she never attracted serious disciplinary action.

During the recruit period, Julie was still not really cognisant about her sexuality. Reflecting today, she remembers accruing some knowledge about homosexuality

growing up. As a child aged around ten, a book had mentioned the topic, though this knowledge faded away with puberty. She does laugh, remembering the other recruits at WRAAC School complaining about being away from men and being locked in with women, while she thought, 'Oh, I don't mind.' She elaborates: 'The penny hadn't really dropped still because until you actually fall in love with a woman, you still think, oh well, maybe I'm just a slow developer – because I was always thought to be a little bit of a goose at that age. I was naïve to the extreme.'

After finishing her basic training, Julie was sent to Kapooka as a mess stewardess to wait for the next Operator Keyboard and Radio (OKR) signals course to start in Mount Martha in Victoria. It was at this point that she made a spontaneous decision to go AWOL. She describes herself now as a 'silly goose' for doing this, saying that 'because someone else was going, I thought: "Oh, I'll go too. That sounds like fun"'. She reached 'somewhere or rather in the middle of New South Wales' before she thought 'Oh, I'm being naughty here; I shouldn't do this' and turned herself in to the police. She was disciplined for this, confined to her barracks for two weeks and 'I think docked five pounds or something'.

Julie's brief misadventure made her focus much more intensely on doing well in the WRAAC: 'I thought, well, better pull my socks up now. I better behave myself.' This decision to refocus meant that she put a considerable amount of effort into the six month OKR course at Mount Martha: 'I tried really hard. And it was the first time, because I never tried at school. And suddenly I was top of the class all the time and doing very well indeed.' This filled Julie with a sense of confidence that she had not gained through her schooling. She remembers the work as 'fascinating. I loved it, yes'. She learned 'how to do Morse and how to transmit information via teleprint'.

The time at Mount Martha was also significant for another reason, as it was here that she first became truly aware of her sexuality when she 'fell madly in love' with another woman who she knew was a lesbian. She remembers:

I was mad about her, and you have to look at yourself and think about that. And I realised that's that, and I was very comfortable with that. And I had, I wasn't going

to question it. It was me. I knew also that the Army didn't approve, so you'd be in deep shit if anyone found out, so you had to keep it under wraps.

When asked how it was that Julie came to know the WRAAC's policies against homosexuality, she does not remember it being raised during her initial training, 'but you certainly knew. There was no question about knowing that you'd be out on your ear. Yeah'. She also emphasises that women could be discharged for many reasons in this era.

You'd be out on your ear if you got pregnant, if you were seen fraternising, well caught in bed with a man, all these, they were really. They couldn't work out whether we were prostitutes or saints. They didn't know whether to protect us from the men or the men from us. But it was something like that. It was always very much anything sexual and they'd go very strange.

In the previous chapter, Carole and Christina were able to leave the WRAAF without being issued dishonourable discharge certificates stating, 'Retention in the military forces not being in the interest of those Forces'. When they revealed their relationship, they were instead issued certificates that stated they had left 'On Request'. They believe that different discharge certificates were issued across the services, with dishonourable discharges more common in other branches. Ford has also suggested that during the 1950s and 1960s, women of higher rank were sometimes able to avoid discharge and instead were transferred to different locations to detract attention from their sexuality.²³

The broader context of the era is important in understanding Julie's experience. Bomford has argued that during the 1950s and the 1960s, the military wanted to avoid any suggestions the environment was conducive to lesbianism.²³ This was a continuation of official anxieties about the women's services during the Second World War. Therefore, in the post-war period, when women were forced out because of their sexuality, it appears that the military tried to keep these cases very quiet. Paperwork rarely mentioned the reasons the women had been forced out. Ford has argued that 'the official silence indicates the deep fear of publicity about lesbians in the military', as it was believed public knowledge would adversely affect recruitment and undermine the construction of the forces as 'more and noble – and asexual – the nation's best, defending and making sacrifices for the nation'.²³ It was not until 1974 that the three ~~services~~forces, both male and female, adopted a consistent policy on homosexuality. Despite this, Ford

has argued that during the 1950s and 1960s the women's services engaged in a pattern of witch-hunts, persecution and pervasive attempts to ensure that lesbians did not serve in the military in the post-war period.

While the military maintained an official silence about lesbian women during the 1950s and 1960s, it is clear that the institution was increasingly influenced by medical discourse coming from the United States and the United Kingdom, which diagnosed homosexuality as a psychological, or a pathological disorder.²³ Women who were suspected to be homosexual were not engaging in criminal activity, which was quite different to the situation of men. Instead, it was argued that lesbian women were 'defective' and posed a possible threat to camaraderie and morale. Furthermore, it was claimed that they could be subjected to blackmail. As a result of these views, women whose sexuality was discovered and were labelled as 'untreatable' homosexuals were unable to serve in the Australian military in the 1960s and 1970s. Evidence suggests that in the post-war period, the military was more concerned about lesbian women than gay men. Ford has also argued that unlike men, women in the military who were accused of same-sex activity could not be court martialled and were thus not provided with an opportunity to defend themselves or counter evidence documented by witnesses.²³

When she was at Mount Martha, though, Julie became aware that, despite military prejudice against homosexuality, there was a network of lesbian women who were serving, though 'it was very complicated too because you had to suss it out'. Once 'you got to know someone in the circle, they would say "There's so and so and there's so and so." And you get to know who's around'. She laughs as she remembers some of the stereotypes she had in her head at this time about lesbians.

And I was so glad I was in 30 WRAAC and not 31 WRAAC because apparently 31 WRAAC in Melbourne had some serious heavy-duty numbers. And I was thinking, 'Oh that's very frightening.' But of course they were just girls like me, really. It was just all in my imagination.

She knew that she had be careful not to be caught. She describes one incident which she believes could have been an attempt to catch her with another woman.

I was in 30 WRAAC Barrack and I was actually having an affair with someone in this particular room, and a corporal came past and we'd been in the room alone together for some time, but I had actually, and they-- The room had a sink in it, and I had actually gone over to the sink for some reason and she was way on the other side of the room. But this corporal burst into the room, and there was only one possible explanation for that: she was hoping to catch us out.

Julie knew that the woman she had fallen in love with at Mount Martha, who was a few years older than her, was interested in someone else, but Julie was still determined to pursue her. This pursuit was made even more difficult because the object of Julie's affection thought Julie was inexperienced and 'didn't want to corrupt' her. As it happened, another woman was interested in Julie at the time, so Julie 'let her chase me and let her win so that I would be corrupted. And then I could say, "Oops, now I'm corrupted. How about this?"' In the end, Julie did end up having a 'fling for a minute' with the woman she was originally in love with. She remembers that it all had to be clandestine and 'we had to be fairly closeted. You'd get thrown out. But you work that out'.

This first relationship that Julie had pursued so determinedly came to an end when she was transferred to Cabarlah outside of Toowoomba in Queensland to continue her work in signals. It was a prestigious posting but the relationship breakup was devastating. Julie says, 'You know, it broke my heart at the time.' She describes receiving the letter which ended their relationship at lunchtime. While heartbreak is always difficult, given the position of the WRAAC towards lesbianism, she knew she had to conceal her emotions: 'I've got the big letter and just walked away and stood under a tree and just thought: "I've just got to not let anyone notice." So you learn how to just control it. Nobody would've guessed.'

Cabarlah had few diversions: 'It was a pub and a post office. That was Cabarlah.' Julie was part of a group of around five or six women who were the first to go there because 'This was an elite place for very fast Morse people.' As it was the time of the Vietnam War, 'boys were going and we had to fill in the gaps'. Julie concentrated on her work because 'These were straight women and I had enough sense not to go there.' As she was enjoying the job, there was little time to feel isolated: 'The work was fascinating.

I had to learn how to do a whole bunch of stuff up there and I was loving the work.’ The other women, although straight, ‘were lovely and I just got on like a house on fire with them’.

Julie managed to conceal her sexuality from others in the military by making it appear that she was actively dating men. She says, ‘I always had a bloke as cover. I had no trouble attracting them; the business was getting rid of them. And I had several who desperately wanted to marry.’ While this was necessary at the time to avoid social pressure and scrutiny, she does harbour some regrets about her involvement with one man in particular. She actually became engaged to him when he went to Vietnam.

Then I had to send him a ‘Dear John’. I was terribly cruel, and I recognise it now. And I knew at the time, but I had to do it, I felt. I couldn’t just sit and stay at home, and in those days that was about all you could do as an option. You, either did that or go out with the boys or go down the pub and drink with the boys, but then you’d attract a boy. And I never seemed to have any trouble attracting them, I think probably because I didn’t care. And I think that probably made me attractive.

In Queensland, Julie was promoted to a Lance Corporal and then Corporal. She had experienced some difficulty shaking off the earlier image she had been labelled with by some WRAAC officials as ‘the slacko person always in trouble’. Consequently, ‘they promoted me via Lance Corporal, which almost never happens. So I was a Lance Corporal for about a year or so, and then they had to make it full Corporal.’ With the posting at Carbarlah, Julie had been recognised as one of the most talented women in Signals. While Julie may have been ‘a bit sloppy and the last one on the parade and all that stuff’, the military had acknowledged she was ‘an exceptional Morse operator. I passed all the Morse warrant officer qualifications on my first go’. These remarkable talents were about to become increasingly valuable.

As more Australian servicemen were posted over to ~~serve in~~ Vietnam as Australia’s involvement in the conflict escalated, a growing number of opportunities were opening up for women in the WRAAC. Female signallers had been a critical asset during the Second World War and Defence again recognised their potential. Colonel Dawn Jackson, the Director of the WRAAC, had been lobbying strongly for the overseas posting of

women since 1964. Defence refused to send women from the WRAAC to Vietnam, a place of active combat. In 1967 though, it was finally agreed that a select group of women from the WRAAC would be deployed to Singapore.

Julie's role as a pioneer was cemented when she was selected as one of seven women from 7 Signals Regiment in Carbarlah who were to be sent to Singapore to serve in 121 Signal Squadron with the Far East Land Forces. They were accompanied by Captain Heather Gardner, Lieutenant Pam Smith and Warrant Officer II, Mary Bulmer. The women prepared to leave for Singapore on 15 November 1967. This was an extraordinary moment in Australian military history, as they were the first to serve outside Australia since the WRAAC had been established. The posting was so prestigious that news of the women being sent overseas was published in Australian newspapers.²³ Interestingly, the increased focus on servicewomen meant that the issue of lesbian women in the WRAAC was raised publicly that year. Colonel Jackson told the *Australian* newspaper in an interview that 'with the number of women we have, lesbianism must exist. Our officers are trained to watch for it, and we have methods of dealing with it. Doctors and padres play an important role here.'²³ While Jackson had driven the overseas service of WRAAC women, she was very traditional in other ways. Lorna Olliff has asserted that Colonel Jackson 'insisted that members of her Corps were women first ... and soldiers secondly'.²³

Julie spent just over ten months in Singapore. The high-level work that women in the Australian military performed in the 1960s is often not acknowledged. Julie did not disclose specific information about the work she had performed in Singapore. She reminded us that she had signed the *Official Secrets Act* and that she would always honour this. Her particular training as a signals operator and posting with the 121 Signal Squadron provides some indication of the type of work she was engaged in.

While Julie took her work very seriously, she also found ample opportunities to meet and socialise with other lesbian women. She laughs as she tells just how many other lesbians there were in Singapore. The Australian servicewomen had been sharing a base with the British and 'there were 104 other ranks. And at least 30 were out lesbians and another 20, if you talked to people, they had had a dabble. So there's 50 women'. As a

young woman exploring her sexuality and determined to enjoy her overseas posting, Julie laughingly recalls, 'I went mental.'

Julie knew the British Army was prone to witch-hunts. She says:

Prior to my being caught, they came through on the big hunt. They'd been through the barracks at Hong Kong and got some letters and they kept trying to find someone in some letter had referred to someone by a nickname and they kept asking who this nickname was. It was one of those generic nicknames that didn't actually apply to anyone in particular. So it would have been an internal shorthand. But anyway, they were SIB [[Special Investigation Branch](#)], I think they were called. And everyone was on tenterhooks about being called up before SIB because they would investigate fairly thoroughly, but they weren't going to touch me because I was Australian Army. So until I bloody gave it away completely, yeah.

Julie's sexuality was exposed in October 1968. During a relationship with a British servicewoman, Julie and the other woman had fallen 'asleep and they did a bed check and there we were ... So I was sprung, seriously stark naked, in bed with another girl, stark naked'. She remembers that 'the British were quite used to' this sort of thing happening and that it took them about a month to send the British servicewoman home. For Julie though, 'I was out within a week. And it was shocking, yeah.' She remembers the 'stunned silence' that followed when she had to tell the other Australian servicewomen in Singapore why she was being sent back. They were heterosexual and Julie had been very discreet about her relationships with British servicewomen.

In aftermath of the incident, Julie had to appear before the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Singapore base, a British Sergeant Major. She remembers that her relationship with this Sergeant Major had always been positive but the dynamic altered dramatically as 'suddenly it turns out that I'm this depraved horrible thing'. The Sergeant Major told Julie she would have to 'write and say how many [women she had slept with]. You slept with 16 here and 14 there'. She continues:

And I had to say, 'Ma'am, I'm not an animal.' I remember saying that: 'I'm not an animal', which is pretty provocative for a little nice girl like me. And, I wrote I think a two-page letter, and she said, 'Now detail all the names of the people.' And I just refused. Death before dishonour. But I did say how I was and what I'd done.

Officially, as someone with a high security job, the military's position was that Julie's homosexuality made her vulnerable to blackmail. She remembers:

The whole point about being a lesbian in the Army was they used to say, 'Well you're subject to blackmail.' You're only subject to blackmail 'cause they make it illegal. But I had already confronted that idea. And I already knew that if anyone ever did try to blackmail me, in the remote chance someone tried to blackmail me, there's no way I'd betray my country. You'd have to have rocks in your head really. And I would just front up to and say, 'Look this is happening and it's because of ...' and I would've been discharged. But it's much better than the horror of going down in the other path. I'm just not a moral coward.

She also remembers feeling concerned that the military may have attempted to make her undergo psychiatric treatment for her homosexuality, although she thought, 'I don't want to be fixed. I'm happy the way I am'. This, coupled with the loss of her security clearance, left her with little choice but to accept the official process that unfolded.

Despite pressure during interviews from officials, Julie refused to name any other lesbians that she knew in Singapore. She was sent back to Australia so rapidly that the paperwork surrounding the incident had not yet reached her superior when she arrived back in Australia. The Assistant Director asked what had occurred, and Julie told her that she 'was caught in an invidious situation' before expanding to outline the circumstances under which she had been caught with another soldier (not divulging the sex). There was about a month left before Julie's service period was due to end, and the Assistant Director sent her home on leave for most of this period. Three days before the period was up, her leave ran out and Julie returned:

... so I rocked along again thinking: 'Oh well, I'll do my three days.' And she said, 'What are you doing here?' And I said, 'My leave ran out, Ma'am.' She said, 'Go home. Come back on' whenever it was. So she was very gracious. By then she would've known.

There was no option for Julie to continue to serve in the WRAAC, and she was issued with a discharge certificate. This certificate noted the reason for her discharge was that her 'Retention in the military forces not being in the interest of those Forces'. Julie contrasts her experience with that of another woman she knew who had served and had

been caught in bed with a man, noting that this woman had been discharged at her own request. This was a substantial difference from Julie's certificate, which made it clear that leaving the military had not been of her own choosing. While the overt expression of heterosexual sexuality was not encouraged, it was not stigmatised and punished in the severe way that lesbianism was. Expressions of sexual desire between women were pilloried and brought unique risks. Julie remembers the message conveyed to her through her entire experience of being identified as a lesbian was that 'I'm in total disgrace, yes and I've betrayed the country. And I have to be sent home in disgrace.' It would have been exceptionally difficult for anyone to avoid internalising and absorbing this message to some extent.

Towards the end of our interview, Julie reflected on just how long this message had stayed with her after her discharge. She drew on the language of psychiatry towards homosexuality that was prevalent at the time: 'Well, I had two odd years where I actually did believe I was defective.' She struggled with having been a high achiever who was then treated appallingly: 'When you've been top of what you're doing and they send you over to Singapore and then they say, "Oh clearly no, you're rubbish," and get rid of you'. Julie emphasises that an experience like this 'makes it pretty clear that you're not quite right'. She points out:

And it was a mental illness and blah, blah, blah until 1973. So I believed it. And it wasn't for a couple of years that I began to slowly piece together the fact that no, I'm actually quite a nice person. And, but it's still, there's residual scars, I think, if I look at it.

During this part of the interview, Julie noted that she felt the impact of her discharge with ongoing scars. She was also keen to draw attention to her coping skills and resilience, noting that many women would not have dealt so well with the experience emotionally: 'I would imagine that some people would've been devastated by it. I would imagine that some people would've found that really, particularly if you had invested a lot in the career side of things. But it's certainly not how I am.'

On her return back to her family, Julie decided not to divulge [to](#) her parents what had happened in Singapore, instead telling them that 'the heat got to me'. She

remembers: 'I'm sure my mother suspected something amiss, but if I wasn't going to tell her, she wasn't going to ask.' With some money saved up, Julie decided to spend some time in England with the British Corporal with whom she had been caught.

I'd always wanted to go to the UK. That's what we all did in those days. Everyone wanted to go to the UK. And now I'd saved up a gazillion amount of money in Singapore because we didn't get taxed the same way and I wasn't spending it; it was very cheap to live there. Very cheap, and the NAAFI was cheap booze and all they did was drink beer. And also I wanted to go out and live my life. I hadn't been at home for a long time. I couldn't stay at home, I couldn't hide from my parents in that way. I had to get out somewhere. And [the woman she was caught with] and I were still on together. And so I thought, well I'll fly over there, we'll get together.

Later in the interview she returns to this memory, noting that her time in England 'was a complete break. And I was humiliated enough to want it to be that way'. The relationship lasted about a year and during this time, Julie was able to establish a life outside the WRAAC. She enjoyed the vibrant gay and lesbian scene that was emerging in London at the time. The relationship with the British Corporal did not last, but Julie found other ways to make the most of her time overseas. As someone still in her early twenties, 'We were all just experimenting really – experimenting with life.' A lot of the British women she had met in Singapore eventually came back to London after they were discharged, which increased Julie's social circle. She describes a rich world of gay bars and socialising that opened up to her in London, 'And they knew the scene and we would go down to the Robin Hood Club, Gateways, and what was the other one? The Rehearsal. And, but mostly Gateways, that was the big lesbian place and I remember one time I suddenly realised I'd been down 11 nights in a row, I thought I'd better take a night off.' Julie remembers this as a 'fabulous' time. Having been stigmatised as a result of her sexuality, she was determined to embrace it: 'Every night we'd go down there and we'd drink and we'd smoke and that's when I – 'cause I'd been thrown out for being a degenerate. And so I was going to live the life of a degenerate.' Soon enough, though, she discovered that 'my idea of being a degenerate was to smoke cigarettes, drink beer and stay up 'til midnight.' The time reinforced her growing belief that what she had been told

by the military was wrong: 'So it took me a couple of years to realise I was, actually, I'm not that bad. Yeah.'

Julie notes that during this time of her life she had nothing to do with the Australian women she had served alongside in Singapore: 'Oh no, no, no, no ... I had nothing to do with any of the girls from 7th Sig Regiment or Singapore group ... I had no idea how they would respond to me, and I didn't want to go there'. Ironically, in 'an unexpected twist', Julie even undertook some work at Australia House for the Australian Army. She would go out with some of the British Army lesbians she had met in Singapore all the time – they were her best friends. After just over two years in England, Julie returned home with a British partner, though this relationship came to an end back in Australia.

While the experience of being discharged was undeniably traumatic, Julie referred throughout the interview to her easy-going personality and the way this helped her to cope with what she went through. The time spent in England after her discharge also provided a different environment to explore herself, which perhaps helped her manage this major and unanticipated life change. Furthermore, the skills she had learned in the WRAAC helped her to obtain employment back in Australia. She initially got a job at Ansett Airlines as a teleprinter operator, essentially data processing, 'because that was one of the things I'd learnt in the Army'. Although she was highly skilled at Morse code, she soon found that sexist perceptions in the civilian world made it impossible for women to gain this type of work: 'Morse code you couldn't do in private life without a penis. I don't know why.' Julie moved away from data processing into reservations, which she found much more interesting.

Like so many Australians in the 1970s, Julie was a beneficiary of [Prime Minister Gough Whitlam](#)'s introduction of free tertiary education. She remembers 'he also introduced something called the NEAT scheme where you got paid to go to university. And there was an early leaver scheme. So the stars just lined up.' Just as Julie was exploring these options, she met someone through the magazine *Nation Review*: 'One day there was this delightful ad and it really was so well worded I had to answer it.' This correspondence led to a relationship with a woman who was attending university to study psychology. The two women developed a relationship and Julie moved into her partner's

‘lovely house in Carlton, beautiful big palatial house. Shared with a bunch of women and people’.

After sitting a qualifying exam, Julie ended up studying psychology and behavioural biology. Her studies – which included an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree in neuropsychology – her relationships and her success in an intellectually demanding field helped to negate the WRAAC experience somewhat. Julie has lived in various parts of Australia, establishing a highly successful career as a neuropsychologist and gaining international recognition for her work. She was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1993 to study the consequences and management of traumatic brain damage in children. She is justifiably proud of her work in this field.

Julie has now retired and lives in an Australian coastal town. Her brother lives nearby and she has found a community she can be involved with. Her life is rich and full with a variety of pursuits. She is a talented artist, enjoys music, is engaged in politics and is even working on a book. She has long accepted her dismissal from the WRAAC as something that allowed her to move on and attempt different career options. She looks back on her discharge in a positive light: ‘All the cards have fallen my way, and I’m very much aware of it.’ At the close of the interview, Julie concluded by putting her WRAAC experience into context.

Of course that while the Army was a very exciting time for me and I did stuff that I’m not allowed to talk about because of the *Official Secrets Act* so I really thought I was special, but I ended up with another job that was equally as riveting and as exciting, and so it’s not as if I look back on that as the most, peak of my life. It’s not. It’s not; it was exciting and it was fun and I had a terrific youth, but I had a terrific middle age as well and I’m planning on a terrific old age.

Julie’s contribution to Australian military history is significant. Her Singapore posting challenged perceptions that women should only serve in Australia. While prejudice meant the WRAAC lost her considerable talents, her remarkable personal resilience meant she was subsequently able to go on to establish a highly successful career in another field. Other women who experienced her treatment might still be dealing with the experience, yet her resilience and the joy she found from another career have allowed her to move

beyond this. She showed exceptional courage and awareness in the 1960s when she resisted the efforts of the Army to stigmatise her and treat her sexuality as a psychiatric disorder.

Julie points out that her WRAAC career was something that began more than 50 years ago and that she has led a long and happy life outside the military since. She is a resilient and highly intelligent woman, adaptable with a keen sense of humour. Her story is an important one because it not only captures the stigmatisation of lesbian servicewomen within the services in the 1960s, but it also demonstrates the contribution that lesbian women have made to Australia's military history in capacities that are yet to be fully acknowledged.

Wally Cowin

When Wally Cowin was discharged from the Navy in 1969, having been caught having sex with a mate, he was devastated. His five-year career was gone, and with it the work that he loved. He was told that his war service would be wiped, and he would receive no pension. He would never get a government job. It seemed as though everything had been taken away from him. What made this worse, perhaps, was that he had not started with that much and it looked as though years of effort were being undone. Wally's story reveals the many sexual opportunities for gay or bisexual men serving in the Navy in the 1960s and early 1970s, as long as they were discreet. His narrative also shows the ways that changing regulations around homosexuality were shaping new Defence methods to deal with suspected homosexuals, marking the end of a period of potential tolerance. In an era when homosexuality was still not accepted or even legal in Australia, the stigma of being kicked out of the Navy for homosexual acts could have ramifications for years.

Wally was born in 1948 in Tenterfield in northern New South Wales, a town now associated with the international performer Peter Allen. They 'shared the same kidney dish', as Wally puts it, having been delivered by the same doctor in the same hospital. Wally's father served in the Army during the Second World War and had become a policeman afterward. He took the family to Queensland, Currumbin on the Gold Coast and then, in 1955, to Mount Gravatt. Back then, Mount Gravatt was on the far outskirts of Brisbane, one of the new post-war working-class suburbs built to accommodate the war generation and their boom of babies. It was a pretty wild place. Even the tram did not run out that far when Wally's family arrived. There was plenty of bushland, and a creek across the road, kangaroos in the streets and koalas and snakes in the yard. The school house was built for 200, but to Wally it seemed like there were thousands who turned up on the first day. Then there was the scout hall acquired from the Holland Park Army Base in the dead of night.

Life for the kids of the area was pretty free-range. Wally learned to cut down trees and build tents, to live off the land, roaming with friends through the forests, which are only remnants now. He discovered an aptitude for leadership. Wally really wanted to travel to Brisbane to participate in the Scouts Gang Show, but his parents would not permit him to take the long tram ride into the West End alone. Instead, Wally organised his own troupe of performers in the backyard using a schoolbook full of plays, and an old blanket on the clothesline as a backdrop and curtain to stage public performances.

This early developed habit, of knowing what he wanted and being determined to get it, carried into his school life. At the age of 12, Wally decided that he wanted to do Home Science (cooking) rather than woodwork, metalwork and trade drawing. The trouble was, cooking was for girls – it was part of their homecraft training, designed to make them good housewives. Even the sympathetic teachers could not do much against the declared policy of the Education Department. Wally dropped a subject and took to just sitting in on the cooking classes, quietly down the back of the classroom, watching and learning. Whenever an opportunity to cook presented itself, he would grab it. When his mates at scouts were competing in knot-tying competitions and the like, he would turn up with a Christmas cake – fruit cakes were his specialty. When the scouts were camping in the bush, Wally would collect the money and do all of the troupe's shopping and cooking.

His sexuality was as free-ranging as the rest of his childhood. There were plenty of boys and girls willing to join him exploring and experimenting with their bodies. Wally was bisexual in his preferences and always had girlfriends as well as boys. There were plenty of opportunities: camping in the bush with the scouts, swimming in the dam with friends. Wally states, 'Everybody played with everybody around here in those days. Age was not a problem.' He had developed an awareness of what was going on around him: 'The gaydar was certainly working for me by the time I was 15. I knew that look or whatever it is to some people. I knew what a man ... whether he's looking at me or ... I just knew'. Wally was careful, of course; he and a few friends would talk about what they were up to, but he knew not to be too open about sex. He remarks, 'I knew not to talk about it. I didn't feel bad about it. No, I was interested in all of it. It was how it all worked, how everybody's body worked.'

It all seems rather idyllic, but Wally was not really happy, either at home or at school. Wally was not much of a student (though he remembers getting 100 per cent in a Navy maths test once) and he failed the last year of primary school because of his English: 'I couldn't spell. I had trouble writing.' Punctuation was a challenge but he knew he had to learn and he set about reading more and more until he got it. Wally repeated the final year of primary school and was then admitted to Mount Gravatt High School. After two years he was ready to leave school and get a job. There seems to have been no doubt in Wally's mind that the way out was the military – and the Navy, in particular.

His father's Second World War service was not a factor encouraging Wally in his decision. He comments: 'There is no bloody way I wanted to put up with what my father saw in the islands ... I didn't want to go through what I'd seen him go through and the post traumatic stuff that he went through ... He had a bad time. The strength of character for him got him through it. I saw that'. What Wally did get from his father was practical advice: that if you have to fight for your country, you can do it more easily in the Navy than the Army. Then there was 'the travel thing ... I could see the world, which I wanted to. Travelling and seeing the world for me was everything'. There was also, of course, sex: 'By that time, I was very much aware of my sexuality, both in my context at scouts and dare I say the police, with my context of what I wanted to do and what did I want sexually, so I was very much aware.' Wally knew of Winston Churchill's famous line that the traditions of the Navy were rum, sodomy and the lash. At least one older man recommended the Navy to Wally on exactly these grounds. Wally recalls 'a scout master who was in the Navy as well, and he said, "Mate you'd love that"'. As if that were not enough, Wally learned that he could do his apprenticeship as a chef through the Navy, bringing his love of cooking to his working life. In January 1965, at the age of 16, Wally Cowin signed up for the Royal Australian Navy.

His plans began to go awry almost immediately. There was a war on in Vietnam and the Navy did not need cooks as much as it did seamen. Its cooking schools were closed down, and rather than being based at Nirimba in New South Wales as an apprentice chef, Wally was signed up as a Junior Recruit and shipped off to HMAS *Leeuwin* in Western Australia. Once there, the recruits were enrolled in another year of

basic education, alongside learning seamanship and military discipline and skills. He knew how to shoot from his younger days, but the .303 rifles were new to him. His intake was a group of about 212 men, lads brought together from all over Australia. Some, like Wally, looked to get away from home, some to escape the boredom of farm or rural life. Some were effectively sentenced to military service by judges looking to get some discipline instilled into young tearaways: if you do not join up, you are going to gaol.

HMAS *Leeuwin* has attained some infamy in recent years as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. In June 2016, the Royal Commission specifically examined the Australian Defence Force (ADF) with attention focused on responses to child sexual abuse involving minors such as the Cadets. HMAS *Leeuwin* featured prominently among the historical cases, with the Royal Commission examining abuse cases there during the period 1960–80. The Defence submission and testimony of the Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, was candid about the institution's significant knowledge and mishandling of abuse claims at *Leeuwin*.

Indeed, in 1971, when an allegation of physical bullying and abuse reached the press, the Minister of State for the Navy commissioned Judge Trevor Rapke to 'undertake an investigation into allegations of initiation practices, physical violence, or bullying at HMAS *Leeuwin*'. The internal Rapke Report interviewed 467 witnesses from staff and junior recruits and described numerous examples of physical, sexual and mental abuse, normally perpetrated by junior recruits as a form of bullying and hazing. Yet, Rapke concluded: 'In the light of the large body of evidence which I accept of bullying and violence, it is necessary to stress that LEEUWIN has been the scene for unorganised and repetitive acts of bullying, violence, degradation and petty crime during most of the years of its existence.'²³ The ADF submission to the Royal Commission acknowledged that the Rapke Report had downplayed the systematic nature of abuse and cover-ups, and Vice Admiral Griggs acknowledged that the ADF had failed these young people. In his testimony, Griggs issued the following apology to survivors of sexual abuse: 'People and systems have failed you and they have put others at risk and that is simply not good enough. I am deeply sorry for what has happened to you.'²³

Notwithstanding this significant historical context, Wally did not report experiencing or witnessing any abuse, mainly because early on, accidentally and unexpectedly, he found himself in the Junior Recruit Drum and Bugle Band. Sitting in the dining room one day, drumming his knife and fork on the table, a bloke asked him whether he could drum properly. Before he knew what was what, that very same day, Wally was whisked off into the band. This meant no more seamanship, no more pointless marching in the rain, and he was fortunately insulated from the widespread abuse. Wally would never have to carry a rifle again. The band would play for the Junior Recruits in the morning and at events all over the state.

Here, too, Wally found his ambition kicking in. As he put it, for some unknown reason the ‘Maharajah of fucking [somewhere]’ had donated to the band a ‘fucking great huge lion skin’. Wally decided that he was going to claw his way to the top of the drumming tree and wear that lion skin. Because someone told him that he would ‘never have that on’, he was determined to do so within six months. Wally remembers: ‘I then learned all percussion and the beat and the time and how to ... and I learned all that with the side drum and the tenor drum and the base drum, cymbals, the triangle’. Sure enough, come the band’s performance at the Perth opening of *The Sound of Music*, there was Wally in the lion skin, leading the band’s rendition of ‘Sixteen Going on Seventeen’. As they marched through the streets of Perth, Wally knew he had achieved his ambition and that his next move was back to cooking. The band was ‘full, fabulous theatre’, but it was not serious.

The band had other benefits for Wally. He and the reservists and the band members would travel the state performing. It was a big team.

...the wind and the percussion ... the tenors. We were the tenor drums and kettle drums. They had the lead kettle drum in the middle and the two behind. Then we had to fill up with six other kettle drums, two tenor drums and then ten buglers and then they’d have the rest of the trombones and the trumpets.

In their dress whites they all looked pretty ‘schmick’. The band attracted attention and, as Wally, remembers, ‘The trousers left nothing to the imagination in those days. Underwear certainly wasn’t a prerequisite getting dressed.’ Sexual opportunities

abounded – within the band, or at parties, or even with whomever was driving the band around.

Wally's gaydar, which he had developed by the age of 15 or so, stood him in good stead. What he could detect was men who were interested, who might be up for a bit of sexual action. It did not matter much whether they were homosexual or not; there were men who at any given moment might, if approached, be willing to perform sexual acts. This was to become increasingly obvious later in his career in Sydney. In the meantime, his confidence meant that he could try it on with someone who seemed likely to respond, and if he got knocked back, well, 'There's another bus any minute.'

After 12 months at Leeuwin, Wally transferred to the ship HMAS *Sydney*. There was still no chef's apprenticeship for him, but at least he was cooking – and on a huge scale. There were five galleys, 40 to 50 cooks and chefs, including bakers and butchers; there were about 3500 sailors to feed. This being the military, there was a hierarchy to account for because feeding different ranks attracted different status. Many years later, Wally was chef on the officers' kitchen on the HMAS *Supply*, which served ten or 12 officers, including on one occasion the Admiral of the Fleet on a trip to New Zealand. At sea, kitchens ran 24 hours a day, but even on shore-bases there was a three-watch system, with shifts beginning at four in the morning for breakfasts. Between shifts, kitchen staff would look after their clothes, read, sit in the sun, and occasionally have sex.

The *Sydney* was a light aircraft carrier which had operated between 1948 until 1958, when it was placed in reserve as surplus to requirements. Recommissioned in 1962, the ship was used to transport soldiers and equipment to Vung Tau, a port in South Vietnam and base for the 1st Australian Logistics Support Group. The *Sydney* undertook 25 such trips, earning the nickname the Vung Tau Ferry. Wally was on four of those trips in 1966, 1967 and 1968, spending two or three weeks each way, with a maximum 48 hours in port. He was a kitchen-hand, which kept him close to his interest in cooking: 'We were on washing up and veggies and that sort of thing, standing there and braising the mince while someone else would ... "You just stir that while I ... this is what you do. Keep it moving"'. He never went ashore in these visits, but his work in the warzone was sufficient to ensure war service credit on his service record.

In port, the main activity for the *Sydney* and its crew was loading and unloading equipment – tanks and personnel carriers off-lifted from the flight deck by cranes and barges and chinook helicopters. There were also the soldiers to be offloaded. For some, this was not an adventure, but an ordeal. Even if those being offloaded at Vung Tau had wanted to deploy to Vietnam, the reality as it loomed closer, was frightening. Such was Wally's experience: 'The soldiers were nervous. "I was just 17", as the song goes. I can remember hearing the mess at night, the Army messes at night, and there'd be a lot of men who would be crying. I helped console some of them too ... the best fashion that I knew how', he laughs. Reflecting upon the widely believed story from the Second World War that many servicemen could be persuaded to engage in sexual activity on the basis that they might be dead at any time, Wally says that this worked for him too: 'I had used that line on some of them too because ... sometimes it worked. "You have never had your cock sucked by a man and you're going to war? We'll fix that for you right here and now"'.

Apart from offering consolation to anxious soldiers going ashore, the highlight of these trips for Wally was the stopover in Hong Kong, with 'its promises of mad chemists and sexual dalliance with anything and everything you want'. The sexual economy was booming and young men like Wally were promised the world.

We were told ... older sailors had said, 'Oh, you will see women that will be able to do this. You'll see men who can suck their own cock.' ... I wasn't let down. I was taken to places where men would suck their own cock and for a smaller fee they'd even do yours, especially if you were in a sailor's uniform. They were only too happy to ... so for me it was a fabulous world, needless to say.

Sex onboard the *Sydney* took many forms. There was, for example, an initiation into the secret world of onboard sodomy via the Golden Rivet. The Golden Rivet is a piece of maritime legend: a claim that the last rivet hammered into a ship during construction was a commemorative one made of gold. It is a well-established practice on the ships of many countries to trick new sailors into looking for it. Wally remembers a somewhat different version in which new sailors, whose interest in homosex had been determined ('the chosen ones, the ones that one knew weren't going to mind'), were invited by an older sailor to come and see the Golden Rivet. Somewhere in the depths of the ship, it would

become clear that the Rivet did not exist, but by that point the two men were in a quiet, private place where they could enjoy each other's bodies. The Golden Rivet that Wally later bought for ten dollars at the Brisbane Maritime Museum during the 1988 World Expo has a meaning for him that it does not, presumably, have for most others. There was also a degree of privacy available in the rostering of sailors and their living in three-berth cabins. Wally shared with two other cooks. Their rosters were well known, and if the others were at work and Wally was rostered off, interested men would drop by to visit him. He makes the point that the visitors initiated such encounters – it worked both ways when it came to seeking out sex on the ship.

Finally, in mid 1966, Wally was granted leave from the Sydney to do his chef's training at HMAS *Cerberus*, a training base southeast of Melbourne on Western Port Bay, and the site of recruit school for most enlisted sailors. A lecturer and others from Melbourne's William Angliss Food Trades School conducted the course, which specialised in training in cooking and associated skills. It was combination of classroom and practical training. Wally recalls: 'There was a course and every day we would do a three-course meal for eight. We'd do a soup and veggies and soups and curries and we'd be given the thing and we'd go and we'd have to do it.' After six months, Wally was done and it was time to move again.

Next stop was a 12-month stint as a chef at HMAS *Creswell*, a naval base at Jervis Bay on the south coast of New South Wales and the location of the Navy's Officer Training School. Wally was working in the junior officers' kitchen in an environment that allowed for plenty of free time and leisure activities: shooting, art, painting and golf. It was here that he got to know Rod Stringer, then working at a bar in Nowra, later to be a significant player in the creation of Sydney's Kings Cross/Oxford Street gay commercial scene. Wally jokingly says that Stringer was 'probably the only older man at the time that I never slept with'. From there, it was back to the *Sydney* for his third and fourth tours to Vung Tau (1967, 1968).

Next, Wally served at HMAS *Penguin* on the shores of Sydney Harbour, the Navy's main hospital base. There, working in the hospital kitchen, his skills were extended to the study of nutrition and the application of new research to treat hepatitis through diet. After

four months he transferred in June 1968 to the HMAS *Supply*, an oil tanker, working in the officers' kitchen. Wally's career was looking good, although he was subjected to a certain level of harassment by the radio operator who would regularly play and dedicate a song to Wally – Tiny Tim's flamboyantly camp 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips'. When Wally found out about this, he let the radio operator know in no uncertain terms what he thought of this: 'fish wife language', he says, 'screaming like a banshee'. The entire ship got to hear the exchange when the radio operator left the microphone turned on. This, Wally says, is when it dawned on him that there were no secrets on the ship.

Wally's final posting (though he did not know that at the time) was to HMAS *Watson* in Sydney in 1969. Here he met a special friend, Robbie, but he also made an enemy. His connection to these two men was to result in a disastrous turn of events. The enemy was a cook who took an instant dislike to Wally. The man called Wally a 'poofter' and thumped him early on. Maybe the man disliked Wally because he was after a promotion and thought that standing up for the regulations would get him noticed.

One night Wally was working in the kitchen for a dinner for the chiefs, officers and staff. Robbie was assisting – bringing the goods and ingredients for Wally's cooking from the victualling (stores) office. While the diners were eating the main course, Wally went into the victualling office to see whether Robbie was getting ready for dessert. Robbie was on the phone but got Wally to sit on the bench and wait for him. As Wally admired the lovely night view over the Bay, 'He [Robbie] starts to undo my fly and play with me while he's on the phone.' What they neglected to notice was that the lights were on in the office, and outside on the bank all of the off-duty sailors who were sitting there had a perfect view through the window. Wally recollects, 'Then they sort of watched and watched and watched and watched, right to the very, very end. As we were sort of tidying up and getting ... then the phone rang again. It was somebody we both knew. "What? What?" ... Then we both sort of turned around and everyone ... "Ha, ha"'. Any number of people had seen Wally and Robbie engaging in sex.

Within a couple of days word had spread. Everywhere they went it was 'Hi, Wally. Hi, Robbie.' As Wally describes it: 'And it was ... and it was ... [whistling]. We both thought, yes, that's right. Everyone could see and everyone has told everyone'. It is

striking that no one seemed particularly offended by all this – except Wally’s enemy. It seems that for the commander, having had Wally and Robbie’s behaviour reported to him by the man who disliked Wally, turning a blind eye was not an option. Wally and Robbie were now expecting to be court martialled.

The Navy’s regulations regarding homosexuality were unambiguous. In July 1966, a ‘Confidential Australian Navy Order’ had been circulated to captains and commanding officers throughout the Navy. There was no chance of anyone in authority being unaware of the rules. In 13 ½ pages, the document spelled out legal and medical approaches to the disciplining of ‘Unnatural Offences’. The intention, according to the document, was to ‘stamp out this evil. The Royal Australian Navy cannot afford, and does not want, to retain homosexuals in its ranks’. There were procedures supposedly to protect the rights of those accused (including restrictions on searching their kit, protection of doctor-patient confidentiality), and a detailed setting out of the kinds of offences that constituted unnatural immorality. Seven of these were also crimes in the civilian world, the eighth (disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind) being a purely military offence. While the document indicated that it was ‘most desirable as a rule’ that the matter be brought before a Naval Board, there remained the option that Commanding Officers might find it preferable to apply to have the offender discharged SNLR (Services No Longer Required).

This 1966 document was one of a series of orders that evolved over the period until 1974, as the Navy developed an explicit, coherent and consistent approach against homosexuality. In February 1969, a new order was issued on ‘Abnormal Sexual Behaviour’. Although it superseded the instructions of July 1966, it was much briefer – a mere three pages. The new order placed greater emphasis on the role of the psychiatrist, whose job it was to provide an opinion in cases where a serviceman (always presumed to be a man) had confessed to the offence of committing ‘unnatural acts’. The Commanding Officer would consider the psychiatrist’s report and referred through his Administrative Authority, recommending for Administrative Discharge SNLR or Administrative Discharge UNSUITABLE. The key difference between the SNLR and the UNSUITABLE dismissals was whether an offence was known to have been committed (in which case SNLR) or merely suspected (UNSUITABLE).

It was under this latter set of procedures that Wally came to be dismissed. The visit to the Navy psychiatrist was a remarkable moment, indicative of the way in which the formal procedures and the dictates of what might be called common sense played out. The Commanding Officer was keen to avoid the court martial and was within his rights to do so. But the psychiatric consultation had a slightly farcical air to it. A friend cued up Wally for the interview, suggesting: “Well, what you have got to do is put ... go and get what’s her name to cut your hair and get your nails done”, because always he will ask about your personal grooming and he’ll [the psychiatrist] want to see your fingernails and these sorts of things’. That is exactly what Wally did: ‘I went and had a pedicure and clear nail polish.’ It worked a treat. This is the exchange in which Wally describes what happened next.

Interviewer: So you went to the psychiatrist?

Wally: Yeah, only for him to say, ‘Yeah, you’re gay, fuck off.’

Wally’s informant had told him that the psychiatrist was, himself, homosexual. Nonetheless, theirs was a ‘strictly professional’ encounter until ‘right at the end of it he did say to me, “Yes, you know, Flossie [someone they both knew]” ... “Yeah. Aren’t you...?” “Mm-hmm”’ – in a knowing purse-lipped camp kind of moue.

In later years, Wally was able to pass on his wisdom to others seeking to escape the services because they were gay or bisexual, or because they thought they could carry this off. Indeed, the whole purpose of meeting with the psychiatrist or, in some instances, other officers, was to determine the ‘confirmed homosexuals’, as opposed to those who either had just been experimenting with homosex or who were claiming to be gay to force a discharge. One of those Wally later tutored was his own brother. Oddly enough, a year or so after Wally’s discharge, the Draft Resisters Union in Australia were circulating a flyer called ‘How Not to Join the Army’. In it the authors urged those trying to avoid being conscripted to:

BE GAY: Play the homosexual bit ... Wear white slacks, have your hair cut rather camp, wear a charm. Visit a couple of camp pubs and study homosexuals. Learn the gestures, the wrist movements. And the delicate body movements, how to touch the fellow you’re talking to suggestively, how to smoke a cigarette. Be a little pathetic,

talk melodically, act embarrassed in front of the other inductees when you undress.

Ask your girlfriend to show [you] how.

It concluded with the injunction ‘don’t overact’. In due course, on 3 October 1969, Wally’s discharge papers were presented to him: services no longer required.

It is striking that, for many years, Wally’s sexual escapades went unnoticed – or at least unchallenged. There must have been a certain amount of turning a blind eye to goings on that, in a stricter environment, might have met with disciplinary action. Oral history interviews with other Navy ex-servicemen who served in the late 1960s also report widespread knowledge about homosexual activity. They suggest that discretion was most important, and it was only those who flaunted their homosexual activities who challenged an unspoken code and faced disciplinary action. Wally had discovered after his verbal shredding of the radio operator on the *Supply* that ‘there were no secrets on the ship’. He remembers an Army figure, a regimental sergeant major, who was a real screamer (a flamboyant homosexual) who was posted to the *Sydney* because all of the hierarchy knew he was ‘a queen’. The thinking was that unlike a lot of Army men, the regimental sergeant major would get on well with the sailors.

Sometimes, there were near misses, where things got close but the offenders managed to wheedle their way out of trouble. One such episode happened at *Leeuwin*. Wally was lying on a bed in his dorm with two other sailors. He cannot remember if they had just done it or were about to, but it was pretty suspicious behaviour. Wally explained that he was teaching the younger men ‘Cat’s cradle’, an old naval pastime played by making patterns with string on the fingers: “I was just showing the boys how do a cat’s cradle, Sir.” ... “Were you learning how to do cat’s cradle?” “Yes, Sir.” “Were *you* learning how to do—?” “Yes.” As long as those under questioning held their nerve, there was not much investigators could turn up.

After the *Watson* incident, with his sexual behaviour now publicly known and with discharge looming, Wally needed to sort things out with his family. He knew he was not going back to Brisbane. Wally remarks, ‘I certainly wasn’t the same person I left as five years ago, needless to say, and I had to work and I had to go out.’ Even so, Wally needed to talk to the family. He rang his father: ““The shit’s hit the fan down here.” He said,

“What happened?” I said, “A bloke went down on me while he was on the phone in front of a few hundred people.” “Oh...” It got worse for a while, Wally says, but at least his father knew now, and when they talked again later, things had settled down. In fact, his father seems to have used his military background and his police connection to intervene and make sure there was no court martial. Wally reports that his father ‘said to this young officer, “Look, Son, there will be no court martial, okay... This sort of happened and if we court martialled all of them there [in the Second World War] ... we would have lost”’. Wally wrote to his mother, but his father intercepted the letter and failed to pass it on. Wally also wrote to his girlfriend, Marilyn, who worked with his mother, and the news got to her.

Yes, all this time Wally still had a girlfriend in Brisbane. But he was becoming ‘more and more gay and less and less bi and I hadn’t had sex with [any other] woman for years’. The rupture with the Navy seems to have made up his mind. Marilyn visited Sydney over Easter 1969. Wally had been intending to ask her to marry him when she came down, but now he was clear that was not going to happen. They had a nice weekend together, but the relationship was over. Today Wally regrets a little that he did not marry someone and have kids: ‘because I do miss probably having children and a different sort of family than what I’ve got. I don’t dwell on it. I thought, oh, that would have been nice at the time and some blokes that had kids and still went on and ... it makes no difference’. Asked what that might have meant for his homosexual sex life, he notes only that ‘I don’t know how that was going to work’.

As Wally has observed, he was not the person he had been five years before. He had seen parts of the world; he was a qualified chef and good at his job; he had developed a confidence in his own judgement. He would offer improvements on how things were done in the kitchens and they invariably worked out. He had an active sex life and an ever wider and more diverse circle of friends. Based in Sydney, at Garden Island, he was just down the road from Kings Cross, then the throbbing heart of sin city: drugs, gambling, strip clubs, sly grogging, sex workers (female and male), night clubs and coffee shops, US servicemen on rest and relaxation from Vietnam, cops clutching brown paper bags full of cash. Kings Cross had it all, and among this nestled Sydney’s camp world (‘Camp’ was the word almost universally used by homosexuals to describe themselves until ‘gay’

arrived from the United States in 1972). Wally participated in all of this even while he was still in the Navy, and he was not alone. The Navy authorities would warn their young charges against the temptations and threats of the flesh: 'Homosexuals were lurking at the gates, as it were, we would be warned about them...' Perhaps some were successfully warned off; Wally was not one of them.

The Rex Hotel – the downstairs bar especially – welcomed a camp clientele and offered safety, privacy and a chance for men and their friends to let their hair down. It also provided a place where sailors, short of cash, might get a feed, a few drinks and maybe a head job – with luck, even a taxi fare home. There were locals who were well known among 'straight' sailors for being obliging hosts or a good root. The roster system on the *Sydney* meant that Wally worked mornings and had the rest of the day off. He could get to the Cross during the day sometimes and see another side of the place. He discovered drag bars and local celebrities that he came to like. He says, 'There's real gay people doing theatre and magic and all those witty conversations and all that sort of stuff.'

After his discharge, Wally was well placed to tap into his network of friends to find work and rebuild his life. Through his friendships with the 'hustlers and bustlers', he got a job in the downstairs bar at the Chevron. When the barmaid did not report for work one day, he was put in charge. He had never poured a beer, but he worked it out. Then the keg ran dry – and he sorted out how to tap the next one. Luckily, he says, it was a Monday and most of the customers did not turn up until later in the morning. Wally is a man who could turn his hand to anything.

After a brief stint at Walton's department store in the kitchenware section, Wally landed a job – again through his camp friends – on the Southern Aurora, the train that ran the overnight route between Sydney and Melbourne. The railways were filled with mutual connections which spilled over from work to living arrangements.

I knew all the queens that worked in the train catering service on the Southern Aurora particularly. There was other gays, cooks and stewards on there, and within the train catering service and particularly with the sleeping cars ... There was a lot of gay people ... Then I'd lived with ... in a lot of share houses with those same

conductors and people ... in the Strathfield push, they were called in the days. I was living in Burwood, Strathfield with these people and working on the trains.

Working on the Southern Aurora, Wally soon joined the Railways Union, quickly becoming the union representative for the catering service workers and ending up as chairman of his branch. Later in life he returned to Mount Gravatt, to the very house he had grown up in where, starting in 1991, he produced a long-running *Queensland Pride* magazine out of his basement.

Wally lived through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Reflecting on the devastating effects of the epidemic, he remarks: 'I'm probably about the only one of a whole 30, 40, 50 sailors that I knew in Sydney that got out at the same time that ... The rest of them ... died some dreadful deaths in all sorts of ways'. While data does not exist about the AIDS epidemic and Australia's ex-service community, it is known that AIDS hit American ex-servicemen, especially those from the Vietnam generation, quite hard. Randy Shilts even goes so far as to argue that by 1987, the biggest provider of AIDS care was the US Veterans' Administration with more than 1500 patients.²³ We will never know how many Australian service people died in the AIDS epidemic and whether these men identified as gay, bisexual, or heterosexual but enjoyed having sex with men. The immense toll AIDS took on the gay community makes the voices of survivors such as Wally even more important to understand gay life before the 1980s in the services and civilian Australia.

While Wally's Navy service ended abruptly, the experiences and training it provided set him up in ways that his civilian education did not. It turned out that Wally had not lost his war service pension when he was discharged, despite this he is still working today. Among other interests, he is a travel writer – seeing the world just as he had always intended. Almost 50 years later, those original motivations to join up continue to push Wally into new adventures.

Section 2: Bans and Witch-Hunts, 1974–1992

In 1973, gay rights newsletter *CAMP Ink* published a story titled ‘so you want to be a WRAAF’. The article detailed the intimidating RAAF Police investigation and interview targeting a lesbian airwoman, compelling her to request her own discharge. Her case and another received mainstream media coverage later that year, prompting the Defence Minister, Lance Barnard, to call for a consistent, tri-services approach to homosexuality that would be ‘liberal, understanding, and designed to cause the least embarrassment in such situations whilst safeguarding the interests of the Service’.²³ This was to be the first explicit policy on homosexuality applicable across the three services.

In June 1974, Barnard approved the new framework for dealing with homosexuality, which drew heavily on precedents. It was the responsibility of the service police to investigate any case of suspected homosexuality, male or female. Only a minority of cases would be dealt with as disciplinary matters: those involving sexual assault, minors or a significant rank imbalance. All other cases would be dealt with administratively. Those found to be ‘confirmed homosexuals’ – again as opposed to cases of experimentation (rarely ever accepted, anyways) – could request their own honourable discharge, or else be dishonourably discharged ‘service no longer required’. Not surprisingly, the majority of gays, lesbians and bisexuals would choose the former.

The rules said that suspected homosexuals should be dealt with ‘sympathetically’ and ‘with discretion’. Oral histories and media reports suggest that this was rarely the case. LGB service members from the 1970s and 1980s recall surveillance outside their homes, secret searches, undercover police visiting gay and lesbian establishments, and being summoned on short notice to interviews. Service police asked questions about suspects’ sex lives, eliciting graphic details. The interviews could go on for hours or even

days until, in most cases, the suspects at last cracked and confessed to being homo/bisexual. Despite this, the police still wanted to know about their sexual practices and, most importantly, the names of LGB members of the forces. Service police would then extend the investigation net to target others in what became colloquially known as witch-hunts. Some of the more prominent witch-hunts were:

- At RAAF Base Point Cook in December 1981, leading to the discharge of five airmen. This case was reported in *Truth*.
- At the RAAF Academy in March 1982, uncovering a gay network connected to one cadet. Richard Gratton's chapter on pXX explains this witch-hunt in more detail.
- Several ex-servicewomen recall a witch-hunt that began at the women's inter-services hockey tournament in 1987. One lesbian hit on a straight woman, setting off the witch-hunt across the three services.

Statistical data on homosexual investigations and discharges, collected within the ADF about the period 1987–1992, provides some insights into police practices. The RAAF had the most discharges at 45, compared with 27 for Navy and more than double the 22 for Army. This aligns with anecdotal suggestions that the RAAF Police were more aggressive in their pursuit of LGB members. Another revealing statistic is the gender breakdown: 55 per cent of Army investigations were of women, suggesting that the Army Special Investigations Branch (SIB) was disproportionately targeting women. The proportion of female investigations was much lower in the Navy at only 18.5 per cent (a gender breakdown is not available for Air Force). The number of officers discharged was only three in the RAAF and two in the Army (not available for Navy). Oral histories suggest that these numbers are probably under-counting, but they do reflect a wider trend: officers were less likely to be targeted in witch-hunts.²³ This data also shows that the police services exercised significant agency determining if, when and whom to target (or not) for suspected homosexuality.

The services periodically updated the ban, though the general procedures never changed substantially. The most comprehensive updated order was DI(G) PERS 15-3. Promulgated in November 1985, the document listed four justifications for the ban:

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1. Command and morale – to retain discipline among troops.
 2. National security – the threat of blackmail against gays and lesbians.
 3. Health – an allusion to HIV/AIDS among gay men as a health threat.
 4. Minors – to protect minors in the ADF.

Critics consistently pointed out that these rationales were illogical. For instance, the health and minors arguments played on false stereotypes of gay men as carriers of HIV and as sexual predators. The national security argument could just as easily apply to heterosexuals engaged in extramarital affairs or involved in vices such as gambling. Moreover, removing the ban would eliminate the threat of blackmail. The argument about morale was the same used by the US forces to justify racial segregation until 1948, and strong leadership could overcome any potential breakdowns in discipline.

Defence members had few channels to challenge this ban. Some complained to the Defence Force Ombudsman, prompting him to write to the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) in 1988 requesting further justification for the ban. The CDF, General Peter Gration, consulted within the leadership of the services and wrote back to the Ombudsman repeating the four standard explanations with more detail. The Defence Force Ombudsman's annual report in 1989 accepted the CDF's justification, while noting that it was speculative rather than based on any concrete evidence. Even if the Defence Force Ombudsman had opposed the ban, he only had the authority ensure that the ADF was properly following the procedures outlined in DI(G) PERS 15-3.

In the 1970s, the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP) occasionally challenged discrimination in the military, but through the 1980s there was almost nil LGB activism against the ban. In 1990, a lesbian servicewoman challenged her dismissal at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC), prompting an investigation into not only her case but the ban more widely. Over the course of 1991 and into early 1992, the HREOC negotiated with the ADF in the hopes that they would lift the ban. These efforts came to nought when in June 1992 the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, announced that the LGB ban would remain. The HREOC then turned to the Attorney-General, Michael Duffy, arguing that the ban violated Australia's obligations under both the International Labour Organization and the International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights. Duffy challenged the legality of the ban under international law, prompting Prime Minister Paul Keating to set up a Caucus Joint Working Group on Homosexual Policy in the Australian Defence Force. The Caucus Joint Working Group methodically examined the international law question and took submissions and testimonies from the service chiefs and gay rights activists. In September 1992, in a 4–2 split, the Caucus Joint Working Group recommended the repeal of the LGB service ban.

Still, Duffy and Ray could not come to an agreement, so they prepared separate Cabinet submissions. On 23 November 1992 Cabinet met; Ray and Duffy presented their cases, and each member of Cabinet had the opportunity to express their opinion. The majority, including Keating, agreed with Duffy's argument and Cabinet lifted the ban, opening the door for LGB, but not transgender, service. Keating's press release said: 'This decision reflects broad support in the Australian community for the removal of employment discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on grounds of sexual preference. The decision brings ADF policy into line with the tolerant attitudes of Australians generally.' By 1994, the Coalition indicated that if elected they would not bring back the ban, confirming gay, lesbian and bisexual service as part of the ADF landscape.²³

Susie Struth

Susie Struth joined the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) at a time when the gay and lesbian movement was becoming increasingly visible and it looked as though social reform in civilian society might eventually be possible. Within the military, though, LGB men and women were coming under increased pressure and scrutiny. While she did not come to realise her sexuality until she had served for some time, she was made to leave in 1977 after it was exposed. The increased awareness of homosexuality in civil society, coupled with a widely reported case of lesbianism in the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) in 1973, meant that those who were identified as gay had little option other than to leave the services. Just as a number of other men and women who feature in this book went on to forge successful careers after their military service, Susie also established a new career post-WRAAC. Towards the end of her interview, she emphasised a point that was very important to her. She wanted people to know that 'We did serve prior to 1992, that there were lesbians and gays in the military before then and even way before I was in, and that we all served with distinction and we cared very much about what we did.'

Susie was born in Warrnambool in country Victoria in 1954, the oldest of five children and the only girl. She was raised in a 'very Catholic family' and attended the local convent school. She remembers a 'really fabulous childhood'; growing up in a rural area made for a 'free, easy life. I could go anywhere, do anything, so long as I was back by whatever time Dad and Mum said'. She was in close contact with nature. She and her best friend each had a horse, and were allowed to roam far and wide. She also learned to 'fish, swim, row, and shoot an air gun – everything'.

Susie's mother used to buy the *Australian Women's Weekly* every week and, when she was 13 or 14, Susie remembers seeing an advertisement for the women's services: 'There was one for the Navy, one for the Air Force and one for the Army and I just thought, "Wow! That looks fantastic."' Her preference for the branch she pursued ended

up being somewhat arbitrary: 'I didn't want to join the Air Force because you had to be 18. I didn't particularly want to join the Navy, because that was training in Melbourne, but I thought the Army would be good because I like green and they are in Sydney. It was a simple as that.' Historian Janette Bomford has noted that the WRAAC was producing advertisements to attract new recruits in the 1960s that emphasised the 'vitally important' job that women could perform in the services.²³

Susie's story echoes that of many ~~of the~~ other women. The advertisements she saw about the military hinted at a life that was far more appealing than the limited career options she saw available to the women around her. She says:

I wasn't great at school; I knew I'd never go to uni and it didn't interest me. I didn't want to be a teacher. I didn't want to be a nurse. I didn't want to be a secretary. I didn't particularly want to work in a shop, and I wasn't pretty enough to work in the chemist, which was pretty much what was open to girls in the '70s from a country town. So that's why this whole world opened up to me when I saw this ad, and I just went: 'Yeah, that's me.'

After completing Year 11, Susie left school. Although she was only 16 and the age for joining the WRAAC was 17, Susie was still so keen she sent off an application. They wrote back, pointing out that she was short of the age of enlistment. Susie marked the time until she could sign up by working in a local department store. Then, on her birthday, the very day she was eligible to enlist, Susie again sent off an application to the WRAAC. She received a quick reply within a couple of weeks. Her interview was scheduled for Melbourne, where she did the various tests that were required. Susie eventually received a letter, letting her know that she had been accepted and was scheduled to begin recruit training in September 1971. While a military career had been a goal of Susie's and a simple choice, it took her parents a little longer to adjust to the idea that she was leaving. She reflects: 'I think Mum and Dad were really pleased but really shocked that this all happened really quickly.'

Susie left home and headed to WRAAC School in Sydney for recruit training – 'and so began my new life.' She met probably around 40 or 50 other women on the same course who came from all over Australia. It was an empowering experience for someone

who had been led to doubt their ability through the schooling system. She says, 'I discovered that I wasn't as dumb as I thought and that, because I wanted to do it, nothing was too hard. No amount of military law or anything they threw at us was difficult. It was just, like, easy. So I really, really loved it.'

Susie was allocated to Signals after her recruit course, and she remembers: 'To get into Sigs was pretty cool so I was really thrilled that I did.' The next course did not start until January 1972, so in the meantime Susie was sent to Puckapunyal in central Victoria to be a stewardess 'just to fill in a bit of time but its also a good training thing. It also teaches you all sorts of things'. While she remembers the experience as being hard work, she still had fun. Susie stayed at the barracks with a group of women, which is where she met one particularly lovely woman living in the Corporal's hut, while 'I was in the slackers privates hut.' Susie became part of a group of friends who 'knocked around together'. Puckapunyal, as Susie describes it, was a 'dry dustbowl of a place'. When the group had time off, 'We used to come into Melbourne and go and see shows or we'd go down to my parents' place.' Susie adjusted easily to the military life and enjoyed her time at Puckapunyal. She says:

It was just a really good fun, carefree kind of existence, without the pressure of having to have been anything yet. So you're still sort of finding your feet in the Army and working out who was who and all that sort of stuff. For me, that came really naturally. I never had any problem with authority, with discipline, with any of that. It was just like somebody told me to do it, say jump and I'd just say how high. It was never ever an issue, because it was what I wanted to do and I just thought I'm just going to be the best I can be. So it was good.

In January 1972 Susie was posted to School of Signals at Watsonia in Melbourne for a three-month course. Fax machines had only just become available in Australia, and the Army had the first ones. She remembers this as a period where she was finding her feet, making new contacts, studying hard and living in the barracks again. The course itself was pretty good, and after completing it in March or April 1972, Susie received her first posting to 5 Sig Regiment in Sydney. Susie remembers being 'thrilled to be going back to Sydney'. She lived at the barracks in Dundas, 'just because you could'. It was expensive

living elsewhere, and ‘there was no need to live out, so I lived in and just went to work every day and just learnt and practised my craft and learnt from amazing people’.

One of the best elements for Susie was that she was surrounded by a lot of strong female role models, whom she describes as ‘just fantastic’. While discrimination was still rife – both in the civilian world and within the military – she felt that the base supported gender inclusion. Rank was more important than whether you were male or female. Susie says, ‘[I] really loved it and I really liked working there. I worked at Kissing Point Road in Dundas where the barracks were and there was a big signal centre there. I also worked at Vic Barracks in Paddington’. For Susie, it was still a ‘very carefree, easy existence’ where she was finding her work easy. Even the most complex tasks did not seem difficult at all.

The girl who had grown up in the country adjusted well to life in the city. Susie got a licence and bought her first car before she turned 18. She drove around Sydney, and remembers: ‘I knew the place really well. It was again a very carefree existence.’ Although the legal drinking age was 21, Susie discovered that because she was in the military, she was able to drink at 18 at Leagues Clubs. She says, ‘Because we were in the forces, we just flashed our cards and we could go in as 18-year-olds.’ For Susie, ‘a lot happened in that first year, so it was just amazing and I just grew so quickly’.

During this time, Susie saw a lot of men returning from Vietnam: ‘some came back wrecked and some came back fine. That’s just the way it was’. Although Australia’s war had mostly ended by this point, anti-war sentiment was strong. Susie remembers being told not to wear her uniform out – a trope common among Vietnam veterans’ memories. She remembers being asked questions by civilians such as “‘What are you doing going over there fighting a war that we’re not part of?’” and all that sort of stuff.’

While Susie was enjoying the time in Sydney, she was thrilled when she received an offer for a posting to 9 Sig Regiment in Singapore. The overseas posting that Julie Hendy’s group had pioneered in 1967 (see pXX) had opened up overseas service opportunities for women in the WRAAC. Still, this was an unusual opportunity and one Susie was keen to take up. First, though, as she was still young, she had to ring her parents and ask permission. To her disappointment, her mother and father told that she

was too young to take up the posting. Susie did her best to argue: 'I said: "Mum, this opportunity doesn't come along".' Her mother responded by saying, 'Well, too bad; I'm not going to let you go.' Without ~~their~~ parents' signature, Susie had to turn down the opportunity. Fortunately, six months later, she was offered the posting again. ~~And~~ † This time around, her mother gave her permission to go.

In April 1973, at the age of 18, Susie set off for Singapore. While Julie had gone to her posting aware of her lesbian identity, Susie embarked on her journey thinking she was heterosexual. It was Susie's first trip overseas, and she remembers it as 'the dreamiest dream posting in the history of anything ever'. The allowances paid to the servicewomen were generous and there were many places in Singapore to explore. Singapore was a paradise for shopping, as it was 'still a duty-free hub and you could get all your good stereos and that sort of stuff. All the big beautiful hotels, we used to go in there and posh it up and drink'. She also enjoyed exploring the local scenery, visiting small villages like kampongs, where Susie noted 'there was a lot of jungle there. I did Taekwondo at a local place.' She purchased a car with another girl, a 1954 MG Magnette, to get around and explore.

Susie remembers having a 'great expat's life, and being in the barracks with the girls from New Zealand and England was fabulous as well'. As there were big naval docks, visiting ships used to come in regularly and submarines also came to port. When the fleets came in, Susie remembers, they used to ring up the barracks, inviting women to cocktail parties. They'd be told:

There's a cocktail party tonight at 5. Dress cocktail and we'll send cars around to pick anyone up that is interested at such and such a time. So the word would go out, everyone would put on their finery and you'd get ferried off down the dock, piped on board, treated like royalty and just had a good time with the boys and it was fantastic. We had a really good time. We really led the life of bloody Riley!

After 18 months, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam recalled the women home several months earlier than expected. Before returning to Australia, Susie went to London on a holiday and 'did the old Contiki trip and all that sort of stuff that everybody did'.

While she was based in Singapore, Susie met a man, John, who was a petty officer in the Navy. The two got on very well and a bond formed. When Susie returned to Australia in September 1974 after her London holiday, she was posted to Sydney and John was posted to Canberra. She recollects: 'We used to see one another a lot and, you know, he was the first boy I ever took home to meet Mum and Dad and all that sort of stuff. So that was a big deal.' She remembers being amazed at how much she had seen and done by being in the WRAAC, compared to many of the girls she had grown up with.

I'd discovered that the girl who was in my class, who was the brightest and most amazing, the prettiest... the one with the most potential – the year after I left to join the Army she'd gotten pregnant and had given all that amazingness away... ~~you~~ You just can't pick it really, can you?

Just as Susie had introduced John to her family, he also introduced her to his. Susie spent time with his sister, who lived in Thredbo, and Susie thought she was 'just a really lovely, lovely woman'.

One night Susie went out for a dinner with John's sister and her friends, who were all women. She remembers: 'I didn't really think anything of it except that I really enjoyed their company and I felt very comfortable with them.' Her ease around women tapped into something else that had been niggling at her since her time in Singapore. One of the gay women on the base pulled her aside late one night and said, 'What is it with you, Struth?... The way you walk, the way you dress – you should be a lesbian.' Susie responded by saying, 'I'm not. I think you've got it all wrong,' but the woman insisted, 'Well, we reckon you are.' Susie said, 'You can reckon whatever you like, but I'm not.' Susie was not offended by the discussion. Nor did she feel that the woman was making a pass at her, so Susie dismissed the conversation as a drunken chat. Susie was aware that there were gay women on the base and never made any judgement about it.

After Susie returned to Sydney, she went on to do a junior non-commissioned officer (NCO) course at WRAAC School. She told John that she would not be able to visit him during this period. There were around 25 other women taking the course. Susie began the course as a Private and then halfway through it, she was promoted to Lance

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Corporal. She explains: 'When you first get promoted, you don't sew any of your stripes on; everybody does it. So we had a big night of everyone sitting around in my room sewing my stripes on, which was awesome. It sounds quite naff but you actually can't explain how incredible that was.' Quite a few of the other women on the course were gay, and one Saturday night they asked Susie if she would like to accompany them to a dance. The women were allowed out on the junior NCO course, so Susie responded with a yes.

Susie cannot remember if the other women told her that the dance was an all-woman event. In any event, Susie went along. As she recalls, by 1974, Sydney used to have 'fabulous' dances. Some would have all women or all men, or they would be mixed but be events for gay people. She remembers: 'They used to change the location because the cops would raid them every week.' Susie cannot remember the location of her first dance, but she does remember walking in and there were 'probably about, I don't know, 300, 400 women there and it was fabulous'. The development of this scene has been captured beautifully by historian Rebecca Jennings.²³ Susie remembers walking in to see 'every sort of woman there you could imagine: tall, short, fat, skinny, scary, dykey, full-on-butch – across the whole thing'. She continues: 'I just went, "Oh my God! This is amazing" and had the best night. It was such a good night. We went to a couple more and really, really enjoyed it.'

Susie's enjoyment of the dances, coupled with the comfort she felt around women and the words she had heard from the gay woman in Singapore, were all weighing on her mind. After Susie got promoted on her course, she went back to her regiment and then went down to meet John and spend time with him and three or four other couples. On that weekend, Susie realised that she did not want to be touched by him anymore. She explains: 'Not because I didn't like him, but because I just went: "Oh, I don't think I want to go down this path"'. Susie ~~points out~~indicates that she had not actually had any sexual contact with a woman at this point, but clearly she was coming to a realisation about herself. When she realised she needed to break up with John, she told his sister first, who was supportive. She says, 'So I wrote to him, I did, I literally wrote him a Dear John letter. I just said, "Look, it's not going to work."' After this, Susie 'hooked up with a few of the girls from the course and just started to explore a whole other world, which was really good'.

In 1976, Susie was again posted to Watsonia in Melbourne and was promoted to full Corporal. Her role was as an instructor at the School of Signals. Susie had wanted to be a recruit instructor because she had been so inspired by the women who had taught her, but officials informed her that she was too young. Instead, she instructed 'basic trade training courses and I really enjoyed it – because I liked signals'. As she describes: 'I liked my job and I was good at it, so I was passing that knowledge on. I rewrote some of the manuals because they were outdated and I just liked the discipline.' It then became time for Susie to consider doing the courses required for promotion to Sergeant.

By this time Susie was in a relationship with another woman, Trish, who was at 6 Sig Regiment on the same base. The two women had been at 5 Sig together, Susie's first posting in Sydney in 1972. Before being stationed at Watsonia together, Susie had been over in Singapore while Trish had been in Canberra and had married. Trish's husband, who was in intelligence, had been posted to Melbourne, which was how she ended up there. Both women were corporals and Susie remembers: 'It was really good to have a friend and what have you.'

The two women used to go to jazz ballet once a week in the city and afterwards have a toasted sandwich somewhere. After a time, Susie says, 'We kind of fell in love I suppose – because we'd been really good friends for a while, from Sydney days. It was a natural extension.' While Susie had been with other women, it was a new experience for Trish. She left her husband and the two women moved into a flat together, just up the road from Watsonia. Susie does not remember feeling particularly anxious about being exposed as a lesbian. She had known many gay women in the services and had not really heard anyone gossiping about their sexuality. Susie focused on her job and kept her private life to herself.

One morning, in March 1977, she was made brutally aware that her sexuality had been noticed. The two women woke up and saw that Trish's car, which had been parked out the front, had been spray-painted with 'poof or fag or something'. She continues: 'To this day, we don't know who did it, but that was pretty upsetting'. The women tried to move past this incident. They were both cryptographers with top-secret clearances who were doing well in their careers. Trish received a promotion and had her 'dining-in' night

at the sergeants' mess, which is a big deal'. Susie was at home while this was occurring but was excited to see Trish when she came home. After the excitement of this, the two women woke the next morning to a knock on the door.

Susie describes her experience:

We had a two-bedroom apartment. The next morning there was a knock on the door at 8 and I opened the door and there were two military police there. I said, 'What are you doing here?' and they said, 'Oh we've come – we want to take you in for questioning.' I said, 'Beg your pardon?' It was like – if you've ever been blind-sided or king-hit or anything, this would be the equivalent because it just came from completely nowhere. No warning, nothing. Just opened the door, two red beret people are standing there.

The two women were taken to the 3rd Military District Headquarters for questioning and were separated from each other. Susie remembers a barrage of queries: 'It was like, "Are you gay? Are you a lesbian? Are you in a relationship?"' She responded by asking, "What business is it of yours?". Susie tried to find out what was happening and what had prompted the investigation. Susie says that 'the details of that day are very hazy, except that we were there all day and I can't remember why. It was quite intimidating. If intimidation was the factor, then it worked'. Finally, in an effort to arrange their release, they were able to call a friend who also happened to be gay: Trish's Commanding Officer (CO). The CO came, 'but she was really wary and she just said to us on the quiet, "Whatever you do, don't say anything about me. Please don't say anything about me." But she was there in her capacity as captain and as CO, not as another lesbian'. This woman did manage to arrange for Susie and Trish to be released from interrogation: 'So she got us out basically and then came back to our place. The four of us just talked it through a bit and then it was like nothing kind of was going to happen.' On Monday morning, Susie went to work 'as though nothing had happened' on the sergeants' course at Watsonia. She was about two or three weeks into the 12-week course, which was one of the first integrated courses of its kind with two girls-women and 28 men undertaking it.

The matter had not ended, however. Susie was called into the CO's office and was told that she was to go to Victoria Barracks in Melbourne to talk to the intelligence people. She remembers: 'A car came to pick me up on Wednesday. I got time off the

course, no questions asked.' Susie describes an interrogation at Victoria Barracks that was intense and unrelenting.

[I] went into this room and there was me and a Lieutenant whose name escapes me, but it was – you imagine a single light bulb on a desk; that was it. He said, 'So, Corporal Struth we want you to name every other lesbian that you know.' I just looked at him and I said, 'Oh, I don't think I can do that, Sir.' He said, 'No, we want you to.' I said, 'No, I think you taught me better than that.' I said, 'I'm not going to give that away. Sorry.'

As other stories reveal, men and women who were suspected to be gay or lesbian and interrogated were put under immense pressure to name others. Susie remembers: 'So that's essentially what they wanted me to do, was to name names.' Susie refused but was compelled to return each week for further interrogations from this Lieutenant. At one point, in frustration, Susie pointed out the way the military's treatment of homosexual people was forcing out some of its best. She said, 'You want to really think carefully about this because you are going to lose some really good people if you keep doing this.' Susie now believes that there was a witch-hunt in Victoria in 1977, and other oral histories support this.

Female homosexuality was still treated as a medical pathology to be corrected in the military and in wider society in the 1970s, and authorities sent Susie to a psychologist. In fact, in 1977, the year Susie's sexuality was exposed, a British Army consultant psychiatrist cautioned the Australian Army that 'most normal women did not consider service life attractive ... Australian servicewomen would show a similarly high predisposition towards anti-social or deviant behaviour and, hence, towards homosexual activities'.²³ Perhaps this assessment contributed to an increase in investigations of women in the Army.

While Susie was undergoing her interrogations, she was still completing her course and doing well. She finished in the top four. She was still living with Trish, who had denied being a lesbian. When Susie is asked if she wishes that she had denied her sexuality, she answers, 'Yeah, I thought about that very question, and I thought if I had, I would have been looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life, and I thought, "No, I

don't want to do that". After Susie finished her course, she went back to her unit, the School of Signals, and asked her CO if there was any way of fighting what was happening to her. He advised her that she would not be able to fight the charges, saying, 'It's like trying to fight city hall. We can't do it'. Susie asked what it was that she had done that was so wrong. 'I said, "I'm not pregnant. I haven't busted up any marriages." I said, "I haven't cost the Army any money. I haven't brought the Army into disrepute." I said, "Tell me what I've done wrong."'

The decision was already made, though. Susie explains: '~~by~~ By then, they'd given me the option of being dishonourably discharged, not suited to being a soldier, or serving out my time to September [1977]', which was when her enlistment period ended. Susie had already engaged for another term, but 'I sort of reneged on that and just said, "No. I want to get out."' For anyone watching Susie's career, it would have simply appeared as though she had decided not to re-engage. Susie says, 'If I knew then what I know now, I would have fought and kicked and bucked every step of the way, but I didn't. I was so passive I think, very passive, and I went without a fight, which was interesting.' Susie expands on the reasons why she did not fight harder: 'I felt like I had no choice because I was so used to the discipline and so used to saying yes and not questioning anything. That was my mistake.' Furthermore, when all this happened, she was still very young: 'I just sort of blindly accepted it. I was still very young; I was only 23 when I got out.'

It most likely would not have made a difference if Susie had spent more time challenging her treatment. By 1974 the military had developed a policy on homosexuality which applied to men and women. It formalised the discrimination and practices that had existed previously and made it impossible for LGB people to serve openly. By the time Susie's sexuality came to official attention, there was a well-practised policy of removing lesbian women from the WRAAC quickly and discreetly, despite the personal cost of doing so.

Knowing her discharge was impending, she wrote to the ABC and managed to get a job that began immediately after her time in the WRAAC ended. It opened the door to a career in film and television as a script supervisor that has given her much satisfaction. She has worked as a script supervisor on some of Australia's most loved films including

Red Dog and *The Dressmaker* and television series including *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Seachange* and *Marco Polo*, a huge undertaking that saw her filming in locations like Budapest, Slovakia and Malaysia. She says, 'In hindsight, it was the best decision I have ever made. I've gone further now than I ever could have in the Army.' Her relationship with Trish ended 'not long after we got out of the Army. The strain was too much.' At the time of our interview, Susie had been in a relationship for 27 years. It was with the lovely woman she had met and enjoyed spending time with at Puckapunyal way back in 1972. The two women reconnected in 1987 and began a relationship in 1990. Susie is now 'very open about her sexuality'.

Susie has also reconciled her relationship with the military to a large extent, although she still justifiably feels let down by what happened to her. She has been to two WRAAC reunions, 'which were just fantastic'. She loved being in a room full of women who served, and she even signed up for a tour to revisit the WRAAC barracks. Although the famous Kathleen Best gates have gone to Duntroon, the original buildings are still there and 'the shape of the place is the same'. Susie describes how a cadet band had been arranged for the reunion, and those who were physically capable marched.

So we went around the back of the area and we did a bit of a drill. There was a woman there who was a Sergeant Major and she just gave us a bit of a drill and addressed us and 'attention' and 'stand at ease' and all that, and everyone just kind of remembered. We were laughing our heads off and then eventually we all got serious. So then all the girls who couldn't march were around the front, near the gun bays, so we marched around from the back through what would have been the gates with a band playing 'Soldiers of the Queen' on the parade grounds.

Richard Gration

Richard Gration's chambers are what one might expect from a corporate barrister. They are located in Sydney's Central Business District, a short stroll from the Supreme Court of NSW, State Parliament and Hyde Park. Lining his office walls are bookshelves full of meticulously ordered law journals and court reports dating as far back as the mid 1800s. Behind his desk are framed photographs of Richard from the 1980s, dressed in his RAAF pilot's uniform. Some of the photos are reminiscent of the movie *Top Gun* – a reference that Richard says is apt for the types of planes he was trained to fly. His story is significant not only for his many experiences, but also because he has so effectively saved old documents to reinforce his sharp memory of events that nearly cost him his RAAF career as a 19-year-old at the Air Force Academy.

Richard was born in Perth in September 1962. The oldest of two brothers, he was what is commonly referred to as an Army brat: the son of a career officer who moved quite a bit in his early childhood, when his father was posted all over Australia. The family generally spent about two to three years in any one location, whether that be Perth, Melbourne, Canungra (west of the Gold Coast), Canberra, or 12 months as a 14-year-old in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, while his father attended the US Army War College. Richard's mother was a school teacher, and his father Peter Gration was a commander in the Royal Australian Engineers. Peter did 12 months in Vietnam from 1969–70, and Richard remembers writing and receiving letters from his father every week or two. Peter Gration would eventually rise to the highest level of the ADF: he served as Chief of the General Staff of the Australian Army from 1984–87, and as Chief of the Defence Force from 1987–93.

Richard describes his upbringing as stable, and other than the one year stint in the United States, he remained settled in Canberra from the age of six. Richard spent three of his six high school years in Canberra as a boarder when his family was living interstate or overseas. It was within this semi-autonomous environment that Richard first had

opportunities to explore his sexuality. He had known since about age six that he was gay, but it was when he was a hormonal teenager that he first acted on those attractions. The boarding house was not the hotbed of same-sex activity that stereotypes might suggest, though sex among boarders did happen. Most of Richard's encounters were with non-boarders, and he even had a fling with an older student. Their association endured for a few years, even after Richard completed secondary school. Richard's friends in high school knew he was gay, and he remembers it being a non-issue in the late 1970s.

It was the family military background that made Richard interested in joining the Australian Defence Force (ADF). In addition to Richard's father, his uncle Barry Gratton was an officer in the RAAF whose career culminated in the position of Chief of the Air Staff from 1992–94. As Richard succinctly puts it, 'If you've got a father who's a general in the Army it's a disincentive to join the Army, so I thought I wanted to do something a little bit different.' Richard instead joined the RAAF, entering the Air Force Academy in Point Cook in Melbourne in 1981. The separate service academies were precursors to the current Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA); students would undergo officer training while concurrently studying for a tertiary academic qualification – in Richard's case a science degree majoring in physics. The Air Force Academy was primarily for those training to become pilots. The academy would receive approximately 1500 applications each year, and after rigorous medical and academic testing, only about 40 students would be selected. Given his boarding school experience and upbringing, Richard adapted well to the regimentation and discipline instilled from the moment he arrived. Though not as intense as Army officer training at the Royal Military College Duntroon, Richard still recalls: 'So you arrived at the Air Force Academy, and there was a little bit of yelling and running around in the first few weeks just to wake you up that you're in the military'.

Richard knew from the start that there were rules against homosexuality in the ADF. Defence Instruction (Air Force) PERS 4-13 summarised the reasoning against permitting gay or lesbian service members:

Homosexual activities are prejudicial to effective command relationships, high morale and discipline, without which the Services cannot function efficiently.

Furthermore, the Defence Force includes a number of young persons for whom the Services play a guardian role with respect to social behaviour, and many parents and citizens would be reluctant to authorize or encourage enlistment to an organization that condoned homosexual acts. Finally, the Services' public image would be degraded by any suggestion that homosexual behaviour is acceptable therein.

Homosexual acts, therefore, cannot be tolerated in the Defence Force.

Despite knowing the risk, Richard early on found his way into Melbourne's burgeoning gay scene. A friend of a high school mate took Richard to bars and introduced him to a circle of gay friends. Richard was quite open about being a cadet at the Air Force Academy, and his openness during this early period risked his career and taught him a lesson about the importance of discretion.

Richard was not the only serviceman visiting gay bars, and in fact several LGB members from the 1970s–1980s mention recognising others in saunas or beats as well. Interviews with several ex-service members often describe fear when they saw others in bars. Yet, once the initial panic passed, they would realise that the other person was there as well – meaning they, too, were likely homosexual. This was very much the case when Richard saw a Mess steward when rollerskating (it was 1981) at Pokeys nightclub in the Prince of Wales, St Kilda. Somehow that leading aircraftman later came to the attention of the RAAF Police, and in what would foreshadow further experiences in Richard's career, the Mess steward named Richard as homosexual.

Two 'unpleasant' RAAF policemen hauled Richard into an interview because he had been seen 'rollerskating with some homosexuals'. He remembers being scared during the four or five-hour interview as the men grilled him to discern if he were gay. Though Richard admitted to having gay friends and rollerskating with them, he consistently denied being gay himself. The police accepted Richard's explanation for the time being, giving him a stern warning: 'Don't go down this path. Don't associate with those sort of people. You'll be judged by the people you associate with, so if that sort of thing happens, you'll be out.' It is intriguing that Richard only received a warning, because testimonies from other LGB personnel during this era indicate that being associated with homosexuals essentially meant that you must be one. Other ex-service personnel describe interviews that went on for days until the suspect cracked, confessed and named others.

Why, in this case, the police accepted Richard's explanation is unclear. He certainly was now on the RAAF Police's radar, and less than a year later he would confront a more severe investigation.

During Richard's first year he had come across a third-year cadet named Ryan (name changed), who had a reputation for being 'a bit of a poofter'. On three occasions Richard and Ryan performed sexual acts. An incident at the start of 1982 brought Ryan to the authorities' attention: one evening he climbed into the bed of a cadet with whom he previously had sexual relations, and performed oral sex while the cadet slept. The cadet awoke, shouted, 'What the fuck do you think you are doing?' and fought back. Ryan jumped out the cadet's ground floor window and ran naked across the courtyard. Other members of Ryan's course later trashed his room and vandalised his clothes in retribution, and then reported him to the RAAF Police. On 2 February 1982, the first day of Ryan's police interview that went for over nine hours, he detailed multiple sexual encounters with five other cadets, as well as unreciprocated advances he made on another four. The next day, Ryan identified Richard Gration and another first-year cadet as men with whom he had sexual relations. Ryan described three occasions when he had sexual relations with Richard.

February 1982 should have been the commencement of Richard's second year at the Air Force Academy, but it began with two RAAF policemen hauling him in to investigate Ryan's allegations. He had just returned from a six-day bivouac training exercise, and had slept only about one or two hours of the previous 36. According to a handwritten report Richard drafted two days after the interview, the first policeman would not tell him what the allegations were until the interview commenced. When Richard pushed him to reveal the allegations, the flight sergeant retorted: 'Don't tell me how to conduct a fucking interview – I have been interviewing people for 20 years and I don't want any fucking cadet telling me what to do.' The other sergeant then played good cop, stating 'for goodness sake, Richard, don't antagonize him. We're all very tired – we've been at it for a week and we'd all like to get a bit of sleep so if you're co-operative we'll be able to get it over & done quickly'. After further pressure from both police officers, Richard started to detail his encounters with Ryan. *Then* the formal interview commenced.

The official transcript of Richard Gratton's interview is straightforward. It begins with the officers advising Richard that under Defence Instruction (Air Force) PERS 4-13, he was entitled to have an officer present: No. He was under no obligation to say anything, but anything he said would be used as evidence: Understood. Did he understand that he was going to be asked further questions, and that he would be allowed to review the interview transcript? Yes. Richard then detailed three sexual experiences with Ryan. When asked why Richard let the encounters happen, he answered: 'The first time I was too drunk, the second time I was too tired and the third time I initially tried to stop him but succumbed to the physical situation.' When reading Ryan's allegations, Richard indicated that they were mostly accurate, but emphasised, 'Throughout the three incidents, I was a passive participant.' Richard's emphasis on not initiating the encounters suggests an effort to shield himself from the charges – perhaps hoping he could escape with a warning rather than be expelled. At least one other implicated cadet indicated that he was under the impression that his interview was meant to support a prosecution case against Ryan, rather than for himself or Ryan's other sexual partners.

Even today Richard's recollections of his encounters with Ryan align with the interview contents. Richard never denied having gay friends, the police interview transcript saying: 'I think of homosexuals simply as people. I do not discriminate against them in the same sense that I do not discriminate against people of different religious or political views.' Yet, Richard's description of the police behaviour highlights the problems with accepting the interview transcript at face value. In a rebuttal statement drafted five days after the interview, Richard wrote about ways the RAAF Police manipulated him during the interview: 'He [flight sergeant] emphasised that the only reason I would want an Officer would be if I felt physically threatened. He also said that if I asked for an Officer I would have to wait until the Officer was brought in.' In regards to not being obliged to answer any questions, Richard said that the flight sergeant advised 'it was in my interest [sic] to answer all their questions as no answer would imply that I was guilty ... He also said that "this was my opportunity to put my side of the story across". This was not recorded on the record of interview. This was the first time I had received a caution'.

Richard indicates other times when he gave short answers, and police pressured him to provide detailed statements. Under Defence rules regarding police investigations, after an interview the suspects needed to parade before an officer to confirm that nothing untoward had happened. Richard's statement indicated that before this procedure, the flight sergeant said: 'We didn't beat you up, did we. I said No, I guess you didn't. Flight Sergeant [sic] L**** asked me to write I had no complaints if I did not wish to make a formal complaint. I did so again to hurry things along. I was then given a copy of the interview and went straight to bed.'

Two days after his interview, Richard received notification that he was being recommended for discharge. He had the right to a rebuttal, and while preparing his statement his father advised him not to submit it without first receiving legal counsel. This significant piece of advice is what set Richard's story on a different trajectory from most others. Richard requested access to legal assistance, but the senior officer managing his case indicated that it was an administrative matter and he should prepare his statement. Richard did prepare his rebuttal statement and submitted it, but, according to Richard's diary notes, 'Dad said that was a stupid thing to do after his advice earlier. He had had legal advice and they recommended that I say nothing and write nothing without having it checked.' Richard withdrew and resubmitted his statement; the revised statement simply read: 'I do not wish to make a statement in rebuttal at this time as I have not had the chance to seek the advice of a legal aid officer.' Richard did receive advice from a legal officer and subsequently submitted the rebuttal statement. Even so, it still looked like Richard was on a path towards discharge.

Peter Gration and his connections proved instrumental in what happened next. Peter directly asked Richard if he were gay, even telling his son, 'Well, look, there's been a few things while you were a teenager that have made me think that perhaps you are.' Richard denied being gay, saying that it had all just been experimentation. Peter believed that Richard's career was over and was seeking the smoothest way for Richard to discharge, so he arranged for Richard to meet with the Director of Army Legal Services – the one-star brigadier who was head lawyer for the Australian Army. Over several hours on a Saturday morning in Defence Headquarters in Canberra, Richard told Brigadier MJ Ewing about the incidents with Ryan and the police investigation. To Peter's surprise,

Ewing suggested they fight the dismissal. Ewing prepared a short legal opinion that described the admissibility of Richard's interview as 'open to very serious challenge'. He further expressed that Richard clearly was under duress when he made his statement and that, on evidence, he supported Richard's claim 'that he is not orientated towards homosexual behaviour'.

Ewing contacted the Defence Minister James Killen, advising him that the RAAF cadets had been mistreated and the RAAF Police behaved 'abysmally'. Peter Gratton also wrote to Killen, and in a heartfelt letter expressed: 'I write as a father to make a plea to retain Richard in the RAAF. While some of what I include results from the conferences and discussions above, I only include what I accept as a father.' Peter also relayed Ewing's legal advice and explained Richard's actions thus: 'My own predominant impression of the affair is of a young man, fresh from school, raw in the Service, and exposed to a situation with which he was utterly unprepared to cope ... Richard has no previous or subsequent history of such acts, which were an aberration in his normal heterosexual lifestyle, including normal and continuing contact with girl friends'. Killen accepted Ewing's legal advice but was concerned that everyone at the Air Force Academy knew what Richard, Ryan and three other accused cadets had done, and they would be unlikely to tolerate Richard and the other three cadets' presence.

Richard had an inkling that the other cadets would not be overly concerned if he and the three other cadets (but not Ryan) were permitted to stay. One evening, the four accused summoned approximately 120 Academy cadets across the three year levels to a meeting. As Richard recalls:

And we explained the situation of 'Look, the Minister considers that it would be problematic that none of you would accept us ... We can't discuss with you the details about what's alleged and what's happened, but if you are happy for us to stay on in these circumstances we'd be very grateful if you'd write a statutory declaration saying that you're aware that something is being investigated but you're more than happy for us to stay on'. And so we got 120 stat decs; we got the whole Academy to do it.

It is intriguing that such a significant majority of Air Force Academy cadets were willing to continue serving alongside the four men all but proven to have participated in

homosexual acts. This suggests that sentiments within the ADF could have been more tolerant than the officials, who consistently argued that gays and lesbians would hurt troop morale, had presumed. There are a few possible reasons for this. One is that, as they were all still in training, they had not been fully indoctrinated into the ADF group think about homosexuality. Another possibility is that their youth meant they had more tolerant attitudes than older servicemen. As officers-in-training, the cadets were essentially university students who, while not necessarily as left-wing as students at other institutions, still were more intellectual about issues including homosexuality. Finally, there is of course the matter of loyalty and cohesion. They clearly felt a strong sense of allegiance to their fellow cadets, whom they considered wronged by both Ryan and the RAAF Police.

What happened next was unprecedented. The family of one of the other accused cadets was friends with their local member of parliament. The family gave the statutory declarations to that member, who forwarded them to the Defence Minister and then, as Richard puts it, 'the shit absolutely hit the proverbial fan'. Questions went flying down the RAAF hierarchy demanding to know what was happening at the Air Force Academy, how the command had lost control, letting these young cadets organise 120 statutory declarations on such short notice, going around the chain of command, and essentially politicising a sex scandal. Minister Killen decided to set up a Court of Inquiry and, at Brigadier Ewing's urging, set the terms of reference to examine the police investigation rather than the sexual incidents. The Court of Inquiry sat in April 1982. The reserve legal officer representing Richard and the cadets argued that the conditions of the interview were essentially unreasonable and constituted collecting evidence under duress. The ADF's lead counsel argued that what was most important was the substance of the evidence collected: 'The fact of the matter is that there is no denial that some incidents took place and indeed, that the number of incidents referred to in the interrogations, took place.'

Richard Gration did not see the final report of the Court of Inquiry until September 2017, when the National Archives released it at our request. The Court of Inquiry's final report simultaneously vindicated and criticised the RAAF Police. It found that generally the findings of fact were accurate, albeit incomplete, and 'concludes that

the interviews were generally conducted properly and in accordance with the relevant rules and the required procedures contained in RAAF publications'. The Court of Inquiry also determined that there had been small procedural misjudgements around matters such as cautioning the cadets about how their interviews would be used, the timing and rushed nature of interviews, the specificity and accuracy of the transcripts and unclear direction over the presence of an officer. Taken collectively, these minor procedural actions disadvantaged the cadets and would not be admissible as evidence in a court martial. Therefore, they should not be accepted for administrative proceedings either. In relation to Richard, the Court of Inquiry did shine some doubt on his version of events, but also stated: 'he impressed the Court as being clearly the most articulate, composed and controlled of all the cadets interviewed and in the Court's opinion unless affected by tiredness would have been better able than most cadets to ensure that the answers recorded were in accordance with his recollection'.²³

The Court of Inquiry went to the Attorney-General's Department as well as the Defence Minister. The Crown Solicitor cautioned against discharging Richard and the other cadets because, given the manner in which evidence was collected, they could challenge any dismissal in the Federal Court and likely would win. The Chief of Air Staff accepted the advice and Richard and the other cadets were not discharged. Instead, they received formal warnings which read: 'should I again come to notice adversely in the future for any further scandalous homosexual behaviour, Air Force Office will: a. whilst I am an air cadet, take action to effect my discharge from the Service; or b. should I be serving as a commissioned officer, seek termination of my appointment.' Richard had no further difficulties during his time at the Air Force Academy.

This was a favourable outcome for Richard Gration, but it was also, in the wider history of LGB Defence experiences, an outlier. There is no doubt that Richard's father's connections provided him with legal and political interference generally out of reach for others suspected of homosexual acts. Yet, this case is important because it shows the very real disconnect between Defence policy on homosexuality versus Defence practice. For starters, the policies adopted since 1974 indicated that suspected homosexuals would be dealt with 'sympathetically' and 'with discretion'. There was nothing discreet about Richard's case, and the only sympathetic treatment he received was from his allies. The

policy also made an interesting, albeit problematic, distinction between those who were gay or lesbian and those who were generally heterosexual but participated in isolated homosexual acts. The latter cases could be retained in the ADF. To determine if someone were a genuine homosexual, the policy stated that investigators should take into account:

- a. the isolation of the incident,
- b. the incident being ascribed to adolescent experimentation,
- c. a psychological or psychiatric assessment that the incident was non-typical and unlikely to be repeated, and
- d. the extent of any common knowledge of the incident.

Richard and his legal representatives went to great lengths to argue that his encounters with Ryan were isolated and ascribed to experimentation. In one letter to the Air Force Academy Commandant, Richard wrote: 'I am convinced that I will never again engage in such activity. Now that I fully realise the nature of the acts which took place, I feel repulsion and horror.' Brigadier Ewing similarly wrote to the new Defence Minister Ian Sinclair in June 1982: 'It is our submission that the cadets come fairly and squarely within that policy and that as they are not confirmed homosexuals they should be retained.'

Richard claims that 'I'm told, and I kind of observed, afterwards that there was a huge shake up to the RAAF Police and the way they conducted themselves.' This does not appear to be the case in the RAAF or other services. Of all the people interviewed for this project who served during the ban, only one other person who admitted to performing homosexual acts was retained. That sailor had something in common with Richard: an influential officer as an ally, who happened to have a legal background and understood how to make an effective argument that they were not confirmed homosexuals. The vast majority of cases did not have access to such legal advice (or any for that matter), let alone have the support to fight their cases to the highest levels of government. More importantly, the prosecutions and intimidation tactics that Richard experienced did not cease, instead accelerated as the 1980s rolled on.

Richard's career survived, though the rumours of his homosexuality would follow. Richard finished the academic portion of study in 1983, and in 1984 commenced flight

training. Part of it was at Point Cook, and the duration was at RAAF Base Pearce in Western Australia. The intensive training entailed constantly learning new flying techniques and almost daily exercises, such as forced landings after engine failure, doing aerobatics, or particular flight and landing sequences. Every flight was rated on a scale of zero to five; three zeros during the year meant that the person failed and was 'scrubbed' from the course; it did have a high fail rate of about 50 per cent. Richard passed the course at the end of 1984 and was officially a RAAF pilot. In the years that followed he was based at Williamtown (Newcastle), Richmond (Sydney) then Fairbairn (Canberra). His first job was being a practice target for Navy exercises, then he flew Caribous, and in the Canberra posting Richard flew VIP transport flights for politicians. Interestingly, on one of those flights was National Party MP Ian Sinclair, who had been Defence Minister when the Court of Inquiry concluded. Richard remembers: 'He came and looked me in the eye and said, "Don't you worry. I've been following your career closely" in a really quite threatening way.'

Notwithstanding the written warning, and Richard's sheer terror of being caught again, within a year he did resume his secret, double life as a gay serviceman. Richard visited bars and saunas in his free time, especially when he was in major centres such as Melbourne or Sydney, and built a social network of gay friends. When stationed at Richmond, Richard used to travel into Sydney almost every weekend, meeting even more people through an organisation for under 26-year-olds called the Sydney Gay Youth Group. Over time, a significant portion of his social circle became other gay Defence members. As he put it: 'As soon as people know you're in the Defence Force, they say "I know so and so. Have you met so and so?" ... So there was quite a network of the secret society of gays that then didn't have to be quite so secret after 1992.' When Richard moved off base in Sydney he even lived with a gay Army officer, and a lesbian who was a RAAF air traffic controller dating a Navy air traffic controller.

Almost all of these friends were officers, reflecting the continuing importance of rank even among LGB social circles. It is not that they were discriminating against other ranks, but rather that the social groups did not mix in work life, so the people they met in private life also tended to reflect this separation. Interestingly, among gay other ranks of the 1980s, few interviewees reported having a social network of other servicemen. This

suggests that there was something about officers and the ways they networked which made them more prone to meet and form close friendships with other gay servicemen. As some of the other stories outline, though, among the women's ranks there were plenty of subcultures and networks where people could safely and discreetly connect.

Another interesting pattern that sets the gay officers of the 1980s apart from other ranks is the personal effects of leading a double life. While other ranks often talk about the double life having adverse effects on their mental health, Richard and other officers talk more about an ability to compartmentalise their work and gay lives. Richard says of his attitude: 'I guess I was probably a little bit less concerned that if you're going to throw me out you're going to throw me out.' Perhaps his brush with the military police in 1982 numbed him to the possibility, or maybe his knowledge of his father's connections provided a veneer of protection.

Where matters did become complicated was in forming relationships. Richard did have some short-term relationships lasting a month or two while he was based at Richmond, one of them with an Army officer. It was difficult for relationships to endure, partly because of the secrecy and partly because of the very nature of RAAF life and its extensive commitments. One night in Canberra, though, Richard was dining with two mates when the waiter came over with three glasses of port 'courtesy of the two gentlemen who just left'. About six weeks later, when Richard was at Canberra's gay-friendly Meridian Club, a gentleman named Roger approached and said, 'Did you enjoy the port?' They chatted that night, and a few weeks later they chatted again at the Meridian Club. This time Richard went back to Roger's place. Thirty years later they are still together.

The first few years of their relationship were not always so smooth, given the importance of secrecy for Richard, and the increasing possibility of surveillance. For instance, when Richard was posted to Sale in eastern Victoria in 1990, the long distance and the secrecy seriously challenged their relationship. Richard tried to visit Canberra most weekends, which was a six-hour drive each way. Fortunately, Richard had an excuse to explain his trips: his family lived in Canberra. Even with his parents Richard

had to maintain a fiction – and they knew it was fiction – that Roger was just Richard's housemate.

Richard's coming out to his father is another interesting story. Clearly, Peter Gration had his suspicions, but he always accepted his son's word when he said that he was not gay and it was just experimentation. That he never judged his son and offered support during the 1982 incident attests to Peter's love for Richard. The real coming out was in 1987. Peter had just become Chief of the Defence Force Staff, and several RAAF senior officers advised him there was a perception that Richard was gay. Peter called Richard home one weekend, told Richard about these discussions and asked what Richard had to say in response. Richard describes what happened next:

I still remember to this day I paused for two or three seconds and then said, 'Are you sure that's a question you want to ask?' which was then followed by another three or four seconds of pause, and he said, 'Well, I'll take it from that answer that yes you are,' and then it was fine. He said, 'It's okay. We still love you ... It just means you can't continue to be in the Air Force. You have to get out of the Defence Force'.

Peter wanted Richard to resign quietly, but Richard pointed out that this would not be possible. Because he had trained as a pilot, he had a return of service obligation to the RAAF of ten years, meaning he could only leave by outing himself. Peter accepted this and said that Richard would have to resign quietly when he completed the return of service obligation.

As it so happened, changes afoot in 1990 gave Richard another excuse to delay resigning. Defence was in the process of transitioning from the superannuation Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme (DFRDB), to a new scheme called the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme (MSBS). Under DFRDB, if someone resigned before 20 years' service, they would receive back just the amount of their contributions, without any earnings or interest, minus a 'handling fee'. Under the new MSBS, anyone leaving the ADF would receive their superannuation contributions plus earnings, regardless of length of service. Therefore, if Richard were to resign in 1991, he would have been about \$100,000 worse off than if he were to wait for the new scheme.

Peter agreed that Richard could stay until the transition to MSBS was completed. By the time that happened in 1992, the lifting of the LGB ban was imminent.

It must have been difficult for Peter Gration, being Chief of the Defence Force, to protect the secret of his gay son even though this contradicted the very rules he was obliged to uphold. In a 1989 letter to the Defence Force Ombudsman, Peter meticulously outlined the arguments the ADF regularly espoused to justify the ban. He argued that the policy was 'not meant to be judgemental or anti-homosexual, [but] it seeks to accommodate the real attitudinal and practical problems posed by homosexuals in a Service environment'. It seems likely that Peter was not prejudiced himself, evidenced by his affirmations and ongoing love and support for Richard, but he did believe the discourse about openly LGB service personnel not meshing well in the ADF.

Even so, Peter's experience with Richard and his behaviour during the 1992 debates over permitting LGB service suggest that he was not a passionate advocate for the ban. For instance, the minutes of ADF Chiefs of Staff Committee meetings from March 1992 suggest that Peter was deferring to the opinions of the Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force (his brother), who all advocated to retain the ban. As the Keating Labor Government debated LGB service, Peter Gration testified before the ALP Caucus Joint Working Group on Homosexual Policy in the Australian Defence Force. Its chair, Senator Terry Aulich, recalled in 2014 that while Peter Gration and the other service chiefs defended the ban, they were more concerned about there being a clear policy decision either way so that the ADF had clarity. Former Attorney-General Michael Duffy similarly recalled in 2014 that Peter and the other chiefs 'played a very, a straight down the centre role on it; it was a matter for government'.

Just as Peter knew his son was in a complicated situation, so, too, did Richard recognise that his father was in a difficult position. Richard generally respected this, but he did on one occasion exploit his father's awkward circumstance. A friend of Richard's in the RAAF Police warned him that there were undercover officers infiltrating gay bars in Canberra as part of a witch-hunt. After a friend was the victim of one of these undercover agents, an incensed Richard contacted the editor of gay magazine, *Outrage*. A March 1991 feature article exposed RAAF Police practices which Richard's mate had

leaked to him. The article described the investigation process: 'A man or woman is targeted by the RAAF Directorate of Security Services ... after being told that the person is suspected of being gay. No proof is required, and the complainants are never required to come forward publicly or to stand by their evidence in court'. The article detailed surveillance, entrapment in gay bars or beats, and the intimidating interviews such as that Richard had experienced in 1982. The article drew heavily on an interview with informant 'John', with an opening tag saying: 'John was told, months later by a friend of a friend, about the investigation – and that it had been broken off. There is one reason, obvious to those who know him, why his pursuers might have given up the chase; but that cannot be revealed without identifying him.'²³ 'John' was, of course, Richard Gration.

This article caused a ruckus at Defence Headquarters, not just because of the bad press, but also because it specifically named three undercover officers and their service numbers – a serious security breach. Peter Gration easily knew that 'John' was his son because of the article contents, including two paragraphs outlining what happened in 1982 at the Air Force Academy and the Court of Inquiry. A cheeky line in the article also would have caught Peter's attention: 'commissioned officers, like John, could appeal to the Chief of the Australian Defence Force, General Peter Gration'. The article prompted Democrats Senator Janet Powell to take up the LGB ban as an issue and contributed to Labor pushes to lift the ban. Within the ADF, the article did have an impact. Richard recalls: 'Then there was an edict that came down from the Chief of the Defence Force that the RAAF Police were not to behave in that way and then it really formalised the position that it's "If you get a complaint you can investigate it but you are not to engage in entrapment"'. When the Keating Government lifted the ban the next year on 23 November 1992, Richard invited about 20 friends to celebrate with champagne.

Richard continued to serve until 1995. During those final years, Richard was able to relax and stop living a double life. He did not advertise his sexuality, but if people asked he had no qualms telling them. While Richard found the RAAF to be generally accepting, he did notice a difference in cultures across the services. Richard was studying a Masters degree in computer science at ADFA when the ban was lifted, and he remembers attitudes among Army members such as 'You have to put up with all the bloody poofers now' and

‘What a terrible thing this is’. Richard finished the Masters course in mid 1993 and then worked as a lecturer in computer studies at the Staff College at Canberra’s RAAF Base Fairbairn. In 1995, he received word that he would be posted to Richmond again to fly C130s. Richard had to make a decision: accept the four to six-year posting, or leave the RAAF. Richard elected to leave. On the Friday, he discharged from the ADF, and on the following Monday, he commenced a new role as head of IT support in the Commonwealth Department of Administrative Services. He continued in public service roles until accepting a redundancy amid a restructure in 1999.

Meanwhile, in 1997, Richard commenced a part-time Law degree at Australian National University. What sparked his interest was an intensive contracts course he took for his public service employment. He switched to full-time studies after the redundancy and completed the Law degree at the end of 1999. Richard then moved to Sydney and commenced employment at a Sydney law firm, working in their intellectual property and technology section. He left the firm in 2009 to join the bar and become a barrister. Since then, Richard has enjoyed technology and intellectual property matters but also does more general commercial litigation.

In 2011, Richard’s career went full circle when he signed up for the RAAF Reserve as a lawyer. Because Richard had dropped off the Reserve list for more than five years, he had to start the enlistment process from scratch, including all of the entry interviews. By the time he finished the process, he was re-enlisted in July 2013. Ironically, Richard had to go through basic training again despite having 15 years’ service as an officer. For reservists entering with a skilled profession (for example, lawyers, chaplains and doctors) this was just a one-week intensive at Officer Training School in Sale. While those courses normally have about 30 participants, Richard’s only had two: himself and a chaplain. It was certainly a cruisy week for him. After completing that basic training, Richard undertook three Legal Training Modules to learn about military criminal law, international humanitarian law and military administrative law.

The standard amount of time RAAF Reserve lawyers commit is 20 days per year, though the minimum is seven, and when big cases arise they can commit more time. Reserve lawyer responsibilities can include advising on when international humanitarian

law would permit bombing a particular site, or, more commonly, defending ADF members charged under military law. Reserve lawyers from the three services can be appointed to defend any accused across the ADF, and Richard jokes about the typical kinds of discipline offences in each service: ‘The sort of offences that Army lawyers have to deal with is soldiers getting drunk and beating each other up. The Navy, they get drunk and start having sex with each other. And in the Air Force they commit lots of white-collar fraud, so they go off and misuse their government credit cards and so on. It’s a bit of a stereotype, but it’s indicative of the culture.’

Richard’s intellect, sharp memory and sense of humour have served him well across his RAAF and non-RAAF careers. His political connections within the ADF and the Australian Public Service set his career apart from other gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but those very distinctions within his career are revealing about the way policies disconnected from practices when investigating suspected homosexuals. When asked how he would like Australians to remember the role of LGBT military service, Richard answers with:

As having silently served and done great things, despite being fearful that if they were ever found out that they would be thrown out of the military, despite that doing wonderful things for the country and serving the country unknown as being LGBTI through all of those years, and only now since 1992 able to serve openly.

Richard has seen the significant changes in the ADF from a bastion of conservative masculinity in the 1980s, to the more inclusive organisation of today. As he effectively summarises: ‘They genuinely embrace and recognise that it adds to Force capability by having diversity in the Defence Force. It’s not just a “We have to do it because we have to do it.”’

Yvonne Sillett

In 2013, Yvonne Sillett watched as members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) marched in uniform in Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras for the first time. While she was 'very happy' to see LGBT service personnel finally able to reconcile their pride with their military service, it was also a 'bittersweet' moment for her. Yvonne was discharged from the Army in 1989 after ten years of service, just three years before the ban on open gay, lesbian and bisexual service was removed. Yvonne was a pioneer who had been one of the first women to train platoons at Kapooka, south-west of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, so the military had been a central part of her life. Once her sexuality was revealed she was informed that she would no longer be able to keep her top-secret security clearance and make a contribution to the Army. Despite the challenges, with the resilience and tenacity that saw her lead when she served, she has maintained a connection to the ADF and is determined to ensure that the experiences and contribution of those who served before the ban was lifted in 1992 are acknowledged.

From as far back as she can remember, Yvonne was interested in the military. She was born in Melbourne in 1960 to parents who had both served in the Navy. Yvonne's mother had been something of a trailblazer, joining the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) in Perth as a cook at 18 years of age during an era when very few women signed up. She met and fell in love with Yvonne's father, who was also in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in a communications role and had served in Korea. Until 1968, women had to leave the WRANS upon marriage, so Yvonne's mother's stint was relatively short.

Yvonne remembers her childhood as being a happy one; growing up with two older brothers, she was not particularly interested in academic pursuits, and was at her most content playing with her siblings and friends and enjoying sport. Reflecting, she says, 'I wasn't aware that I was gay. I mean I'd always been a tomboy growing up. I was always

in the street playing cricket and rollerskating and all sorts of things with my brothers. So I certainly wasn't the little girl that Mum probably thought she would have.'

Her father's ten-year military career made a strong impact on her at a young age. After he left the Navy, he went on to work for the Defence Signals Directorate. Yvonne remembers: 'I wanted to follow in his footsteps because growing up as children, we'd be sitting around the dining table and we'd say to Dad, "What is it you do?"' The role at Defence Signals Directorate involved top-secret work involving coded messages; even to this day LGBT and other Defence members who serve in Signals do not describe their jobs beyond vague 'intelligence analysts'. The secret job intrigued Yvonne and provided a window into a more exotic world than the occupations she heard about in the school yard.

Just like so many of the lesbian women we spoke to, Yvonne was determined to join the military at a young age. After completing Year 10, Yvonne left high school, prepared to wait until she was old enough to enlist. While she was yet to realise her sexuality, she knew a military career required physical fitness and would allow her to continue to pursue her interest in sports and move outside of the narrow range of occupations available to women in the 1970s. She says that her time in the military did mean that 'I did so much more in ten years than I would ever have had done in that era as a [civilian] female, for sure.' First, she had to reach the age of 18, the age of enlistment. Biding her time, she got a job at a Safeway supermarket 'as a cashier on the big clunky cash registers' for around six months. She then tried to apply to the Navy, who were not recruiting at the time.

Undeterred, recalling the experiences of an uncle who had served in Vietnam in the Army, Yvonne lodged an application for the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC). Her application was successful and she went off to WRAAC School at St George's Heights in Sydney on 22 January 1979 for six weeks of training. Perhaps as a sign that the ADF was starting to reflect broader social changes towards the treatment of women, this was the first year that women in the services received equal pay.

Although Yvonne had only been away from home once before, on a holiday with her grandfather, she instantly felt at ease: 'I just fitted in, like a hand into a glove really.'

The military life was everything Yvonne had always hoped it would be: 'I got there and thought, this is me.' She states emphatically, 'I loved it. I loved it so much that I thought I'm going to come back here and be an instructor one day.' For her, it was not just going to be a short stint in the WRAAC: 'It was what I wanted; it was my passion. I knew that that was my life and I was going to do 20 years plus. That was always going to be my goal.'

Yvonne is a self-described tomboy 'since the day I was born'. It took Yvonne some time to work out her sexuality. In the late 1970s and early 1980s there were very few public representations of lesbian women from which to draw, and homosexuality carried considerable stigma. For the first four years of her service, Yvonne dated men and did not examine her sexuality. Women in various branches of the military were aware that, although lesbianism was never a crime in civilian society (even if it were often treated as such), homosexual conduct between women in the military could lead to their discharge. By 1979, the year Yvonne enlisted, the ADF's policy on homosexuality had been formalised for several years. In 1974, the Department of Defence had circulated a formal 'Policy on Homosexuality in the Services'. This had been, in part, prompted by the publicity generated in 1973 when two women who were discharged from the WRAAF on the grounds of their sexuality requested their cases be investigated further.

In 1976, Sir James Killen, then the Minister of Defence, approved a statement which asserted that 'the policy reflects that, although homosexual behaviour is not a frequent occurrence in the services, it is not acceptable. It is however necessary to differentiate between different levels of behaviour.' Such a statement appears to distinguish between women or men whose sexuality was considered 'untreatable' and that of those who might be considered to be 'situational' lesbians or gay men. The policy also departed somewhat from earlier approaches, which seemed to involve the immediate dismissal of women considered to be homosexual. The statement stated that individuals should be given 'the opportunity to apply for discharge at own request. If this is inappropriate, then action should be taken to obtain approval for discharge "retention not in the interest of the Army" or "not suited to be a soldier"'. As historian Janette Bomford has pointed out, this policy from the WRAAF that subsequently expanded across all three

services, was justified on the supposed grounds that service life was a unique environment:

Including shared accommodation with a wide diverge of ages; problems of morale, rumour, and gossip in an enclosed community; vulnerability of the young or 'socially inadequate' to sexual persuasion and the possibility that it could lead to favouritism or misuse of rank; the service's responsibility as loco parentis; and the argument that lesbians would lower respect [for the services]; reduce recruiting, be responsible for the loss of respect from [servicemen] and seriously affect morale.²³

For Yvonne, in the first four years of her service, ADF policy towards homosexuality was not an immediate concern. She loved her work and her career progressed well. After completing her initial training in Sydney, her first posting was to her hometown back in Melbourne. She laughs, 'So my first posting out of WRAAC School, after my training at Watsonia Barracks, where the School of Signals is, was Melbourne. I was like, "I've joined the Army to see the world and here I am, back in my hometown. Oh well, Mum and Dad are here." It was all cool.' Her career within the WRAAC progressed exceptionally well and she was considered a servicewoman with considerable talent in Signals. She keenly represented the Army in sport: 'I started playing touch in the Army and I represented the Army and I represented the Army in athletics and softball and everything ... we travelled around Australia playing sport. That's what I wanted to do.'

In 1983, at the age of 23, Yvonne had a life-changing experience when she fell in love with another servicewoman. At first, she felt incredibly isolated: 'No one else in the world is like this. That's how you think.' The other woman returned her feelings and the two embarked on a relationship that lasted about 12 months until they were posted apart. Initially Yvonne compartmentalised her feelings: 'I thought, "oh, we can't tell anyone. This is really weird. I'm not gay. I'm just in love with you."' She also knew the relationship carried a substantial degree of risk: 'I realised this is now me. I'm in the military and I'm a gay lady in the military. "Hmm, we're not allowed to be gay in the military." So [it was] constantly looking over your shoulder, making sure you weren't doing anything that was going to get you booted out.'

Not only was it against Army regulations to be homosexual; Yvonne also had a 'top secret clearance because I was in Signal Corps'. This meant she 'had completed security clearances for that top-secret access, the highest classification you can have'. She was all too aware that any rumours about her sexuality could impact on her security clearance and her ability to perform her job. LGB personnel were particularly vulnerable to losing their security clearances if their sexuality were suspected, as it was argued they were vulnerable to blackmail from foreign powers. Yvonne emphasises: 'When they say you're in the closet, I literally was living in the closet for many years.' It was difficult to open up to fellow servicewomen because 'You couldn't really trust anybody because you knew if it got out, that's the end of my career. Because I knew pretty much their policy if you like, was that they do not have homosexuals in the military. So you couldn't really trust anybody just in case that did get out.' Furthermore, casual homophobia dogged the military, just as it did many other parts of Australian society during this era. Yvonne remembers: 'You had to put on a brave face – because you'd hear the comments but you couldn't defend the comments.'

While her initial relationship did not endure, Yvonne's career went from strength to strength. In 1984, she decided that she wanted to return to WRAAC School in Sydney to be an instructor 'because I knew that I wanted to be a soldier ... not just sitting in a communications centre or cooking or something. I wanted to make a difference'. She successfully applied to undertake a Recruit Instructors Course. Instead of being sent back to WRAAC School in Sydney, Yvonne was sent to Kapooka. Unbeknown to Yvonne, WRAAC School was in the process of being closed down as female soldiers were being integrated with men into the Army at large. As historian John Blaxland has noted, 'former WRAAC members were integrated into a number of corps but not the combat arms corps of infantry, artillery and armour'.²³ Over the next three decades more positions would open up to women, culminating in the final Army combat roles in January 2013.

Yvonne successfully passed the course at Kapooka in 1984 and was informed: 'You'll be raising the first female platoon here at Kapooka in February next year.' In January 1985, she was posted to 1 Recruit Training Battalion and became a female instructor. She shared a room with a friend, Leonie, whom she had met back at WRAAC

School in 1979. She remembers: 'At that stage, there were no female instructors. They were all males. It was male recruits, male instructors, male everything. You might have had females in the mess or doing admin, but not female instructors.' Leonie and Yvonne raised the first platoon together. She comments: 'So it was very ironic. We were recruits together and then first female trainers together.' This was a remarkable and pioneering achievement. Yvonne was and still is justifiably 'very proud of that'. Being the first women to work in such a male-dominated arena meant that 'we were under the microscope. We had the media there. We were on the news. I've got a scrapbook with all the cuttings and everything. It was just amazing'. Bomford has stated that 'the entry of women into the armed services is a story of women's negotiation for a place within the most traditionally male profession, and their fight for equality of opportunity and outcome.'²³ This was most certainly the case for Yvonne and Leonie.

Yvonne recalls a particularly evocative moment that occurred when she was at Kapooka on Anzac Day:

They wanted us to march down the main street of Wagga. Females at the front of the parade. So my recruits and the corporals and the sergeants and officer, we all marched down the main street of Wagga. That was just unheard of that there would be females marching in an Anzac parade in Wagga. So we did that and we have photos of that to prove that and we were out the front and we were very proud.

Given the centrality of Anzac Day to Australian national identity and Australian military heritage, there is no question that these women publicly marching in this way provided a quiet challenge to public attitudes about the diversity of who was serving the country in the ADF.

While at Kapooka, Yvonne managed to avoid the advances of men and to keep her sexuality private by focusing on her work. She emphasises:

You're doing pretty much a 15-hour day, seven days a week. You've got to be there spick and span to wake the recruits up. Looking like you've just ironed your [clothes] and spit polished [boots]. Then at the end of the day you're still there, putting them to bed and everything between. They go, 'Do you ever sleep?' and you go, 'No I don't.' Left right, left right.

Yvonne stayed at Kapooka for two years, raising eight platoons in total. She remembers training the first two platoons as being ‘challenging, because the men didn’t really want us there’. Sexism was rife, though female instructors ‘still had to get these recruits through as well as [men] did’. Blaxland has noted the ‘misogynistic tendencies’, which ran through the Regular Army in this era. By the third platoon, with the results speaking for themselves, she feels the men had come to accept that the female instructors ‘know what they’re doing’. Yvonne served at a particularly significant time when gendered ideas surrounding military capability were slowly being challenged and women who were given opportunities were proving themselves to be highly capable.

It is very clear from our interview that Yvonne’s time at Kapooka was a steep learning curve, but a challenge she excelled at and one she enjoyed immensely. She looks back on this time as a highlight of her military experience:

When they told me I was raising the first female platoon I thought, ‘Well they must think that I’m alright.’ So I taught drill. I taught weapons. I taught bushcraft. I taught everything that you need to be, to be a soldier. That course then, when mine, was six weeks, this course was a 12-week course. Of course I had to teach weapons. I’d never held a weapon in my life. All of a sudden, I had to learn how to strip, how to assemble, how to fire, how to do drill. All with a weapon. After being in the Army for five years I’d never done it. All of a sudden, I had to be teaching this.

She particularly enjoyed mentoring the recruits and seeing them transform from civilians into trained soldiers, who were confident and highly skilled. There is more than a slight element of wistfulness in her assertion that ‘I will never find anything that is so rewarding, so satisfying than to have 30 girls get off a bus, hair down, having no idea – high heel shoes, their big bag, hopping along like this, make-up – to marching out as soldiers 12 weeks later.’

The intense training the women undertook bonded them together: ‘You’d be in the bush for a week, living in the bush for a week and you were just there. You were with them ... so I did that eight times, with eight different recruit courses’. Yvonne mentions the unique relationship that develops between trainers and the recruits. Even today, she remains in contact with the instructor who trained her originally when she was an 18-year-old recruit. The process of gaining unique skills, learning techniques very rarely

considered by most in the civilian world and becoming part of an institution was a unique undertaking.

While training women at Kapooka, Yvonne knew she had to be discreet about her sexuality: 'I had to be again, very mindful of my behaviour', being not only a female instructor, but instructing female recruits. She trails off as she states: 'If it got out that I was gay...'. There is no need for her to spell out the consequences of such a revelation; they would have been immediate and career-ending. While Yvonne kept her 'head down', she was fully aware that 'male instructors were fraternising with the female recruits'. The double-standard grated, but she focused on her job and seeing the women she trained progress.

Gradually the numbers of women at Kapooka increased and Yvonne became aware of other gay women who were serving.

By the second platoon, obviously I raised the first platoon and then 32 Platoon, 33 Platoon came on board. So they had female corporals. So I was by that stage one of the senior female corporals. Then a few more gay corporals, female corporals came through and you get to know them, because you're the minority. So you'd go out and have a drink with them and stuff.

As there were so few women, a sense of trust developed among those at Kapooka: 'Because we were the minority, there were only a few of us, you really knew who you could trust. You could pretty much trust all of them.' Yvonne became really good friends with another corporal who joined with the second platoon and ended up sharing a flat with her. Although the other woman was heterosexual, she knew about Yvonne's sexuality and accepted it without question: 'She'd have boys over and I'd have girls over and we just – it just worked.'

After two years at Kapooka as instructor, Yvonne was posted to Perth, back into Signals, in 1987. She notes that the work at Kapooka was so physically and intellectually demanding that 'they don't like you staying too long because you burn out'. In Perth, she was the Corporal at the communications Centre there, as well as a Cipher Operator. In late 1987, she was posted back to the 6 Sig Regiment in Melbourne working in the Communications Centre. By this stage, she knew a considerable number of gay women in

the Army and socialised with them: ‘We would do stuff. We would go out.’ Instead of the discreet gay and lesbian world that had existed in previous decades, there was a public and well-developed scene for LGBT people in Melbourne to enjoy by the 1980s.

While her life was proceeding well at this stage, in early 1988, Yvonne remembers hearing whispers going around that ‘there was a witch-hunt going on for lesbians in the Army. I was like: “Oh God no; got to keep my head down...”’. While Yvonne maintained discretion, she kept up her contact with trusted friends: ‘We just continued in our little group to go out and do our things.’ At this time, Yvonne was in a relationship with another servicewoman, Katrina, who was also in the 2nd Sig Regiment based in Watsonia. Soon, it became clear that she had been swept up in the witch-hunt. She says, ‘Now, how it unfolded, still to this day, I do not know. How my name was mentioned, I do not know.’

Later in our conversation, Yvonne returns to this topic and elaborates a little further. She believes that the names of suspected lesbians may have been mentioned after a failed drug raid where her partner was based. Yvonne notes, ‘She was never into drugs, never had been.’ However, Yvonne suspects that some of the men who may have been involved with drugs perhaps deflected attention away from themselves by saying ‘well, what about the lesbians, there’s this one and this one and this one.’ As Mark’s chapter on pXX reveals, this sort of deflecting tactic, uncovering homosexuals during a drugs investigation, is certainly recorded in at least one document from 1989. Yvonne’s Army police file, which she obtained in 2017 but had never seen before, did indeed state: ‘Suspected user – cannabis – hashish’, and indicated that another member reported Yvonne as being ‘involved in homosexual activities since 1983’. Yvonne was never a drug user – indeed her physical health was paramount to her – and she remains puzzled as to how this statement ended up on her police record. Perhaps someone with a grudge made a false statement.

Yvonne first realised that she had been named by someone as a suspected lesbian when she received a phone call, asking her to come down to the Victoria Barracks in Melbourne to see the Special Investigations Branch (SIB), ‘which is like the detectives of the military police’. Immediately suspecting that her relationship had been reported,

Yvonne called her partner and said, 'I don't know what's going on but I just got a call'. Her partner responded with, 'So have I.' Yvonne reported to the Barracks as requested and: 'was pretty much interrogated ... "We know you're a homosexual... we know this, we know that." They just started throwing things at me: 'Your name's been mentioned, that you're a lesbian. We have been following you. We've got this, this, this'". The scene she describes is brutal and very much in line with the experiences described by other women (and men) who were interrogated as suspected lesbians (and gays) in the 1970s and 1980s.

Aware of the potential consequences of exposure, Yvonne attempted to deny the allegations. As her interrogation continued:

I felt like I was a criminal. I felt like I had the big light on me, saying, 'Where were you on the ...?' And I was in there for several hours. Just so frightened. How old was I then? Twenty-seven. I was so frightened. I thought, 'This is my career, I'm gone.' I remember sitting in Vic Barracks and just feeling like a criminal. It went on and on and on. In the end, I think I came out and said, 'Well, I have been with a female but I am not a gay woman.' I knew that I was, but I thought if I expose everything, I'm gone.

The choice of being forced to deny who she was or to lose everything she had spent her entire military career working for was an agonising one. Yvonne's police record does not include a transcript of a police interview; instead, it says 'On 14 Jul 88, CPL Sillett was interviewed, however, she declined to answer any questions in relation to the allegation.' As Richard Gration's story also highlights, this sort of record was not necessarily an accurate reflection of the intense, intimidating encounter with the SIB.

In the meantime, while Yvonne was experiencing this, Katrina was also being interrogated. The two women had not even had a chance to speak properly before they were put through this process. Yvonne was able to work out that women suspected of being homosexual in Signal Corps were being targeted. The witch-hunts could have been occurring across the Army, but for Yvonne, it was Signal Corps that she saw most impacted. She remembers: 'There was myself, who as a Corporal, my partner, Katrina, who was a Corporal' and 'about half a dozen' other servicewomen: 'I recall that we were all pretty much tarred with the same brush.' This was also the same time and likely the

same witch-hunt and investigation that caught ~~Mark~~² (see pXX), who was also in the same Signal Corps.

While the interrogation had been deeply unsettling, when it finished, Yvonne felt an obligation to return to her duties back in the Communications Centre. The Centre was a major conduit for communication across Defence, with service personnel dealing with the incoming and outgoing material. Incredibly, as Yvonne relieved another serviceperson by receiving incoming signals to the Centre, she received a message that was about her. She remembers: 'It just so happened that I happened to see [that message] and my heart just sank. It started talking about downgrading of my security clearance. Straight away, I think, downgrading security – that's my job. That's what I do.' Devastated, Yvonne, 'just had to leave and go home'.

After taking some time to regroup at home, she thought: 'No, this is rubbish.' She sought the opportunity to put in a redress of grievance and did so: 'I wrote my redress of grievance pretty much explaining why I shouldn't be discharged and my passion and what I've given to them so far.' Her response was so detailed that it ran to three pages. Yvonne even sought advice from a military lawyer, 'which when you think about it, you think, well they're going to be on the Army's side'. She feels he 'was supportive but said, "It's policy. I'm really sorry, but it's policy"'. Her redress of grievance got knocked back: 'I thought, they've just gone bang. Just destroyed my world.' At the time this happened, she felt 'you don't have an option at all really. It's their way or the highway pretty much'.

On reflection, Yvonne now feels that she might have had a case to push to remain in the military.

When I look back now, how many years on, I look back and I think, hang on a minute, [they] were just saying, 'Your security clearance will be downgraded', not that you will be discharged. The policy states, 'We do not accept homosexual behaviour in here', so we've got really a contradiction.

Whether pushing harder would have helped is difficult to predict. Other accounts from this era show that men and women suspected of being homosexual had to deal with enormous prejudice, even if they were able to evade official sanctions. Only in

exceptional circumstances, such as the Richard Gration case, were these men or women able to retain their roles and have successful ongoing careers. For Yvonne, the rationale that homosexual women should not serve or have security clearance as they might be susceptible to blackmail still flummoxes her. She notes, with a degree of bewilderment, 'What are you going to do, tell the Russians? What do they care? I couldn't see the logic behind their thinking.'

Yvonne's discharge from the Army in January 1989, exactly ten years after she joined up, is still painful to reflect on. She emphasises all she gave to the military. Interestingly, she slips into the present tense when describing herself. It is clear that her military identity has never left her.

I'm a professional soldier. I've just raised eight female platoons. Eight and in each platoon, there's 30 women and I that whole time maintained professionalism and I was one of the very first female instructors. Respect me for that. Give me credit for that. Bang! Gone! It's like hmm, how did that work?

For Yvonne, being a soldier was so much a core part of her being that even today, she still thinks in these terms. She wishes she had questioned her treatment more at the time, 'but I was so shattered. I wasn't thinking clearly'. This is also a common sentiment among LGB service members caught unexpectedly and put through the intimidating investigation. During our interview, she told us that her mother died, not knowing why she was discharged because 'I didn't want to break her heart'. This was a considerable burden for Yvonne, from a military family, to carry. Much of what happened at the time of her discharge is still 'just a blur for me because it was just such a traumatic time'.

Yvonne was not dishonourably discharged; she was given an honourable discharge in January 1989. Still, for someone who had given so much energy and commitment to the military, knowing that her future would be compromised and that she would not be able to keep her top-secret clearance, this was still a terrible blow.

Yvonne emphasises just how structured military life is and how establishing a civilian life post-military can be challenging, particularly for those who join up when they are young.

You've joined straight from school, straight from home. You've never paid a medical bill, a dental bill. You've never done anything like that. Then you join the Army. You still don't pay any medical or dental. That's all covered for you. You've always got a roof over your head. You don't have to go and look for a place unless you choose to live off base. You don't have to go and find a meal; it's there for you at the mess. So you do this for ten years – for me – 20 to 30 for others. All of a sudden you come out into the civilian world, you've got to get Medicare. You've got to find – get a bond, but you can't – you don't have any references to get accommodation because you've always – if you've lived on base. It's like you've been on another planet for a period of time and now you've come back into the real world. When I was in it was definitely like that. Yeah.

In the aftermath, Yvonne sat down at home with a piece of paper and wrote down the number of the lesbian women she knew who served. This was a document just for her. Its primary purpose was to show just how many lesbian women were serving their country in the Army. By the time she finished, in just five minutes, she had noted more than 20 gay women. In our interview, she told us that many of these women continued to serve, managing to conceal their sexuality from officials and survive the witch-hunts until the ban on LGB service was lifted in 1992.

Katrina, her partner at the time of her discharge, was discharged at the same time, and the two women 'went and lived in Perth, because that's where she was from'. As it happened, Yvonne's parents had also made a decision to move to Perth, as that was where Yvonne's mother was originally from and she wanted to look after her ageing mother. After two years in Western Australia, Yvonne fell in love with a woman from Melbourne and moved back there with her: 'We were together probably about only three years but that got me back to Melbourne.' Later, Yvonne's parents also returned to Melbourne.

After leaving, Yvonne undertook a variety of different jobs: 'Did ten years in the Army. Got out angry. Did lots of different things. Went more into local government.' She had two sons with a former partner (not Katrina), Jack and Max, who are now in their teenage years. Her face lights up as she says that she 'just adores them' and the joy they've brought into her life. She also acknowledges that she would not have her sons in

her life had she not been discharged from the Army. The boys were conceived through IVF at a time when reproductive technologies were nowhere near as accessible for lesbians as they are today. She says, 'I was a pioneer at Kapooka. I was a pioneer with the boys. So there are good things in my life for sure. Absolutely. My current partner is just wonderful and very supportive.'

Understandably, for a considerable part of her post-military life, she has been publicly reserved about her sexuality in the workforce. Over the past few years, this has changed.

But now I'm getting older and nearing retirement, it's like, 'Oh look, I don't care.'

With what they – not what they put me through, but my experience at the time and now I'm older, it's like, 'Well what are they going to do to me?' But there's nothing they can do to me. So yeah, I'm out.

She also came out to her mother before she passed away. Her mother's unconditional acceptance was significant. Noting that her mother was from a different generation, Yvonne says, 'I was expecting more, "Oh dear, oh dear; what have we done wrong?" But no, she was great.'

In 2007, Yvonne came back to work for the Department of Defence in a civilian capacity. Her decision to return to Defence prompts surprise from those who know what happened to her:

So many people that know what happened to me in the Army, are going: 'Why on earth are you working for them?' I said, 'Well it's public service.' But I still love what I do and I still love the fact that I'm working for the military and helping them. It's the archaic policy that they had. But I really enjoy what I do and I'm dealing now with senior ranking officers: Major Generals, Air Vice Marshals. I'm dealing with very high ranking officers that get posted to North America and Canada. So I have to deal with and talk to them. They're just Joe and Bob. They're not Sir to me anymore. Whereas, when I was in, it would have been saluting and 'Sir' and 'Yes, Sir; no, Sir.' Now it's just, 'G'day how are you going?'

Yvonne did balk at applying for top-secret security clearance again. The process itself brought back the residual trauma she had endured when serving. When she started her

civilian job at Defence, ‘They started asking me – you know. I thought “No, I’m not going to tell them that I did have one once, and this is why I don’t have it” because it’s none of their business. So I said, “No, I’m not doing it.”’

Yvonne has been with Defence for over ten years. Part of her current role involves paying members posted overseas: ‘To this day, in however many years forward, we’ve got senior officers with the same classification getting posted overseas with their [same-sex] partners, which is awesome. But yeah, it’s like, how things change.’ While Yvonne was pleased to be able to see same-sex couples treated equally by the military, it naturally made her reflect on how her life might have been if the ban on open LGB service had been lifted earlier.

Over the years, Yvonne has done her best to cope with what happened. One of the particular challenges has been knowing how unfortunate she was to be named and how unlucky she was to be exposed before the ban was lifted. Had she been named just four years later, perhaps she would have been able to stay and see out her full 20 years. ‘There were so many ifs’, she says. Therapy helped and she believes the ongoing support and love of her partner and sons has helped her enormously. She has since revisited Kapooka for a reunion with the recruits she trained. About five years ago, they went into their original building. She saw: ‘On the wall, there is a photo of the inaugural 31 Platoon and there’s a photo of me still in the hallway with my recruits from January 1985. So that’s pretty amazing.’ At the time of the interview she was enthusiastically making plans to attend a WRAAC reunion.

Yvonne talked about her plans for retirement. She and her current partner were relocating to a rural location in Victoria known for its LGBT culture. This means they will be ‘living our dreams a little bit earlier than what we thought we would’. She notes that she has stayed in her current position for a substantial amount of time: ‘The only other job that I stayed at for that long was in uniform ten years. So I’ve done ten years – so pretty much 20 years of my life has been with the Defence, yeah. But not the way I wanted it. I wanted 20 years in uniform.’

The strong and resilient personality traits that enabled Yvonne to excel in the military have provided her with the strength she has needed to cope with what happened

to her. Her story is one of hundreds that highlight the deep personal toll that the military ban on homosexuality had on individuals. More than this, it also shows what the military lost when it discharged highly capable individuals as a result of pointless discrimination. While she once had to keep silent about her sexuality, Yvonne is open about sharing her past experience. She once proudly led an Anzac march at Kapooka, telling us that with enough time, in the future, she thinks she will 'march again'.

Mark

Mark was an incredibly open person to interview. We knew from our chat before the interview that he had been kicked out of the Army in 1988 when the Special Investigation Branch (SIB) discovered he was gay. What we did not know was about the other mental and physical traumas Mark had experienced in his life, including candid descriptions of sexual abuse during his teenage years. There was an extra twist that made Mark's story seem so important: it is not unique. Certainly the abuse he suffered was horrible and happened in its own way. Yet, Mark was actually the second of three interviewees in a row who experienced some form of childhood physical or sexual abuse. When we reflected back on other interviews, and as the project continued, we found that the theme of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse surfaced in at least a dozen of our interviews. This was of course a minority, and this project was neither designed for nor equipped to conduct statistical analysis or substantially probe the links between LGBTI identities (our one intersex participant had also been abused), childhood abuse and military service. Yet, we present Mark's story here to begin posing some hypotheses, and also to highlight further the effects of the LGB ban on those caught in the 1980s.

Mark was born in Melbourne in 1969 but from the age of 11 grew up in rural Victoria. Until that point his mother had stayed home to look after Mark and his much younger siblings while his father was a senior public servant with the Federal government. His childhood in the city was, he says, a classic suburban one for kids of his class: 'the backyard pools, grandparents around, time with the neighbours, riding bikes up and down the street, playing cricket in the street'. Mark's father had a stressful role; he suffered a mental breakdown which prompted him to stop working and move the family to an inherited property a few hours north-east of Melbourne.

At first, country life continued in a similar vein. Mark always had a million activities on the go: long bike rides with friends; hunting rabbits and foxes with his collection of guns; taking out the occasional tree. Mark was a member of the local gun

club and participated in competitive target shooting. School figures very little in his memories until after the family moved to the country, where he was enrolled in a Catholic school which was fun, but not challenging. Mark was a quick learner and was easily bored by the slow pace of classes. Teachers mistook this to be a lack of application on his part.

The move to the country represented a major turning point in Mark's life. His mother moved out not long after arriving on the property, and Mark has not seen her since he was 11. Mark was left living with his incredibly strict father, who was ex-Army Reserve. His father became violent; whether that was associated with his mental breakdown or his wife's departure is unclear, but Mark remembers that there were plenty of beltings. This seems to track back through the family: Mark's grandfather had been 'very, very strict' on Mark's father. Somehow, through this period of abuse Mark managed to be a straight A student until about Year 10. At that stage, Mark decided the situation with his father was untenable and Mark moved out of home to live with a mate and his mate's father.

Mark describes the move as 'Out of the frypan, into the fire'. The mate's father began to abuse Mark sexually. Mark recalls: 'So, I was in a situation where my best friend's dad was basically abusing me, and I was almost handed around at sex parties, which left me traumatised. It left me very distrustful of people, even as far as I actually went to the local Anglican Church and the priest there, ultimately he was just trying to get into my pants.' The mate's father insisted that Mark pay board, so he worked a couple of casual jobs, such as at the local gardening centre and mowing lawns. Mark had to be sure that he always came up with the rent – 'otherwise other things were expected'. Not surprisingly, his schoolwork fell off and he started to drink – at first being plied with alcohol by his mate's father. He was still attending school and he actually managed to keep his grades up. Yet, as Mark recalls, 'I was probably verging on alcoholism to the stage where I would literally have a flask that I would take to school and I would be drinking that during the day.'

The relationship between childhood physical and/or sexual abuse and homosexuality is heavily researched and debated. It is uncomfortable topic, not just because of its graphic nature and the psychological scars abuse leaves, but also because

of the many myths and misunderstandings – often perpetuated by organisations and individuals hostile to homosexuality. Perhaps the most common myth is that gay men are more likely to perpetrate sexual abuse against children. Reputable researchers have well and truly debunked that lie (even though it still circulates).

What is less known, though, is that psychology research since the 1980s has consistently found that LGB people are more likely to report having suffered childhood sexual abuse. One meta-analysis of 65 refereed articles published between January 1980 and November 2013, covering nine countries and 62 045 total participants across the studies, concluded that 22.2 per cent of gay or bisexual men and 36.2 per cent of lesbian or bisexual women were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This compares with approximately 7.6-7.9 per cent of heterosexual men and 18-19.7 per cent of heterosexual women.²³ Given these high rates of childhood sexual abuse among LGB people, it should not be surprisingly (even if any less distressing) that more than 10 per cent of our own interview participants were survivors of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse.

Where research is thinner is examining why LGB people are more targeted for abuse as children. It is an intriguing question given many LGB people do not realise their sexuality until at least their teenage years, let alone come out as children. The majority of psychology studies focus either on quantitative data or long-term health effects of childhood sexual abuse. It is harder to do research with LGB people's actual abusers because they would need to be identified and interviewed. That said, researchers postulate that for lesbian and bisexual women, some of the factors that may contribute to their higher rates of being targeted for abuse are their young expressions of non-normative gender behaviour, or the consequences of being rejected because their sexuality leading them to situations more vulnerable to abuse (e.g. substance abuse, running away or being kicked out of home).²³

For gay and bisexual men, expressions of gender non-normativity can similarly make them targets of physical violence. Adults or peers may abuse gay or bisexual boys as punishment for transgressing what is 'acceptable' male behaviour, or for behaving in a 'feminine' manner.²³ Presumably, sexual abusers sense vulnerability in boys who express gender non-normativity, or who are struggling internally with their sexuality. This was not the case for Mark, as he was naturally confident and relatively open as a bisexual

from the age of 14. Perhaps this was why his mate's father targeted him – seeing him as someone who would enjoy sexual encounters with men. We will never know why the abuser pursued Mark. He died about 17 years ago having never faced justice.

A pattern common to child abuse cases, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is that the abusers know how to trap their victims. There was no one Mark could talk to about his abuse, much less report it. Mark worried that it would not just come back on him, but that if he said anything his mate might end up out on the street, too. They were not lovers, but they were close and they did 'play around' with each other. Mark describes his teenage bisexuality in a 'you take what you can get' kind of way. He had girlfriends – one of whom he was going steady with for several months – but there were always boys as well.

As one problem piled on top of another, Mark applied to join the Army. One very common reason to enlist, both among LGBT members and others, is to use the armed forces as a form of escape from the drudgery of their lives. There are also longstanding historic ties between the armed forces and Australia's shameful history of institutional abusive treatment of children. The Stolen Generations, the Forgotten Australians, the less-documented history of pressuring single mothers to surrender their children for adoption well into the 1960s and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse show a deep current of cruelty in Australian life going back generations. Many survivors from these groups joined the armed forces as a site of escape and opportunity. Military life offers discipline, steady income, training, regular meals, accommodation, the opportunity to travel and a social paradigm that is amenable to people accustomed to, or seeking, structure. Children raised in institutionalised settings, where abuse was rife, often made fine soldiers, sailors or air personnel.²³

The known but rarely talked about sexual and physical abuse of children within families also has played a significant part in many people joining the ADF. For people like Mark, this was the main motivating factor. He remembers:

I just felt so trapped in a small country town which is probably the reason what's actually pushed me to actually go into the Army because it was a way – 'This is my get out of here course'. So, when I was about 16½ I actually applied to join the Defence Force, went through all the testings and just before my eighteenth birthday I

actually got called up. Basically I got called in and found myself on my way to boot camp.

The anecdotal echoes from the other LGBT Defence members – suggesting the ADF as an escape route for abuse survivors – has scholarly support. Psychology researchers from the USA have identified higher than average reporting of childhood abuse among active-duty and retired military personnel than in the population as a whole. This is, of course, not restricted to LGBT survivors of abuse. John Bossnich and Robert Bossarte hypothesise that ‘military enlistment among survivors of childhood abuse is a sign of resilience, i.e., having the wherewithal to break away from a tumultuous environment. A complementary hypothesis may be that the structure, training, and fellowship of the military facilitates resiliency among some survivors of childhood abuse’.²³ The test of Mark’s resiliency was to come much quicker than he imagined, living as a secret gay man in the Australian Army.

On the bus to basic training in September 1987, Mark and his fellow recruits had their first taste of homophobia. A sergeant boarded and delivered a speech on how drugs would not be tolerated and how there were no gays in the military. They were, he explained, ‘weak people and subsequently they would have a breakdown and would then try to actually climb into bed with somebody else during training’. This may have been the popular line, but it was not the official policy. Rather, DI(G) PERS 15-3 (defence instructions (general) personnel) said that gays and lesbians were a health threat, could prey on minors, were subjected to blackmail, and were a threat to troop cohesion and morale. The explanatory note accompanying DI(G) PERS 15-3 noted: ‘Should the issue of the reliability, loyalty and personal bravery of homosexuals be raised, you should accept that this is not in dispute, rather it is the impact they have on group cohesion which adversely affects combat effectiveness of that group. This is particularly important in situations involving the stress of operations.’

In a 1989 letter to the Defence Force Ombudsman, the Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Gration (Richard Gration’s father), even asserted that the ban was meant to protect LGB service members from bullying: ‘Experience has shown that members involved in homosexual relationships have a tendency to dissociate themselves from the group, may cause hostility within the group, or become ostracised by other

group members.’²³ Apparently, on a bus, en route to Kapooka, far away from the watchful eye of politicians, media and the Defence Force Ombudsman, the grassroots view on the ban was more grounded in homophobia than any spin produced by the top brass.

As Mark soon learned, there were drugs for those who wanted them. There were also, of course, homosexuals. At basic training at Kapooka in Wagga Wagga, Mark had high hopes for hijinks. Here he was, a ‘horny little 18 year old’, thinking: ‘Oh yeah, showering with other guys, cock-slapping each other’s legs in the shower, three guys in a single shower cubicle so you can all be showered within ... five or six minutes’. In fact, this was far from the truth; Mark quickly found that after a full-on day of basic training, when the lights were out at 10pm, he was too tired even to wank! There was one recruit whom Mark thought might be gay, and whom he thought had twiggled to him. But it was a long time before they discussed it, and they discovered the same fear of being caught by the other had held them back. All of this was going on in an environment where straight men could engage in what might look like homoerotic play: slapping each other’s arses in the showers, suggestive remarks and grabbing each other’s cocks. If they had been pressed to explain themselves they would have laughed it off as mucking around. As Mark summarises the sentiment: ‘It was okay to kind of do all these things gay, but as long as you weren’t gay.’

Mark joined the Army during the AIDS epidemic, the same year as the famous grim reaper advertisement. The commercial was effective at getting out the message about safe-sex, but it was also controversial because many gay men felt that the grim reaper was being used to represent and stigmatise gay men.²³ Mark remembers one homophobic joke linked to HIV/AIDS: how do you give CPR to someone with AIDS? The answer was mimed: a boot stomping on a chest, air blown in the patient’s general direction. The ADF, for its part, initially responded to the AIDS epidemic with a similar attitude to homosexuals: they were so few and far between in the ADF, so one would expect HIV infection rates to be negligible. In January 1988, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Ros Kelly, announced that all ADF recruits would be required to undergo HIV testing, as well as those employed in particularly sensitive positions. The policy cautioned ‘HIV positivity discovered as a result of testing ... is not to be used as a basis

for disciplinary investigation' against gay men.²³ Oral histories from LGB members of the nursing and medical corps suggest otherwise.

The ADF policy on HIV/AIDS has actually been relatively unchanged over the past 30 years. Those prospective recruits who test positive are not allowed to enlist, and those who seroconvert (contract HIV) while serving are not discharged unless they are classed as category three or four HIV infection. Even so, there are severe restrictions placed on HIV positive members; they are not deployable overseas and they face severe restrictions on postings, transfers, access to courses and promotions. In 1998, the Full Bench of the Federal Court upheld the ADF's right to dismiss an HIV positive soldier on the grounds that the 'inherent requirements of the job' exempted the ADF from HIV-related protections under the *Disability Discrimination Act*. This case happened while highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) was just becoming available (1996), and over 20 years later people with HIV live perfectly healthy lives. Only time will tell if ADF policies catch up with medical science.

Returning to Mark's era, though, HIV/AIDS was one of but many validations for homophobia. Gay-bashing was a pastime for homophobes who stalked gay and bisexual men at popular beats, especially in major urban centres. At least one ex-soldier recollects his mates based at Holsworthy in western Sydney used to drive into the city to do a bit of 'poofster bashing'. Such violent homophobia also tangentially touched Mark. After thriving at Kapooka, Mark entered the Signal Corps and was posted to Watsonia in Melbourne. There he heard about one episode where a soldier saw two men engaging in oral sex when passing by their dormitory. Word went out and a gang was rounded up. Both men, it was said, 'had the shit beaten out of them' and ended up in hospital. That this happened on a Thursday night – pay night, traditionally booze-up night – presumably added to the ferocity of the attack. On another occasion a man was said to have been thrown down the stairs because someone said he was gay (it turned out he was not).

The depth of straight men's homophobia has been the focus of much attention by psychologists and psychiatrists, and there is an argument that in at least some cases such homophobia masks and deflects homosexual desires. Regardless of the reasons, the *effect* of the violence was clear – to prevent any public expression of real, as opposed to blokey, homosexual desire. The violence reported on these occasions was, Mark says, 'another

very, very good reason to actually hide' that he had such feelings. The fact that neither he nor anyone else really knew what happened to these men reflected the atmosphere of fear.

You had to keep everything to yourself. That was probably the most stressful aspect of it – actually having to lead a complete double life. In fact, you could not acknowledge feelings, you could not express feelings because apart from the fact that you knew it potentially put your career at risk. It very much potentially put your health and safety at risk because you were aware of the fact that guys did get bashed.

It was during this period in 1987 that Mark became increasingly homosexual in his desires. He vividly remembers the last time he had sex with a woman, during which he realised that he was not (or was no longer) bisexual.

Mark trained as the signal unit's quartermaster. Though Mark continued to be based in Melbourne, by sheer fortune his unit wound up on a brief posting as guard duty at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. This was just down the road from the gay heart of Sydney on Oxford Street. For his colleagues, Oxford Street and Kings Cross were treated as freak shows, where they would laugh at the gay men as they headed to the heterosexual strip clubs. For Mark, it was easy to slip away and find more satisfactory entertainment. The jumbling of the seedier side of life, especially in Kings Cross where drugs, alcohol, sex shows and sex workers were all available without regard to distinctions of gay or straight, clean-cut or sleazy, made it easier for people to navigate across the boundaries. Mark did this by rarely going to exclusively gay venues, so that if he ran into anyone he was able to plausibly deny his behaviour. The mixed nature of the venue meant that he could pass as one of the straight patrons, even if there were gay people present.

Oxford Street was 'an eye opener'. Mark remembers especially Anzac Day 1988 when he was returning from guard duty at the Cenotaph in Hyde Park. As he walked back along Oxford Street in his Army uniform, he thought: 'This is so weird. Here's me, a gay soldier, wearing a military uniform, and there's all these gay guys dressed up as soldiers.' It was during his Sydney posting that Mark met a gentleman named Robert and headed for a drink in one of the bars. Robert would write him letters – sexually explicit love letters – and eventually the inevitable happened: Mark left one sitting on his bedside table

in the barracks, where one of the other men in his unit saw it. He was saved by the fact that it was signed 'R', and he was able to pass it off as having come from 'Rebecca'. Whether Robert was intentionally in the habit of being careful is unclear, but such coded writing was common enough among gay men for decades, if not longer.

Mark uses the term 'double life' to describe his time in the Army. It is common among many LGB people who served under the ban, and what comes across in both Mark and others' interviews is both their carefully thought through strategies, as well as the mental stress that the double life created. For instance, besides the coded letters, other LGB ex-service members describe strategies such as maintaining personal items in a spare bedroom to pass their partners off as 'housemates'; bringing opposite-sex dates to mess functions; or driving in erratic patterns when visiting a sauna, beat or sexual partner for fear of being followed. Mark says:

You just adapt. It's horrible, but you just adapt. It's survival so you lead the life of the good military person, the good straight boys, even soldiers wanting to protect and serve the country. But then on the other hand, you have this other side of you that when it's only when you actually feel safe are you then able to actually then go on, and then actually let that side of yourself be expressed ... But it was that constant stress of 'Will I be found out?'

Even though Mark was effective at hiding his homosexuality, his developing relationship with Robert was opening up a side of him that he did not want to hide anymore. Mark describes the relationship with Robert as a catalyst for events that led to his dismissal.

Back in Melbourne, Mark found himself caught up in an investigation – not into homosexuality in his unit, but into drug-taking and dealing (possibly the same one that ensnared Yvonne Sillett – see pXX). His description of the interrogation conducted by the SIB makes for harrowing reading:

It was like every textbook interview – good cop, bad cop, bait and switch – every type of interview to try to catch you off guard; befriend you, throw in a weird question here, anything to try to catch you off guard. But what evidently was apparent in hindsight was that the detectives did realise the fact that I was actually hiding something.

What he was hiding, of course, was not drugs, about which he knew very little, but that he had been exploring gay life in Sydney. After five hours he finally thought, 'I can't handle this anymore' and confessed to being gay, hoping to end the interview. They continued questioning Mark for another 20 minutes, finally leaving him alone, with some water and a sandwich.

However, this was not the end of the matter. As every other person found out to be gay, lesbian or bisexual during this era describes, the military police wanted to know everything. They returned to interrogate Mark again for another two or three hours. The questions were incredibly explicit: 'everything from the sexual positions that I did, how I did it, whether I was receptive, whatever ...'. The original tri-service policy on homosexuality had purported to protect Defence members from invasive investigations that unnecessarily violated their privacy. The 1974 guidelines stated:

Questions may be directed to establish the circumstances of the case, identify others involved and ascertain whether action on related matters, such as possible compromise on security, is required. Questions on the detail of sexual acts is to be avoided except to the minimum necessary to establish that homosexual conduct has in fact occurred and that the person concerned fully understands the nature of the allegations.

Such questions, as attested by Mark and others, were common practice during the ban era, even though they contravened the instructions. What the respective police were always most interested in obtaining were the names of other LGB Defence members.

The interrogation finally ended with the SIB officers claiming to be satisfied that he was not connected with the drug issue, and they declared that he was 'not a security risk anymore because you're out and our concern is that you could have been blackmailed for being gay'. A friend, a senior flight commander in the Air Force with legal training and responsibilities, told Mark that coming out was the right thing to do. Once Mark told them he was gay, they were under an obligation (or so it was said) to treat the matter with a degree of discretion. The ADF preferred a quick, clean, discreet break with LGB service personnel, rather than the long drawn-out process of court martial. Like all other LGB personnel caught under the ban, Mark had a choice: he could

either request his own honourable discharge, or contest the matter and receive a dishonourable discharge. Like the majority, Mark elected for the honourable discharge.

Most interview participants speak of their discharge – traumatic as it often was – being complete within a matter of days. For some unknown reason, Mark says that the whole process of discharge felt like months. He was in ‘total limbo land’, though he was still turning up to work and running the store in his unit. He recollects, ‘I was still out there, going out there shooting guns, throwing hand grenades, doing all the training and everything else, even though the fact that I knew that I felt part of me was like, “I’m doing this training; but why? At any stage this discharge is going to come through and it’s going to become irrelevant.”’ Mark only told one friend in his unit what happened, so presumably everything seemed business as usual to his other colleagues.

By day Mark’s Army life appeared normal, but inside he was desperate. He says, ‘I remember that was one of the most traumatic and stressful times in my life. I contemplated suicide many, many times. The anger that I actually felt, the self-hatred, the resentment was really, really awful’. Mark was a survivor. One gay officer from the RAAF, whose job included processing the discharge paperwork for homosexuals, remembers two gay men who suicided in the 1980s – one of whom was under investigation. Statistics on homosexual discharges over the period 1987–92, compiled in response to a question in a Senate Estimates Committee, also indicate that one of those under investigation suicided. We will never know the number of LGB Defence members who took their lives when they were caught for homosexuality or dressing in clothes associated with the opposite sex, not to mention the others who may have suicided as a result of bullying or witnessing the persecution that Mark had seen.

Mark loved the Army and had come to believe in many of the values that it stood for, yet he felt that he was being treated callously. Mark began visiting the Prahran sauna 55 Porter Street as a refuge. He was not necessarily there looking for sex; it was merely a space ‘where I wouldn’t have to worry about being seen because it wasn’t a public space. I wouldn’t have to drink and do what everyone else does at gay bars; I could sit there and have cups of tea if I wanted ... it was just somewhere I could just go, sit there on the lounge and be around other gay people and just be myself’. These places often operated as social places as well as sex venues. Porter Street was one of these types of venues,

sometimes assumed by outsiders to be brothels. They charged an entrance fee and then left men to hook up (or not) as they saw fit, without further money changing hands.

As the time dragged on, Mark's mental health deteriorated. On one occasion he was pushed too far and lashed out. Walking with a friend down Commercial Road in South Yarra – well-known for its variety of gay venues – a man verbally abused them, and then pushed and slapped them from behind. At first Mark told his mate to ignore the provocateur, but then suddenly:

That black rage that was there got unleashed; within five seconds, this guy was on the ground. I think I broke his jaw; I think I broke his nose – I definitely broke his nose because it was on the other side of his face. I know arguably one could say it was in self-defence because I definitely felt we were being threatened, but I mean it scared me the amount of rage that was actually loose.

Mark remembers that he felt that there was nowhere he could get help or support. While services such as the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard existed, given Mark's isolated history in the Army, it is not surprising that he was not aware of them. Scholars refer to the idea of 'community attachment' when discussing such matters – whether gay men or any other of the diverse identities that exist were actively participating in the community – reading the papers, listening to gay radio, attending social groups, protests or clubs. It seems Mark had little of this beyond Porter Street. The discharge finally went through in August 1988, which Mark describes as being a 'massive relief' at the time.

Mark briefly returned home, where he both reconciled with and came out to his father. Mark's words were: 'I play on both sides of the fence', which he reckoned was the easiest way to tell him. His father's response was: 'Oh, I thought that might have been the case'. For about 12 to 18 months, his father would say, 'It's a stage you're going through. You'll grow out of it.' Eventually, Mark's dad realised he would not grow out of it and accepted Mark: 'So, in that respect my dad has been very, very supportive.' Over the years Mark has grown close to his siblings as well, though he believes they do not entirely approve of his lifestyle. Still, he regularly talks to them and their kids know that Uncle Mark is gay.

By the time of his dismissal Mark was starting to put together a new life. Like most gay servicemen who were not officers, his circle had really been among civilians.

He returned to Melbourne, first working a night job pressing socks for a manufacturer, and then he got a job as a tram conductor and tram driver. He had friends, knew where to go, and started living in a four-bedroom house in Hawthorn where all of the residents were gay. By now he was completely out. He recalls:

I basically decided then while one does not have to be obvious about one's sexuality, I'm never going to hide it, which the irony has been that – I mean, since then I've worked in the building industry quite extensively and even had guys actually come up and say to me: 'Oh Mark, such-and-such, so-and-so is saying you're gay'. And my comeback would be: 'No, I'm not, but my boyfriend is', and they would not believe me because I was not the gay stereotype. Maybe through conditioning or that I'd learned to hide it, but I just figured that I was comfortable enough with myself that I didn't have to be [flamboyant].

Mark's reference to the building industry, which he began working in around 1994 after he survived a bout of cancer, is an important one. Working as a builder was a way to regain weight and fitness that he had lost through the cancer treatment. Though stereotypes suggest the hyper-masculine building industry to be a homophobic environment, Mark's experience did not find it to be so: 'I put it down to the fact that most people actually got to know me for being "Mark" first before they found out I was gay.'

Mark was aware of the extent of homophobia still in society. One night standing outside Mandate, a gay dance club in St Kilda, a police van went by and used its PA to abuse those outside: 'Get off the street, you AIDS-ridden faggots!' Victoria Police in the 1990s were renowned for such homophobic views. The most famous example was the police raid at Tasty Nightclub in Melbourne's CBD in August 1994, when they detained all of the patrons for up to seven hours looking for drugs, and strip-searched hundreds of them. Mark was going to join friends at Tasty that night, but something came up at the last minute and he cancelled. After the Tasty raid, the public backlash, lawsuit and massive compensation paid out to the patrons marked a turning point, and the Victorian Police set up the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLOs). Incidentally, a RAAF airman interviewed for this project *was* caught up in the Tasty Nightclub raid. By then the

ban was lifted and he was open about his sexuality, but it still made for some uncomfortable conversations with his commanding officer the following week.

Around 1998, Mark's then-partner was accepted into the University of New South Wales. Mark packed up his life on about three days' notice and moved to Sydney. He answered an advertisement in the local paper looking for an operations manager at a commercial furniture company. Mark attributes his success in that role to a mixture of his experience in the building industry and his logistics and ordnance training from the Army. After a few years Mark changed careers and started working in a call centre for American Express. For 8½ years he worked his way up the corporate ladder, retiring with a 'golden handshake' as a senior account executive. Since then he has been living a more laid-back life, still doing some handyman jobs here and there, but essentially enjoying an early retirement with his partner of almost ten years.

In Sydney Mark had more involvement in the advocacy and support side of the LGBT community. For years he volunteered as a coordinator with the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON), helping to organise fundraising activities. He currently volunteers for an ACON peer outreach program at one of the gay saunas/sex clubs, wearing a t-shirt emblazoned 'Sexpert, ask me anything'. This is Mark's way of giving back to the community, answering patrons' questions about sex and sexual health. He has coordinated floats for Mardi Gras. One was called Cheerleaders for Love, organised for a friend's fiftieth birthday, which ended up with a contingent of 80 marchers wearing white netball skirts, pom poms and gold 'tis-tant-tizzle' wigs. The other float was around the theme, Pretty in Pink. For that float, 'I made myself a gladiator's outfit from scratch – spent God knows how many hours sewing and sticking glitter everywhere. I think the only way I finally got rid of the glitter out of the carpet in this room we're sitting in now was when they pulled up the old carpet and replaced it.'

All up Mark served only 11 months in the Army, but he is included because Mark's story is one of survival. The traumas in particular are the events that stand out, but sadly are not unique. Looking back he observes: 'I haven't made a complete stuff-up of my life so therefore things can't be too bad'. The treatment Mark experienced for being gay killed all loyalty he felt to the Army, and not surprisingly the ex-services associations hold little attraction for him, nor does he march on Anzac Day. He

recognises that things have changed in the ADF, and he believes that further progress will need the 'dinosaurs to die out' before homophobia will be eradicated once and for all. As he best puts it:

The irony is now actually having spoken to military personnel – serving military personnel – in the last couple of years who were saying, 'We now have to do diversity training and everything', it just seems so bittersweet because it would have been a job and a career that I would have loved to have continued doing, but unfortunately, that was taken away from me because that was the status quo back then.

Section 3:

From Tolerance to Inclusion, 1993–2018

Repealing the ban on LGB service meant an end to witch-hunts and the fear of being dismissed from the Australian Defence Force (ADF). It did not end homophobia, nor did it mean transgender members could openly serve or transition. The most obvious way that LGB Defence members still faced institutional discrimination was the ADF's unwillingness to recognise same-sex partners. Throughout the 1990s numerous LGB members lodged applications for their partners to be recognised, and consistently the ADF rejected them because the policy specifically defined a de facto spouse as someone of the opposite sex. Some LGB members lodged redresses of grievance that went as high as the Chief of the Defence Force. In 1997, then-Flight Lieutenant Mike Seah even wrote a letter to the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel, Bronwyn Bishop, stating: 'Although we are no longer discharged on the grounds of our sexual orientation (which I might add should not be relevant to one's employment in any case), ADF members who are in same-sex relationships are being actively discriminated against.' He did not receive a favourable response, and the redresses were all denied.

The push to extend benefits to same-sex partners essentially proceeded in two phases: one around 1994–97 led by the advocacy group G-Force, and one around 2002–05 led by the successor organisation DEFGLIS. With the advent of active combat operations in East Timor (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the new push from DEFGLIS gained some political traction. In December 2005, the ADF unexpectedly changed its policy on de facto recognition to be gender neutral, thus allowing same-sex couples access to full benefits such as travel allowances, housing and compassionate leave. It would not be until 2009 that the Department of Veterans' Affairs updated its policies to recognise same-sex couples as well.

The period between 1993 and 2005 is best viewed as an era of tolerance. Those men and women who did come out were pioneers who often endured taunts, bullying or gossip. Commanding officers often turned a blind eye to homophobia and sometimes treated LGB members more harshly. Those brave enough to come out were often in non-combat roles, and lesbians and bisexual women tended to be more accepted than gay or bisexual men. In 1994 RAAF members David Mitchell and Stacie Watson founded G-Force as a support group for LGB members of the ADF. The association printed a semi-regular newsletter, initiated the abovementioned advocacy, hosted social meet-ups and in 1996 organised the first Defence contingent at Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. G-Force never had a large membership base, but still it provided the first co-ordinated visibility of LGB service members.

Transgender members of the ADF did not fit into this period of tolerance. The first time the ADF formally addressed transgender service was in 1996 as part of the institution's submission to a Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee inquiry into the proposed Sexuality Discrimination Bill. The ADF submission and committee testimony opposed transgender service because of the supposed confusion it created around gender roles, and using the same troop morale argument that had been espoused for decades to defend the LGB ban. The ADF spokesperson claimed that those members who wished to transition could discharge, have gender reassignment surgeries, and would be welcome to re-enlist under their new gender.

In 2000, the ADF adopted DI(G) PERS 16-16: 'Trans-gender Personnel in the Australian Defence Force'. This was the first formal policy on transgender service, codifying what had been longstanding practice. The summative statement in the policy said, 'Consistent with the current ADF medical and recruiting policy, a person undergoing or contemplating gender reassignment cannot be considered suitable for service in the ADF because of the need for ongoing treatment and/or the presence of a psychiatric disorder.' The directive said that the ADF could enlist candidates who had undergone gender reassignment surgery, but the policy was generally interpreted as a ban on transgender service. Moreover, the directive would preclude service for those transgender people who did not undergo gender reassignment surgery. Of course, there

were already transgender members of the ADF living with gender dysphoria, unable to retain their jobs if they transitioned.

In 2009, Army Captain Bridget Clinch revealed her intention to transition. The Army dismissed her in line with DI(G) PERS 16-16, but Bridget lodged a claim in the Australian Human Rights Commission. Like the HREOC case nearly 20 years earlier, this proved to be the spark that forced the ADF to reassess its ban on transgender service. A second, internal challenge from RAAF member Amy Hamblin compounded the pressure on the ADF. In September 2010, the ADF announced the repeal of DI(G) PERS 16-16, meaning that transgender members could now openly enlist, serve and transition within the ADF. Moreover, in line with policies guaranteeing health care to all of its members, the ADF would pay for all members' treatment for gender dysphoria, including gender reassignment surgeries.²³

These two major turning points – the 2005 recognition of same-sex de facto partners, and the 2010 reforms to transgender service – marked the ADF's transition from passive tolerance to actively pursuing inclusion of diverse sexualities and gender identities. DEFGLIS began marching at Mardi Gras in 2008 and since 2013 they have marched in uniform. The ADF incorporates LGBT people into its Diversity and Inclusion strategies and has sent Defence Force Recruiting to major LGBT events such as Melbourne's Midsumma Carnival, Sydney's Fair Day and Feast Festival in Adelaide. The RAAF has published two diversity guides relating to LGB service and one titled 'Transitioning Gender in Air Force'. High-ranking members of the ADF have attended the DEFGLIS-organised Military Pride Balls, including the Vice Chief of the Defence Force and the Surgeon General of the ADF. The ADF leadership's emphasis on inclusion accelerated dramatically after 2011, when the national media reported on an incident at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) where a male cadet secretly broadcast himself over Skype having sex with a female cadet. This one story set off a flurry of reports and government inquiries which exposed longstanding problems of physical and sexual abuse in the ADF. Though most of these reports focused primarily on women, they did include cases of abuse and harassment of LGBT members. Subsequently, the ADF leadership have pushed for cultural change within the ADF, and part of that cultural change has entailed taking a strong stand against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

From 2013–15, one of the most high-profile faces of the ADF was the Chief of Army’s speechwriter, Lieutenant Colonel (later RAAF Group Captain) Cate McGregor. As an openly transgender servicewoman, McGregor came to prominence after Lieutenant General David Morrison’s viral video message telling those soldiers who could not respect women to ‘get out’. She was first profiled on the ABC program *One Plus One*, and subsequently had appearances on *Q&A*, profile pieces in the LGBT and mainstream press, delivered a National Press Club address and was even nominated by Queensland for 2016 Australian of the Year (an honour which she subsequently requested to be rescinded). Since leaving the ADF in early 2016, McGregor has been a regular media speaker, a Fairfax newspaper columnist and ABC cricket commentator. In April-May 2018 the Sydney Theatre Company even staged a biographical play titled *Still Point Turning: The Catherine McGregor Story*. McGregor has significantly raised the public profile of not only LGBT service members, but of transgender Australians more widely.

In many ways, though, what happened to McGregor is symbolic of the wider issues confronting LGBT Australians in the contemporary ADF. On the one hand, they are welcomed and have even been able to rise to prominent positions. On the other hand, they can be caught in the crossfire of the culture wars, targeted personally by trolls and bullies both within the ADF and civilian Australia. As the opening chapter revealed, conservative media have been keen to attack the ADF’s strong advocacy and support for LGBT diversity and inclusion. The comments attached to online news articles and on various ADF Facebook posts have contained numerous hateful remarks – sometimes from current or formerly serving Defence members.

Conservative attacks on the ADF have especially targeted the uniformed Mardi Gras march and transgender service. For instance, in July 2016, at the direction of the Attorney-General, the ADF updated its policies to allow members to identify their gender as male, female or ‘Indeterminate / Intersex / Unspecified (X)’. This is the first policy even to mention intersex members and has opened the door to non-binary Defence members. In September 2017, *The Australian* reported that the ADF had ‘recruited personnel who don’t identify as male or female, including one of the nation’s first gender-neutral cadets.’²³ The story about ‘Cadet X’ – the first openly non-binary cadet at

ADFA – prompted the Minister for Defence Personnel to instruct the Department of Defence to find a legal exemption from recognising non-binary members.²³

The *Daily Telegraph* published its first beat-up article about taxpayer-funded gender reassignment surgeries in June 2015. This was shortly after the ADF coincidentally introduced a new policy on transgender healthcare that made it more difficult for members to access such surgeries. In October 2017, after more sensational headlines in the Murdoch press, some conservative politicians questioned the ADF's continuing funding of gender reassignment surgeries. The Defence Minister, Senator Marise Payne, quickly quashed any suggestion to cut healthcare provision for transgender members, asserting: 'Gender dysphoria is managed in accordance with best practice clinical guidelines, under the same principles as any other health condition ... If a member of the ADF is diagnosed or treated for gender dysphoria, Defence will fund the medical procedures or support as prescribed by the treating doctor'.²³

The ADF has come a long way in the 25 plus years since lifting the ban on LGB military service. It is by no means a perfect institution, and change has come at a slow pace. Particularly in the first decade of open service, LGBT members continued to endure bullying and harassment that could leave significant mental scars. Yet, the ADF's ability to adapt over the past two decades shows the ways that strong leadership can influence the organisation's culture. Rather than recoil at criticism, the current ADF leadership has taken a strong stance to affirm its commitment to diversity and inclusion, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, religion or other affiliation. Their reasoning is best articulated in an April 2016 letter to *The Australian* signed by the five service chiefs:

Diversity is not about identity politics it is about improving the quality of the workplace, it's the antidote to group think – gaining a wider range of perspectives to make better decisions and, in the military context, enhancing our capability, that often intangible concept that is manifest in the conduct of military operations be that in combat or non-combat situations.²³

David Mitchell

David Mitchell was the first person we interviewed for this project. It was at a park in Southbank along the Brisbane River, where as the sun went down he shared his incredible life story. David was the president and founder of G-Force: the first organisation dedicated to supporting serving lesbian, gay and bisexual Defence members. G-Force existed at a particular moment in ADF history. The ban on LGB service had just been lifted, but this did not necessarily mean that LGB members were welcomed or even treated as equals. G-Force existed to challenge the discrimination still facing LGB servicemen and women, especially fighting to extend partnership rights to same-sex couples. While G-Force had only limited success and lasted only a few years, its presence showed the importance of LGB visibility to advocate and support each other.

David's road to reformer was a rocky one. He was born in Toowoomba in 1961. His father was an accountant and his mother was a section manager at Woolworths. Because his father worked for the Bowen Farmers Association, David moved around various parts of Queensland. David attended Catholic schools throughout his upbringing. Though his family was not overly observant, the Catholic background would play a significant role in David's prolonged denial of his sexuality, as well as his troubled coming out process.

When David was 12, his father died from a cerebral brain haemorrhage on Christmas Day. The sudden death affected David for years, and he has regularly reflected on how his father would view the later events in his life. David remembers him as a loving dad, very involved with his family. David's father taught him life lessons, like 'everyone in this world is entitled to happiness as long as it's not at the expense of someone else'. David is sure that his father would have been supportive of his son being gay.

David was good at school and generally got on well, although he had developed a respect for rules and order that got up the nose of some of his fellow students who saw

him as a goody two-shoes. Fortunately David's ability to defend himself allowed him to fend off bullies. David's father had been opposed to fighting, but had been an amateur boxer and had taught David to fight. He was able to put this to good use on at least two occasions. David jokes that perhaps these incidents, as well as his adherence to rules and regulations, show that he was 'destined to be in the military'.

David was an adolescent in the 1970s who thought he was heterosexual. This is not uncommon among gay and bisexual men, and David has no memories of grappling with his sexuality during his youth. However, in a wider arena, homosexuality was becoming visible in places like Sydney, and law reform was gaining traction in South Australia and Victoria. Even in Queensland, a more conservative state, there was an activist presence in Brisbane through CAMP Queensland. Like its counterparts in other states, CAMP Queensland was involved in demonstrations and focused its advocacy primarily to push for law reform and to end discrimination in areas such as employment. The University of Queensland's Campus CAMP even sent a letter to members of the Whitlam Government in 1974 calling for an end to discrimination in the public service and 'especially in relation to the Armed Forces and employment in security and classified areas'. Acting Prime Minister Jim Cairns wrote back: 'the public view of the special character of the Services would be seriously eroded if open tolerance of homosexual behaviour was to be accepted policy.'²³ Of course, being a young teenager far removed from the small gay activist circles, David had no awareness of CAMP.

The possibility of a military career first came to David during a Defence recruiter's visit to his school. At first he and his mates were not interested, though during Grade 12 he pondered the possibility of joining the ADF. David thought the military could offer a good life, but he also considered enrolling in a Bachelor of Business Studies at university. In the end he let fate (or perhaps the wheels of the bureaucracy) decide for him: the ADF got back to him first. David ruled out Navy because he was not able to swim well. He opted for the Air Force because he thought it would be more high-tech than Army. Reflecting on the decision to enlist, David says: 'I wanted to join for patriotic reasons because I wanted to do something for my country. And as I say, that hopefully shows through in my life to other people too is that I've always wanted to sort of do something and make a difference in this world.'

David commenced recruit training in 1979 as a fresh-faced 17-year-old at RAAF Base Edinburgh in Adelaide. It was a culture shock to enter this new world of discipline, regimentation and hierarchy. David did not see, nor was he the victim of, any bastardisation rituals so often reported from this era, normally in the form of assaults against new recruits or those who did not quite fit in. Yet, he does remember that the language and treatment dealt out by the instructors would be unacceptable by today's standards. David also missed his mum, who had been his best mate since his father died, and he gave serious consideration to taking advantage of the get-out option available during the first six weeks. She encouraged him to stick it out, which turned out to be a smart decision: David served for another 24 years!

David entered the Communication Operator Mustering (Comms Op), a field he describes as a Defence version of Telstra. The technology developed rapidly during his service years from typing and telephones through to more sophisticated equipment and ever more challenging tasks. Before emails and internet, it was their role to operate communications equipment, sending and receiving messages across the globe. The mustering went through several amalgamations and name changes, eventually becoming Communications and Information Systems Controllers. David remembers the communications work varied from 'the most boring seemingly mundane stuff like, okay this person's got to go this ... transfer or a posting, or it could be communicating plans for a military exercise or it could be communicating information to do with an actual operational event, or it could be one of the places I worked out we'd be typing up flight plans for aircraft movements'.

David's career took him up the ranks within the communications musterings to Flight Sergeant in postings all over Australia. These included significant leadership roles, such as 2IC of the communications centre at the Russell Offices (ADF Headquarters) in Canberra. Eventually, David ended up in Strategic Communications at RAAF Base Amberley in Brisbane. The work was sensitive and even today he cannot be forthcoming about it. He also moved into the information systems area where he showed a particular aptitude.

The ban on LGB service was still in place in the first half of David's career, but interestingly this had no effect on him. David remembers there were other RAAF members who were homophobic, but he personally never had a problem with gays, lesbians or bisexuals. David still had no inkling of any difference in his sexuality for the first decade of his RAAF service. He was even engaged to a woman at one stage. When thinking about his own attitude before realising his homosexuality, David says: 'some people either have admitted to themselves or have been observed as being outwardly uncomfortable and phobic because they're struggling with their own sexuality, but that wasn't the case for me. I was just thinking, oh well, that's those people, that's them'. It was not until the 1990s that David started to have 'realisations'. This was coincidentally around the time of the lifting of the ban. David protests that 'I can honestly hold my hand on my heart and say that my coming out was not timed around this. Even so, he does acknowledge that the public discussion about LGB military service might have triggered him to think about his personal circumstances.

There were real obstacles David faced coming to terms with his sexuality. His family's faith was strong, and at one point he had considered resigning from the Air Force to become a priest. Coming out involved a lot of soul-searching. While the exact timing is a bit fuzzy in David's memory, he remembers being posted in Canberra; that was in 1992, before the ban was lifted in November. David did not know any other LGB people, and he genuinely worried 'that I was going to lose my friends, my family, if I was gay I'd lose my job'. He likens the inner turmoil to being pushed to a precipice of realisation – 'the lowest point of despair' – but he decided to act. He broke off his engagement. He went to see a civilian priest, not a military 'padre' as the chaplains are colloquially known. He was crying on the phone and not in much better shape when they finally met. He could barely say the words, but got it out eventually: 'I think I might be gay'. The priest reached over – and grabbed his crotch! With remarkable restraint, David threw his cup of tea across the room and stormed out.

At home David got out his rifle, stuck the barrel in his mouth ... and decided to ring his mum. David describes how this suicide attempt played out:

And just some safety mechanism in me made me ring my mum and I didn't tell her what I was upset about, but it was just ringing her to say goodbye basically. And then I'd say, 'Look I've got to go now; I've got to go and do something,' and I'd hang up, and then she just kept ringing me back because she wasn't going to let me finish a conversation crying and upset. So she just kept ringing me back until I'd got past that point.

He never did tell her that she saved his life that day. The theme of suicide – either contemplating or attempting – is present in several other oral history interviews. This is not surprising given the high rates of suicide within the LGBT community. Literature from the United States and Canada during the 1990s suggested that: gay and lesbian young people accounted for about 30 per cent of completed suicides; gay and bisexual men were 13.9 times more at risk of genuinely attempting suicide; and gay men accounted for 62.5 per cent of those who attempted suicide.²³ Australia's National LGBTI Health Alliance reported as recently as 2013 that same-sex attracted Australians had up to 14 times higher rates of suicide attempts, and 15.7 per cent of LGB Australians reported thoughts of suicide.²³ Among interview participants, suicidal thoughts were common in transgender stories, and some LGB members such as David mentioned contemplating or attempting suicide at some time. David's story as a survivor provides a window into the experience of LGBT Defence suicides.

David remained angry with life for a while and then suppressed it all again, thinking 'if this sort of thing's going to happen when you turn to someone to talk about it to try and work out whether you are or you aren't ... I just didn't want to go there'. Isolation can be a huge barrier to LGBT people accepting themselves. Isolation can mean lack of social support, no contact with the LGBT community, social withdrawal and ignorance about what it 'means' to be gay.²³ What changed David's outlook was his transfer to Perth later in 1992, where he started to meet gay civilians as well as supportive allies, including a fabulous straight housemate. She said things like: 'there's no rush; no one's going to be forcing you to make a decision one way or the other'. Over the next few months he started meeting gay and lesbian people and started to feel comfortable, even happy. Finding gay social networks proved, as psychology literature suggests, a vital tool to overcome his sense of shame and social isolation.²³ David even wound up

organising a group in the 1994 Perth Pride Parade known as the Marching Boys; they asked him to lead because of his military background.

David found a boyfriend and came out to his mum and his sister. They were all fine with it; he remembers his mother saying words to the effect of 'Well, you're the same son that I've always had, and you're my son and I love you'. His extended Catholic family, including his aunt the nun, were all fine too. She even asked about his partner, Albert, whom the family embraced.

Because David came out in his thirties and had no real inkling of his sexuality in his early years, he remembers what it was like to have straight attitudes. He always had an appreciation for diversity within the ADF, supporting other minority groups like Indigenous Australians and women. But he was aware that his views were not shared universally in the Air Force – and he remembers women, in particular, more likely to voice homophobic views than male colleagues. For this reason he was still uncertain about coming out in the workplace environment.

One night in Perth as David was heading into or out of Connections, one of Australia's oldest gay nightclubs, he ran into one of his junior ranks, a leading airman. A few days later there was a cautious conversation between David and the leading airman. There was never any discussion as explicit as 'oh are you gay?', but more a casual reference to the airman having seen David at Connections. As David recalls: 'The statement was never sort of made "Oh I'm gay" or "Are you gay?" It was just, I don't know, assumed, or it was just no big deal to him and ... it just sort of happened and it just became known.'

Later conversations with colleagues about the Perth Pride Parade and increasingly honest discussions about what he did on the weekend brought David steadily out. This manner of outing himself through casual conversation places a different spin on critics who say one should be quiet about their (homo/bi)sexuality in the workplace. Americans who served under 'don't ask, don't tell' describe such casual conversations as one of the ways the policy oppressed them. Even if military officials could not formally ask about members' sexuality, anytime someone asked 'What are you doing this weekend?' was

another form of asking.²³ For David and other LGB members to be truly comfortable, he needed to be able to talk about what he did outside of work.

By and large, people coped. David's superiors were often very supportive. He tells the story of one sergeant who would leave the room whenever he entered, sit at a desk as far away as possible, and even wipe the phone receiver if David had used it (suggesting a degree of AIDS-phobia, too). David did not even notice until his corporal pointed it out. The corporal took it up with the sergeant directly; David says: 'She tore strips off him apparently and told him to grow up and then reported him to the officer in charge as well and the officer in charge had words with him as well. So yeah, that was the only sort of direct negative involvement that I had in the workplace.'

Having a supportive workplace also meant that, fortunately, David's career did not suffer as a result of coming out. LGB servicemen and women who were open in the 1990s report a mixture of acceptance, but also as the following chapter describes, serious bullying and career disruption. Among interview participants who were open about their sexuality in the 1990s, those who were accepted tended to be: in non-combat roles; longstanding members of the ADF with good relationships; specialist officers (e.g. doctor, pilot); or women. This is not to say that these men and women experienced no homophobia at all, but rather that they tended to have more support networks or resilience.

In 1993, David was selected to go to the United Kingdom to work with the Royal Air Force on Exercise Long Look – a professional development program which aimed to encourage a better knowledge and understanding between Australian and UK service members by posting them in each other's military. Although Australia allowed openly gay personnel, this was not the case in the United Kingdom, where the ban remained in place until 2000. While in the United Kingdom, David heard of at least one Royal Air Force member dismissed for homosexuality. David understood the sensitivities about sexuality, so he was inconspicuous while on base; when he was off base he lived an openly gay life.

As it happened, the *Independent* newspaper and the BBC were both taking an interest in the 'gays in the military issue'. The dismissed airman being profiled was the

friend of a friend. They thought that the fact David could serve openly was an example of what the United Kingdom might come to one day. Would David be prepared to speak? Would he appear in uniform? This was easier said than done. ADF authorities do not encourage their members to speak to the public about most matters – let alone about homosexuality in 1993 – so David knew he would need permission. The Defence Attaché at the Australian High Commission referred the question to the High Commissioner, who referred it to Defence Headquarters in Canberra, who referred it to the Prime Minister's Department. David describes the bureaucratic buck-passing: 'I think it was a classic hot potato because I think they were realising that this was a potential diplomatic incident in the making, because they [BBC] wanted me to appear in full uniform'. Back came the reply – it was a 'yes'. The letter from the Australian High Commission cautioned:

While Sergeant Mitchell is quite at liberty to quote the official Defence Force position regarding homosexuals in the Australian Defence Force, any comments made by him during the interview must be considered as his personal views. Sergeant Mitchell was advised to think very carefully before agreeing to take part in the documentary, purely for the protection of his own privacy, but no restrictions were placed upon him.

The interview on the program *Taking Liberties* went pretty well (especially after the producer gave David a scotch and milk to calm his nerves). Afterwards, the United Kingdom Defence establishment advised the ADF that they would rather not have David back again in the future. Media contacts informed David that the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence regarded him as a radical gay activist.

The Australians seem not to have got the message because the issue flared up again more dramatically in 1995. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence discovered that year's RAAF member on exchange was also gay. The RAAF sergeant was two and a half months into his four-month posting. The Royal Air Force ordered him off the Shrewsbury Base on 24 hours' notice. There had been no suggestion of 'sexual impropriety' on the airman's part, or that his sexuality had affected his work or been objected to by his British colleagues. They only became aware of his sexuality when he advised his superior, as a matter of courtesy, that he had been named in a Senate Inquiry as a gay member of the ADF. The Australians gave him a desk job at the High Commission in

London to serve out his time and assured him that there would be no negative career consequences. In fact, the sergeant enjoyed the rest of his time in London; he saw a lot of musicals!

The story broke in the British media and followed in Australia. The press reports indicated that the British Ministry of Defence was unhappy that Australia rebuffed their request not to send service members whose presence contravened British policy. ADF spokesman, Brigadier Adrian D'Hage, advised that the Australian policy around such postings would be reviewed, but noted pointedly: 'Our difficulty is that we don't ask people, before they go away, what their sexual preference is.'²³ From the British authorities' perspective it was inconvenient, coinciding with a looming court challenge to the British policy of excluding homosexuals. In the end that case went to the European Court of Human Rights, which in 2000 found for LGB rights, compelling the British government to lift their ban. Incidentally, yet another gay RAAF member was sent to the United Kingdom in 2000 to undertake a six month Diploma of Aviation Medicine. He was instructed not to make a fuss and to 'behave himself'; the UK ban was lifted one week after he arrived.

David spoke out about the case of the sergeant in the United Kingdom and was quoted in the Australian mainstream and gay and lesbian press. By this time, David was not just some random gay airman; he was the president of an organisation for LGB members of the ADF known as G-Force. The genesis of G-Force came from David's own traumatic coming out experience, combined with his brief stint as a 'radical gay activist' (to use the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence's misnomer). During his time in Britain, David found himself working closely with Rank Outsiders, a support group for LGB military personnel. David had shown a willingness to stand up and speak out; Rank Outsiders showed the value of organising and working with others. When David spoke to other Australian gay servicemen about their experiences coming out, he heard about challenges many faced in the workplace. He recalls men who were:

Still too frightened to come out at work because they were in such a macho or straight perceived area sort of thing. Like, there was a number of Army guys that just they said look they could never come out at work because they just felt that they would sort of get their head smashed in. So they just said, they just couldn't do it,

but that was good to have someone that they could ring up and talk to, or meet for a social catch up when they might have been going home.

In June 1994, David and a few mates – most notably RAAF airman Stuie Watson – drafted a constitution and G-Force was born. Any LGB current or ex-service person could join G-Force, and its seven objectives were to:

1. Provide support and guidance for gay service men and women – without infringing service laws.
2. Provide support and guidance for gay ex-service men and women – without infringing service laws.
3. Make contact with other national and international organisations involved in service life.
4. Collect information, from any source, that is relevant to the improvement of gay rights within the Australian Defence Force.
5. Encourage the Department of Defence to enhance its attitude towards homosexuality within the Defence Force.
6. Make contact with other national and international organisations, so as to encourage awareness and education regarding Gay lifestyle and their existence in the Australian Defence Forces.
7. Make contact with other national and international organisations, to participate and be involved in Gay community events.

G-Force operated in the days before internet, email and social media, so its existence mostly spread by word-of-mouth through ‘the few people that were out, and then they would have friends that they would know’. There were occasional features in the LGB press, and in June 1995 David published an announcement in *Air Force News*. Much of the media coverage focused on G-Force as a support network, with David writing that ‘I hope that through this group, gay service personnel will band together to form a strong network of support to help lessen the trauma felt by others as they go through the journey of coming out.’²³ G-Force had a post office box, published a semi-regular newsletter called the *Gayzette*, and eventually had a membership of approximately 35 members.

The ADF hierarchy's reaction to G-Force was initially supportive. A chaplain David consulted was encouraging, and all the way up the command level he found the same. This was all to change when David pitched a spectacular idea: G-Force wanted to march in the 1996 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. There had once before been somewhat of a Defence presence when a small group called 'Veterans Against Discrimination' marched in 1993 with an effigy of Victorian RSL President Bruce Ruxton. This, though, would be the first ever Mardi Gras contingent of serving ADF members, and is often seen as a moment in the unfolding story of the LGBT march towards equality. G-Force's presence would challenge ideas of gay men as weak or effeminate, showing LGB people who were serving in the ADF. David had another agenda as well, seeing Mardi Gras as a way to promote awareness of G-Force: 'the reason why I wanted to do that was to basically get that free publicity, I suppose, and let Defence personnel know that there was a support network there'. On 30 August 1995 David sent a letter to Brigadier D'Hage, Head of Defence Public Relations, advising: 'We are becoming a significant group within the Australian gay community and as such we feel we have the right to express ourselves in celebration of this position ... we are a group of individuals and as such we would like to be able to celebrate our community just as others celebrate theirs'.

The ADF hierarchy turned out to be not at all keen on the idea of G-Force marching in Mardi Gras. A senior officer rang David to 'strongly advise' him against marching in the parade. David explained that no one would be marching in uniform, as the ADF regulates public display of uniforms. Opposition was so strong that the senior officer said, 'If you go ahead with this I will ruin you'; David hung up. Even so, D'Hage stated to the media:

When we look at the charter of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Pty Ltd, it is not only a celebration of their sexuality, it is also a promotion ... The difficulty we have with that is that it is very doubtful as to whether an official defence force float is an appropriate vehicle to promote a particular lifestyle. We would make the same decision if they were participating in a heterosexual parade.²³

It was quite clear to all involved, including David and D'Hage, that this really was a homophobic reaction rather than some nuanced understanding of the meaning behind

Mardi Gras. Even so, David and the other G-Force members pushed ahead with the Mardi Gras float. They knew that as long as they did not march in uniform, the ADF could not legally stop them. In January 1996, the ADF changed its position and publicly announced that they would support a G-Force float in Mardi Gras so long as it was ‘non-military looking’ (in an oral history interview, D’Hage said they feared a ‘huge pink cardboard bloody tank with a condom over the barrel and a bloody great slouch hat over the turret’).

The contingent marched with maybe 10 or 20 people: some Defence personnel, some partners, some supportive friends. David remembers it as nerve-wracking, exciting and fun. Local and international media interviewed him, and the significance of what they were doing dawned on him. It had a personal resonance, for he realised how far he had come since his encounter with the abusive priest. He also was proud of the message G-Force sent to Australia and the world:

We were able to be ... out and proud in front of the world’s media and people in our own country and say that gay and lesbian people want to serve our country the same as straight people, the same as people from different other walks of life, nationalities that have come to Australia and become Australians and same as Indigenous people ... It just sort of was a good way to, from a gay man’s perspective, is to say look well we’re here too and we can make a difference in a good way as well.

G-Force only marched the one time in 1996 (though one G-Force member organised a smaller contingent under the banner Defence in Unity in 1999). Participating in Mardi Gras is not for the faint-hearted. The parade itself is exhilarating, but the preparation can be, as David found, ‘a logistical ... headache’: the truck, lighting, sound system and generator took time and money to organise and, because G-Force was not large, much of the effort fell to David and his partner. In 2016, to commemorate 20 years since the G-Force march, David, his partner and another G-Force alum were special guests of DEFGLIS and led the civilian Defence contingent in the Mardi Gras parade.

While Mardi Gras was G-Force’s most public event, they organised other smaller meet-ups and worked behind the scenes in an advocacy role for LGB rights in the ADF. Much of the discrimination that LGB service people encountered revolved around the

(non)recognition of their relationships. As early as 1993 the Army rejected a lesbian couple's application for recognition as a de facto couple. This meant that members could not receive partner benefits including travel allowances, housing, carer's leave, education programs, counselling or veterans' pensions. Several G-Force members lodged applications to recognise their relationships and appealed the rejections as high as the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF). There was a personal element in this: David had a partner at the time. Unfortunately these appeals came to nought. The CDF, General John Baker, responded to one G-Force member's redress of grievance in October 1996: 'While you argue that the common [social] standard requires that the discrimination you complain of should be removed, I do not believe that common standards make such a demand.'

Under David's leadership, G-Force had success in a military health insurance scheme and spousal base access. The head of the insurance scheme (now Defence Health) worked with David, successfully arguing that denying benefits to same-sex partners violated provisions of the *National Health Act* as discrimination based on sex. This reform emphasises the important role of cultural change that had been going on in Australia more broadly, and the way in which it generated allies for LGB people. G-Force also successfully secured the spouse base passes, but by the end of the decade there was only other recognition for same-sex partners. Senator Jocelyn Newman, Minister Assisting the Minister of Defence, explained: 'A serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) member may nominate a same-sex partner as their next of kin for casualty notification purposes only. The same-sex partner would be notified in the event of the ADF member being the subject of a casualty report.'²³

G-Force may have been small, but its operation was a lot of work for David and Vice President Stuie Watson. They were the organisation's public face both within the ADF and whenever there were media inquiries about LGB Defence issues. They also copped anonymous abuse – what we now call trolling – through their post office box. An August 1995 *Melbourne Star Observer* article quoted David saying:

The strange mail is just weird, rather than threatening. The police are investigating these postcards someone is sending me. One picture was of koalas, another was a

picture of a military aircraft, another was a religious one. But the one that spooked me the most was a picture of a grave site. I feel like putting out a bulletin saying, 'please get to the point, I never was very good at cryptic crosswords'.²³

By about 1998 (David does not remember the exact time), the G-Force work was putting strain on David and Stuie. Without a new team to take over the leadership, G-Force disbanded. It would be up to the next generation of LGBT Defence leaders to continue the fight to end discrimination against same-sex partners, not to mention the restrictions prohibiting transgender service.

David left the RAAF in 2002 when the prospect of his being reclassified and posted back to Sydney came up. He and his partner had only recently moved to Brisbane and the thought of another relocation set David thinking: 'I'd been in the military then by that stage for roughly ... 24 years, so I'd served my country for long enough ... and so I thought, well I'll get out'. He had an interest in building, and had renovated his house, and he ended up working in the Australian Taxation Office. He had no particular training in tax, but the habits and skills he had developed in the RAAF prepared him well. His military training, reading orders, interpreting them and acting on them stood him in good stead. Above all, he was in a job helping his colleagues in the Australian Taxation Office navigate the vagaries of superannuation. David sees similarities in that both his military and civilian careers involved helping: 'Whether it's serving your country through Defence or helping people out with their superannuation concerns ... it's just something that flows on'.

David's connection to the gay community has remained strong. He got involved with a Brisbane leather pride group called BootCo, which organises social gatherings and raises money for LGBT charities. In 2009 he won the Mr Queensland Leather competition, observing that 'a key word there that people could pick up on is uniforms. You know how you say you can take the boy out of the military, but you can't take the military out of the boy'. He remains an enthusiast for the diversity of the LGBT community, whether that be religious, sexual, or anything else.

Though David did not deploy on active service, he has had some health problems related to his RAAF service. David has a number of skin cancers ('hundreds and

hundreds') which he traces back to frequent exposure to the sun during outdoor activities, and a chemical warfare training that he did in Britain in which the participants were required to remove their protective gear. David had a decade-long struggle with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) for compensation for the physical and psychological damage that he had suffered. He found the Veterans' Advocacy Service, a group of ex-service personnel who know their way around the rules and regulations and the inner workings of DVA, to be his best advocates. Many other LGBT ex-service members have also had difficulties dealing with DVA – a complaint common regardless of gender identity or sexuality – and found that organisations such as the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia, Mates4Mates and Soldier On have been effective at assisting ex-service members to navigate the DVA bureaucracy. These groups also provide services such as counselling where government programs fall short.

David is also one of several LGBT ex-service members who does not speak fondly of the RSL. For some, such as David, it is simply a dislike for how the organisation operates and consider it to be ineffective at supporting most ex-service personnel. Other LGBT ex-service members note the organisation's long homophobic history, dating back to the when Victorian RSL President Bruce Ruxton turned away a group of gay ex-servicemen from laying a wreath at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance on Anzac Day 1982.²³ When the Keating Government lifted the LGB ban, the RSL was a huge critic of the decision, and continued to oppose LGB service throughout the 1990s. In 2000, the RSL national president still spoke publicly against gays in the military. The organisation even sent a submission to a Senate Inquiry that: alleged gay men were paedophiles; presented misinformation about the spread of HIV; and even argued 'Homosexuals invite rejection and unfortunately occasional violent retaliation by deliberately engaging in public conduct which offends the sensibilities of many Australians.'²³ At some stage in the mid 2000s the RSL changed its tune and stopped making noise about LGBT service. Even so, there are many ex-service members who are wary of the organisation because of its homophobic past.

David is proud of his time in the Air Force and of being one of those prepared to put their lives on the line for their country. He says, 'If you haven't served you just won't quite ever fully understand what it's like'. He believes that those who have served

deserve the 'utmost respect', and he includes in that, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender service personnel. He is proud of the way the ADF continues to improve employment conditions for LGBT members and looks forward to a time when they do not have any special recognition, but rather that their service will be taken for granted within the ADF. If and when that time comes, it will be due in part to the work of David, G-Force and the other advocates like them.

Matt Cone

In 2015, while browsing the gay publication *Capital Q*, we stumbled across an 8 March 1996 article entitled 'Seamen charged for sex on ship'. The story described an intriguing case of two sailors, one openly gay, charged for unacceptable sexual behaviour for allegedly trying to engage in oral sex. It was striking how detailed the reports of the Defence Magistrate proceedings were, including naming the accused: Matthew Cone. When we tracked down Matt, he revealed that the incident in the press only grazed the surface of the difficulties he experienced in the Navy as an openly gay man in the 1990s. Matt had not thought about his Navy service for years, and he had never spoken about that part of his life. Revisiting that time was an opportunity finally to confront demons that haunted Matt unknowingly for the last 20 years, and just telling his story was, as Matt put it, an empowering experience.

Matt Cone was born in Scone in the Hunter Valley in 1974. His father was a shearer and then a plant operator in the coal mines, and his mother worked as a swim instructor. Matt remembers, even in his early years, feeling attracted to other guys, though it was not a sexual attraction. He explains how he liked to hold his best friend's hand in primary school, and he would miss him after school. Matt also recalls being fond of a male teacher, feeling a desire or longing that he could not quite explain as same-sex attraction at the time.

Matt had an active childhood and was a keen swimmer. Swimming mates became a big part of Matt's social circle and, as he grew into adolescence, they also became part of Matt's sexual awakening. From about age 13 to 15, Matt used to visit one swimming mate's house almost every day after school, where they used to fool around in the lounge room. They stopped when the mate got a girlfriend, but this did not make Matt's feelings go away. He was heartbroken that the mate moved on, and Matt came to realise that this was not just about one person: he was sexually attracted to men. Matt found posters of

good-looking male singers appealing, and he thought of men when he masturbated. He also continued to long for his mate. After years of rejection from that same mate, Matt finally realised that it was not meant to be, and he became determined to get out of Scone.

When Matt was at a swimming championship in Sydney, the ADF happened to have a stall set up. Matt was 16, about to start Grade 11, and his young life was at a crossroads. A Defence career seemed like a viable option where Matt could learn a trade and see the world. It was Matt's grandfather, a returned serviceman himself, who suggested that Matt join the Navy because he would travel more than in the other services. Matt recalls responding to his grandfather: 'But aren't you a sitting duck? You're sitting out in the water in a bloody ship, and a missile comes at you you're a sitting duck. At least in the Army you run up the hill or hide or something.' When the careers counsellor mentioned that Navy were recruiting more than the other services, Matt was sold and put in the enlistment paperwork. Early in 1992 he received a phone call that he was accepted in the Navy. Matt withdrew from Grade 12 and spent the next few months with his parents before his Navy service commenced.

Matt's start date of 21 July 1992 was just over four months before the Keating government lifted the ban on LGB service. In June 1992 the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, announced that the ban would remain, so there was every indication that gay men such as Matt would have to stay in the closet for the foreseeable future. Matt remembers homosexuality was raised during his recruitment:

What you got to do when you're going through the [recruitment] process and all this, and these were our things we don't accept: criminal record, homosexuality, all that kind of stuff. So it was already in your mind. So you just went in and the psychs are sitting there asking questions, and you answer, you told them what they wanted to hear.

Often recruit training can be a lonely time when sailors have to adjust to a new set of norms, regimentation and discipline. For Matt, recruit school at HMAS *Cerberus* was quite the opposite: a liberating experience. He had been accustomed to 4 am wake-ups before school for swim training; getting up every morning for a jog at 6.00am was like a

sleep-in. Matt's mother was such a strict disciplinarian that he had no problems whatsoever adapting to Navy life. Matt's athletic upbringing also prepared him well for the fitness standards. He was receiving wages for the first time, and he took full advantage of this newfound freedom.

HMAS *Cerberus* is about 80 kilometres from Melbourne, so Matt would spend his weekends exploring the city and even regional areas like Bendigo, Ballarat and the Goldfields. It was by accident (or perhaps kismet) that Matt stumbled across the Peel Hotel in Collingwood. Matt watched as two men, one in a crop top, entered the bar, and he followed them inside. Matt was blown away by what he saw: a room full of sexy guys drinking, dancing and showing affection to one another. Matt remembers:

I looked over and there's two guys kissing, and it's like: 'Wow, and you can do this in this room! You can do that without getting abused or punched, or anything like that.' And then I had an experience with a guy that day, and I still remember being very nervous and I went back to his house.

The next morning Matt went back to his hotel feeling shame about this first sexual experience since his high school mate. He kept it to himself when he returned to *Cerberus*, but that night had opened up a brand-new world.

Matt started visiting gay hangouts and clubs and dressing more flamboyantly, wearing tight Bonds t-shirts, skinny jeans and bracelets. He was conscious that he could be kicked out of the Navy if he were caught. He also knew about the ostracism he could face if there was even a suspicion of being gay. At Matt's recruit school was a guy named Donoghue whom Matt describes as 'obviously gay as a bag of butterflies'. Matt does not recall anyone physically bullying or taunting Donoghue, but there was a lot of gossip behind his back.

There was no chance that poor guy ever had of making a friend. And I felt sorry for him. But I wouldn't befriend him because I'd be part of that then. So, it was guilt by association. So, you kept your distance from him. And the guy had a heart of gold. He was one of the hardest workers, he was nice to everyone, but he had no other option but to go off and sort of side with the girls a bit, hang out with them. So he was categorised without his choice, he was just being himself. He didn't ever admit he was gay. They stereotyped him. And then I saw that with a lot of other people, the

people who went up and associated themselves with him were then known as the Fag Bag.

Donoghue left the Navy after recruit school. The social ostracism, and the very fear Matt felt, sent a clear message about not only being gay in the Navy, but being *perceived* to be gay. Such a hostile environment sent Matt deep into the closet. Indeed, Matt says that he stopped visiting the Melbourne gay bars and sex shops after only a few weeks.

Carrying the secret of his sexuality set Matt into the double life that so many other servicemen and women had to bear. He was never comfortable with the idea of lying, but he proved adept at weaving stories to cover up his extracurricular activities. The other guys sometimes dragged Matt to brothels, and Matt had to concoct lies to explain why he was not partaking: ‘I’d say, “I can’t afford one [sex worker]. But I’ll look after your stuff. I’ll just sit here and wait for you.”’ Matt set a goal: get through the 12 weeks of recruit school and then the seven weeks of category school, where Matt would train to be a steward. After that, get posted to Sydney.

Matt studied hard at category school; a steward’s role was essentially to look after the officers in every way from serving their meals, to doing their laundry, to working the bar at functions. Matt was in the final weeks of category school when, on 23 November 1992, the Keating Government repealed the ban on LGB military service. Matt remembers the news being reported in the magazine *Navy News*, but otherwise there were no formal announcements. When Matt was posted to HMAS *Watson* in Sydney, it was quite clear that a change in policy did not mean it would be safe for him or other gay sailors to come out. He describes the men at *Watson* as ‘some of the hardest, toughest sailors I’d met, and they [believed] there should be two things that shouldn’t be at sea: poofs and women’. Matt remembers one night: ‘I had been in a car with a bunch of sailors and they’d driven through Oxford Street one night on the way back out to HMAS *Watson* and they’d gone past the Albury and they wound their windows down and all yelled out, “Faggot! You’re dead cunts!” Horrible words.’ On another occasion, he remembers the sailors throwing a beer bottle out the window as they drove down Oxford Street. The incidents confirmed what Matt already learned at *Cerberus*: gays were not welcome in the Navy.

These experiences reinforced Matt's decision to continue living a double life even though the rules said he could no longer be discharged for being gay. One night at the Beresford Hotel in Surry Hills, Matt felt a tap on the shoulder: it was one of the cooks from *Watson*, surprised to see Matt. Matt remembers saying, "I'm bi." He's like, "Really?" I said, "I don't fucking know, Adam. I don't know." And that was the first guy who helped me out ... and through that night I basically came out to him, and said this is what I am'. Adam turned out to be a lifeline; for the first time Matt had a gay friend, and not only that – he was a gay sailor who understood the homophobic work environment. Matt says:

He was living the same thing where he wasn't telling anyone on the base he was gay. He was just going home, going out to these places, putting his baseball cap on and his stylish clothes, you'd hardly recognise him, and living his real life ... It only took that one guy in the Navy to empower me, that I wasn't the only guy in the Navy.

The year 1993 was big for Matt. He came out to his family during a visit home. His parents were accepting and only asked that Matt be discreet when in town. His brothers were uncomfortable about Matt's sexuality at first, but over the next five years they came to accept Matt and even started accompanying him to bars on Oxford Street. Meanwhile, other sailors became clued up about Matt's sexuality because they figured out he was frequenting the gay scene. A disapproving warrant officer had Matt posted to the destroyer *HMAS Derwent* based out of Western Australia. The *Derwent* deployment turned out to be a positive, memorable experience as Matt's first overseas deployment. It was a farewell tour before the ship was decommissioned, visiting Borneo, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Tonga, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and every Australian state. Matt took full advantage of these travel opportunities, going on treks in the mountains, seeing the orangutans in Borneo, and avoiding some of the seedier sexploits crew members took part in at the various ports.

It was not discussed, but shipmates on the *Derwent* were aware that Matt was not straight. Matt was not the target of specific homophobia, but he did hear casual homophobic comments: "So everything was a poofter," if they hit themselves with the hammer; "You fucking faggot", if someone jumped the queue in the meal line, but nothing was aimed at me or anything like that.' Men regularly wandered around nude in

the mess and expressed no signs of discomfort around Matt. The tolerance shown towards Matt continued longstanding patterns about the importance of discretion for gay servicemen to be treated as part of the team. When visiting the Australian ports, Matt would quietly go off to explore the gay bars, usually staying in a hotel room. He says, 'I was worried about people seeing me or associating me with that kind of stuff [gay culture], because in the DE [destroyer escort] world you could go from hero to zero in no time ... you could be really popular on a ship; something happens, the whole crew just turns their back on you'. Matt would learn this lesson all too well two years later. On this deployment, though, Matt's crewmates remained respectful. They even pointed out that a sexual tryst Matt had in Hobart was illegal, as Tasmania did not decriminalise male homosexual acts until 1997.

Two major incidents surrounding Matt's homosexuality stand out in his Navy career, the first of which happened in 1993. The *HMAS Derwent* was hosting a cocktail party in Devonport, Tasmania, for new officers who were joining the crew. Matt was tending the bar and serving drinks. One lieutenant was drunk and as Matt recalls: 'He walked up and he grabbed me on the cock, like a whole handful and gave it a bit of a rub like that. And I'm like, I was the youngest one at the three people it happened to, and I said, "Sir, come on, that's enough"'. The same officer went to the ward room and groped two other male stewards, one of whom punched the officer. Another officer witnessed the hit and was going to charge the steward with assaulting a Navy officer, but both stewards retorted that the officer had touched them inappropriately. When they came on deck and told Matt what had transpired, Matt reported that he, too, had been sexually groped. There was an inquiry. Very quickly the *Derwent* was turned around and sent to Sydney, where the officer faced a court martial.

The details of Lieutenant Warren Barry's court martial appeared in the press. Matt was reported (anonymously) as testifying that Barry 'put his hand down and grabbed me on the genitals, the penis and testicles, and as soon as he did that I jumped, like stepped back, and then walked off'. The other steward described Barry's groping as 'something I'd expect my wife to come up and do to me'.²³ Barry's solicitor argued that this was merely drunken misbehaviour, playful fun that sailors (including officers) often got up to, which should have been handled quietly on the ship. The court martial found Barry guilty

of two charges of sexual indecency. His sentence: two fines of \$750, as well as forfeiture of 12 months' seniority as punishment for other charges relating to assaulting a senior officer and disobeying a lawful command. Commander Timothy Bloomfield, the Navy's director of public information, stated: 'I think one thing that comes out very clearly from this is that this type of action is not tolerated in the Australian Navy ... I consider this sends a very clear message out to all personnel'.²³

The *Derwent* incident never implicated Matt as anything other than a victim, but several sailors subscribed to false stereotypes about gay men being hypersexual objects who welcomed any sexual advances. Matt said in a 1996 interview with *Capital Q*: 'People asked me what the problem was, since I was gay. I had to explain to them that it's [having sex] a matter of choice.'²³ Years later the *Derwent* incident would haunt Matt as the first of a series of events that dubbed him a troublemaker.

The entire court martial and its outcome are intriguing given the timing. It was only in June 1992 that the ADF adopted a policy on Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour. Also in 1992, a female reserve medical doctor reported that she had been subjected to significant sexual harassment and even sexual assault on board the HMAS *Swan*. The alleged perpetrator of the sexual assault was found not guilty in a court martial, but the allegations opened floodgates when other women came forward to report sexual harassment on the *Swan*. The Navy established a Board of Inquiry into Sexual Assault Incident on HMAS *Swan*, which found that the Navy was condoning a culture of alcohol consumption and misogyny. Reports reached the media in 1993 about the Navy's mishandling of the HMAS *Swan* sexual assault investigations.

The Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Senator John Faulkner, set up a Senate Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in the Australian Defence Force. That very inquiry was scheduled to start about a week after Barry's court martial, meaning the ADF's dealings with sexual assault were a topic of public interest. Incidentally, there was only one submission to the Sexual Harassment Inquiry which pointed out that 'the incidents of sexual harrassment [sic] and discriminatory behaviour within the Australian Defence Force are not confined to heterosexual incidents only. Incidents of sexual harrassment [sic] against homosexual service personnel are continuing whether directly

or indirectly'. The submission by openly gay RAAF Sergeant Mark Livingstone even mentioned the *Derwent* incident as a clear example of such sexual harassment.

The ADF was combatting an image problem relating to sexual assault and mishandled investigations; the Barry court martial represented an opportunity to show that it was 'doing something'. Yet, the public example to send a 'clear message' was not about sexual harassment of women, but rather related to *homosexual* misconduct. Barry's behaviour was inappropriate, but his case did not challenge the embedded misogynistic culture within the Navy. This was only one year after the ban on LGB service had been lifted, and as Matt's story and others of the era suggest, there was still a strong underlying homophobic culture. Matt remembers, for example, that one time when he cut himself the medical staff yelled: 'Don't fucking touch him! He might have AIDS!' Several of the submissions to the Senate Sexual Harassment Inquiry contained homophobic statements (and even more submissions blamed sexual harassment on the Navy's decision to allow women on ships). Thus, prosecuting an officer for homosexual misconduct was unlikely to provoke outcry among the ranks of the ADF.

The notion that homosexual misconduct was more transgressive than heterosexual misbehaviour affected Matt more seriously in 1995–96. Matt was one of two openly gay men serving on board the *HMAS Melbourne*. Similar to the *Derwent*, Matt had not come across any blatant homophobia, but also he continued to be discreet about how he talked about his sexuality. On the night of 5 November 1995, the ship was docked in Melbourne and several crew members went to a pub. Matt's crewmate Dean (name changed) was asking him questions about what it was like being gay. Things turned odd when Dean followed Matt into the men's room and tried to kiss him. A petty officer walked in as Matt was pushing Dean away and advised Matt: 'That guy's chasing you, and I've just told him he's getting fucking married, and to stay away from you.' Matt returned to the ship as ordered and went to bed.

The sleeping arrangements on the *Melbourne* were mess alcoves where there were two sets of three bunk beds, each with a curtain. Matt was in the bottom bunk and the two above him were empty because the sailors were on leave. Directly across, the top bunk was empty; the sailor on the middle bunk, Stevo, had just gone to bed, and the person on

the bottom bunk was passed out drunk. Around 1 am, Dean returned to the ship drunk and shook Matt awake, soliciting him for a sexual act. The events of the next ten minutes are murky and the first-hand accounts from Matt and Stevo conflict. Where their statements align is that Matt told Dean to go away. Matt said in a police interview a few weeks later that they merely had a conversation about personal problems affecting Dean; when pressed, Matt said, 'It was a homosexual conversation as in an inquiry, if you like.' In his oral history interview nearly 22 years later, Matt was more candid.

Dean said, 'How about it?' and I said, 'No, Dean', I said, 'You're [getting] married.' Like this. And I was only whispering exactly like I'm saying now. And I said, 'This can't happen, mate. My boss is on to it.' And I said, 'It's not right.' And then next minute his hands come down under the curtain and he's grabbing my dick like that and that's, I grabbed his hand and I pushed it through the curtain. I said, 'No, mate.'

Stevo could not see everything behind the curtain and could only interpret what he heard. His signed police statement said that after Matt resisted Dean's initial advances:

Dean and Matty continued to talk for some time and I heard what appeared to be the sound of kissing. I rolled over and my bunk curtain open slightly and I saw Dean cradling Matty's face and kissing him on the mouth, the kissing continued for around 10 minutes then Dean reached in under Matty's curtain and appeared to have his hand in Matty's groin area, Dean's right arm was moving in an up and down motion and they continued to kiss both of them also continued to moan, Dean continued to move his arm and down and Matty said to Dean, don't waste it, don't waste.

Stevo coughed, turned on his bunk light and opened his curtain, startling Dean and scaring him off. In Stevo's version of events, he then went for a smoke and had a short exchange of words with Matt when he returned. Stevo alleged that Matt said: 'You try putting up with it, it happens all the time when he comes back off the piss he puts his dick in through my curtains ... Relax we don't suck hetro's dicks'. Matt's police interview had a different recollection: Stevo returned upset and said he did not want to live in that mess anymore, to which Matt replied, "whatever Stevo, we'll talk about it in the morning." I was still unaware of what he was upset about, I thought it was the conversation [with Dean about homosexuality]'.

The available documents all suggest that Stevo genuinely believed that Matt and Dean had engaged in a sexual act. How and why he came to this conclusion would become part of the investigation, and how it played out reveals a lot about the homophobic culture that lay just below the surface in the Navy. Stevo wrote in his police statement that after the incident: 'I went back to bed and because I was scared of being bashed I kept my head out so. I could see if they were going to come back and get me because of what I had seen.' Matt questions the veracity of this statement, pointing out that Stevo was a very big guy: 'You would never have mucked with him. I was scared of him.' Stevo reported that he ran into Dean in the shower the next morning, and Dean offered to pay him to keep quiet. Stevo said he did not intend to report the incident, but over the next few days he discussed it with several people. The incident rapidly reached the attention of the officers on *HMAS Melbourne*.

Matt received word that he was confined to quarters as the *Melbourne* sailed back to Sydney. Upon arrival, as he recalls it: '[I] got called up to the gangway, and "You're off the ship." So I was like "No way, this is ridiculous. Can you tell me why?" "No, you'll get further orders. Just stand by to stand by, but ring [HMAS] Kuttabul police by this afternoon if you haven't heard anything"'. Later that day Matt received word that he was being put on leave with pay and a solicitor had been arranged. He still did not know what was going on. The next day Matt had to return to the ship dressed in full uniform to face a captain's table. The coxswain, who also happened to be gay, read out two charges: unacceptable sexual behaviour, and prejudicial behaviour. These charges could land Matt with up to nine months in a military prison. The captain then said: 'Get off my ship, this is going to the Defence Force Magistrate.' Sending this to a Defence Force Magistrate was an extreme move. Cases of this nature were most often dealt with by a ship's captain. Matt later commented to *Capital Q*: 'It should have been handled at a lower level. They must have really wanted to go after this case.'

Matt was devastated, and he felt even more awkward when he attended his first meeting with the ADF reserve lawyer and saw Dean there as well. They were being represented jointly and, in the solicitor's opinion, their best defence was to stick together. The solicitor case was to challenge Stevo's reliability: there was poor lighting, he was tired, only heard mumbling and could not see what was happening. The solicitor was

doing his job to provide the best defence possible for his clients, and at the time Matt agreed to go along with this approach. On reflection, Matt sees the defence strategy as part of the wider injustice.

I should have, in hindsight, put up my hand and said, 'No, hang on. Let me set you straight. This man here, I'm sitting here with, he did this stuff to me, and he's trying to get away with it to protect his wife, and the military's helping him because he's a leading seaman, and he's quite well respected and his knowledge is invaluable to the military and I'm just a fucking shit kicker, and you just want to get the poof out, because it's all too much.'

The Defence Force Magistrate's case would not be heard until March 1996; in the intervening four months, Matt was permitted to return to the *Melbourne* on light duties. That time was rife with homophobia and psychological trauma, as almost the entire ship turned against Matt. They treated him as the guilty party: the gay man who seduced the poor straight, engaged guy. Matt was not allowed to stay on board at night, though Dean was. He regularly received taunts such as: 'Troublemaker', 'Shit breaker', 'I knew fags wouldn't work on this fucking ship', 'Should never be in the Navy', 'able seaman, able seaman, are you able to swallow semen? You won't'. His boss treated him awfully and at one point said: 'We sail in a week, mate. Make sure they don't cement your feet and throw you overside because this is getting bigger than Ben Hur.' Matt received anonymous phone calls with the message that he would go missing. Matt was terrified during this period, both of the threats he was receiving and of the possible outcomes of the Defence Force Magistrate's case. He was put on medication for insomnia and anxiety.

Matt's only support network came from his gay friends, and they put him in touch with a reporter at *Capital Q*. The journalist considered what was happening to Matt to be an injustice and promised to follow the case to drum up support from the gay community. The *Capital Q* coverage very accurately reflects the proceedings from the transcript of the Defence Force Magistrate. The prosecution focused on Stevo's testimony, and the defence argued that with the poor lighting, curtains and tiredness, Stevo was relying on innuendo rather than what he actually saw. Moreover, given how public the mess space was, it would be odd for Dean to perform a sexual act there.

The defence raised Matt's homosexuality in an interesting way. Matt's solicitor asked Stevo whether he used words like 'faggots' and had spoken derogatorily about gays. The prosecution objected to this line of questioning, and the Defence Force Magistrate indicated that he did not consider Stevo's previous comments or attitude towards homosexuality to be relevant. Matt's solicitor had to clarify that he was not arguing that Stevo made up the incident because he was homophobic. Rather, the solicitor argued:

In my respectful submission, he [Stevo] has – even though this case isn't about homosexuality – but he has, in my respectful submission, some concern about homosexuals and it's perhaps that suspicious mind, the knowledge that Cone is a homosexual, it's a dark situation and he assumes something that then becomes something ending in this kissing allegation.

Matt's defence solicitor emphasised that the case was not about homosexuality, later stating: '[Cone] says quite openly, made no secret of the fact that he was homosexual, but no-one took that as – he wasn't sort of flaunting the fact and didn't make a fuss about it, but that's the way he is, and it's really not an issue in the case.' The solicitor's comment about Matt not 'flaunting' his homosexuality highlights that a gay man just living an openly proud life was marked for ostracism.

The fact that neither the magistrate nor solicitors were even willing to consider the case to be about homosexuality speaks volumes about how defensive the ADF was about its treatment of homosexuals. They would not even countenance the notion that one sailor took advantage of another because he was gay; nor would they consider that homophobia may have influenced witness attitudes or how the captain and other authorities reacted. A Navy spokesperson reported to *Capital Q* that sexual matters were a small percentage of charges relating to prejudicial behaviour, insisting that such charges were blind to sexuality. It is hard to see Matt's case as about anything but homosexuality given the escalation of the case and the treatment Matt endured. He reflects:

Twenty years down the track I'm starting to say, 'Why was I charged?' I never realised it, but why did I face these charges? Dean should have faced charges for coming home and unacceptably sexually touching me, attempting to touch me in what case that I should have been protected, but I wasn't. I was treated as the person,

because I was gay, I was treated as the person who did it. 'He's gay, yeah, he must have.'

The Defence Magistrate accepted that there was reasonable doubt and found both Matt and Dean not guilty, though in his ruling he described Stevo as having 'impressed me as a responsible and truthful young man'. Just this comment left a sting with Matt that bothers him to this very day: 'And I was insulted. I was standing there and I thought, "You fucking asshole. That's bullshit. What about me?"'

Though he was found not guilty, the case still tarnished Matt's career and would affect his mental health for life. He was not allowed to resume duties on the *Melbourne* and instead was posted at the submariner's base HMAS *Platypus* in Sydney. It was a terrible time.

My boss over there absolutely hated me; I was a troublemaker. I'd say, 'What do you want me to do today?' and he goes, 'You may as well just play solitaire.' And was just rude to me, and he warned everybody else on the base 'I've got this nut job here. He's a gay guy, and he's been through this big thing', so he breached all security ... No one wanted to talk to me, no one would do anything for me.

Because Matt had gone to the media, the Defence hierarchy was touchy and wanted to restrict his access to the gay community. He was often rostered on weekend nights; he fronted questions about what he was doing on the weekend, where he was going, whom he was seeing. Rumours abounded that Matt had lied about the incidents on both the *Derwent* and the *Melbourne*.

There was a final incident that proved to be the last straw in Matt's career. During his time on both the *Melbourne* and at *Platypus*, he had befriended a gay medical officer, with whom he used to party at Oxford Street nightclubs. One night the doctor offered Matt a tablet, telling him that it would neutralise the effects of ecstasy so that he could pass any random drug test. When Matt's housemate came home late that night he saw the doctor having sex with Matt – except the next morning Matt said nothing had happened; they had simply come home and passed out. Initially, Matt brushed it aside but over the next couple of weeks similar things continued happening: Matt would take ecstasy and a drug to neutralise the effects. When he awoke the following morning he found lube in his

crotch or could smell a condom. This went on for about three or four months before Matt pieced together that the doctor was sexually assaulting him. One morning after one of these nights, Matt's housemate insisted that he go to a clinic on Oxford Street and order a toxicology report. The two pills the medical officer had been giving Matt were Temazepam and Rohypnol – a sleeping agent and a known date rape drug.

Being sexually assaulted was traumatic enough, but the fallout when Matt confronted the doctor was devastating. The doctor denied that he had administered date rape drugs or sexually assaulted Matt. When Matt threatened to report the doctor to the Navy, he retorted with words that, sadly, turned out to be prophetic: 'They won't believe you.' Matt reported the rape to his divisional officer, who responded: 'So we've got the cocktail party in Devonport, we've got the Defence Force Magistrate, now we've got a doctor who raped you. This is the littlest fucking vile thing in the world.' The divisional officer said he would produce a form that, if Matt signed it, would mean his discharge in three weeks. Traumatized, ashamed and even blaming himself for all that had happened, Matt signed the form and was discharged three weeks later in August 1997, having served just over five years.

Matt's mental health was affected by his time in the Navy: the homophobia, sexual assault, verbal abuse and general sense of isolation and shame. Matt moved to Cairns, where he spent almost 12 years working in hospitality, first at the gay resort Turtle Cove (managed by the partner of a gay Vietnam veteran) and doing other jobs in pubs, restaurants and on fishing trawlers. Matt hit the grog heavily, and at the time of his interview Matt said that he has only gone 14 days out of the 20 years since leaving the Navy without drinking. He reduced his alcohol consumption by replacing it with another substance: marijuana. Matt clearly sees the Navy as changing him, and not for the better: '[Before I joined up] I was an elite athlete. I didn't drink, I was about fitness, getting up, running every morning; I was about being into the body beautiful and being ready to hit the world. And I turned into this miserable lump.'

Matt's mental health problems also affected his relationships. Matt was in a 14-year relationship that was mutually destructive. He was prone to bursts of anger; his partner could also be verbally and emotionally abusive, yet his partner also would talk

about how proud he was that Matt was an ex-sailor. Matt's partner did not know about what happened during his service because he never spoke to anyone about it. Matt sometimes went to see counsellors about his relationship and anger, but he would never open up about his time in the Navy. When they gave advice that Matt found challenging, he would simply move on – 'doctor shopping', as he put it.

Matt moved to Port Macquarie in 2009 when his mother was unwell, and he continued to take chef jobs while also accessing Centrelink welfare on and off. He worked for two years as a carer for his father before he passed away in 2016. It was only then that Matt finally saw a doctor to whom he spoke about all the trauma that he experienced during his five years in the Navy. The doctor filled out a form for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) that stated: 'I believe he has PTSD and depression and anxiety, and I'm treating him for disorders, and I've sent him to a referral for a psych.' The psychologist concurred with the diagnosis, and Matt received a white card from DVA. Matt's white card covers any services relating to mental health, including anti-depressants or other medications. Matt is also in the process of applying for a DVA pension.

It has really been in the past two years, since the death of Matt's parents, that he has begun to heal. About five years ago he met his current partner. What has made this relationship more successful than previous ones is that Matt trusts him more, and Matt has begun to confront the demons that have haunted him since his Navy days. Matt says: 'It's the first ever relationship I've had where it's, I've been honest, so that's made a world of difference. Because you're a bit empowered, you've got someone else, you saw him come in, and he'd like, there's this guy coming to help you.' Matt has also turned to a mate who has experience working with the DVA in the hopes of receiving some recognition or compensation for the trauma he suffered.

Reflecting on his own time of service was been a painful yet liberating experience for Matt. He knows that he had it rough in the 1990s, and he knows that other gays, lesbians and bisexuals who served during that era faced a lot of homophobia. He also knows that 20 years later, the experiences of LGBT personnel have improved immensely.

That does not take away from the pain that he has endured, but he does reflect on why he and so many other LGBT people have served.

They expect a gay guy to be, or a woman, to be in the jobs that the straight world chooses for them. Hairdresser. Supermarket attendant. Waitress in Bondi. Waiter in Bondi. They want you to be all that. But when you look back and you think of, there's people out there that are dealing with who they are, and what they are, totally different to everyone else, and they have got to go into a team environment, we're in a family environment, and they're willing to sacrifice their life for their country. That's not a job: that's something that they're willing to do, that's signing your life over to Her Majesty, the day you join the Navy. You're willing to die for your country. And, if anything, you should be, you should feel proud. I never have, but to anyone that's doing it, that's the way it should be.

Bridget Clinch

At one point during the course of our interview, Bridget Clinch reflects on the growing visibility of transgender military personnel in Australia. She notes that, while it is wonderful to see, in some ways for her, 'it's bittersweet'. Bridget was a trailblazer, whose bravery and persistence pushed the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to finally overturn its ban on transgender service in September 2010, almost 18 years after lifting the ban on LGB service. In early 2010, after serving for 11 years in the ADF, she was told that she would be no longer suitable for service if she proceeded with her transition to live openly as the woman she had always known that she was. Rather than accepting discrimination, she campaigned for the removal of Defence Instruction (General) 16-16, which since April 2000 had stated that 'a person undergoing or contemplating gender reassignment' was not unsuitable to serve because of the 'need for ongoing treatment and/or the presence of a psychiatric disorder'. Bridget's case coincided with RAAF member Amy Hamblin also challenging this policy – the two examples perhaps indicative of growing transgender visibility and activism in Australia. She ultimately succeeded in overturning her termination and changed ADF policy, making it possible for transgender people to transition and serve openly within the ADF.

Bridget's story demonstrates the way determined individuals have driven changes to military policy. Now others – both within and outside of the military – have been able to see the contribution that transgender and gender diverse people can make to the ADF. Cate McGregor, who transitioned in 2012, becoming the highest-ranking transgender person in the Army then RAAF, has cited Bridget's actions as being directly responsible for clearing a path that enabled transgender women, men and now non-binary people to serve openly. Bridget's experience illuminates the real personal cost of grappling with discrimination and of being a visible agent for change.

Bridget lives in Brisbane with her partner and their young child. Their home radiates love and warmth. It is located quite close to the large Army base at Enoggera,

which to some extent, must serve as a reminder of Bridget's considerable service life. Her life is filled with study, her partner, and their child and two children from a previous relationship, whom Bridget looks after part-time. She was also in the process of developing an enviable level of skill at Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Despite this, she was still adjusting to a life post-military. She was conscious that her efforts in the ADF 'took down that policy', but she felt she was 'still trying to get up. And yeah, it's been a long road.'

Bridget was born in the inner-west of Sydney in 1979, the oldest of three children. After spending the first few years of her life around Sydney, her parents moved the family to Western Australia when she was in the final stages of primary school. A couple of years later, they relocated to Victoria, where she finished high school. This history of moving across states has given Bridget a strong sense of being Australian, rather than holding an attachment to one particular place.

Bridget has spoken publicly about knowing she was female from a young age. She has drawn much needed attention to the experiences of transgender individuals, who still experience prejudice and discrimination. When reflecting on her childhood, she affirmed in 2010: 'I didn't want to be a different person. I wanted to be me – but a girl me.' She noted that 'society and parents and all sorts of influences tell you that's crazy, you can't be thinking like that. You can't be acting on those thoughts. You can't resolve that thing that eats you up'.²³

It would not be until years later that she was diagnosed with gender dysphoria. When she was growing up there were very few representations of transgender individuals in the media or pop culture, and when some examples did surface in the 1980s and 1990s, they were almost always negative, sensationalist and laden with transphobia. The prevalence of the internet today and the growing number of transgender individuals in the public eye means awareness has increased. Unfortunately, though, there is still an enormous distance to be traversed before Australia can claim to have eradicated the discrimination and prejudice transgender individuals experience.

Similar to many of our interviewees, there had been some military background in Bridget's family. Her maternal grandfather had been a test pilot in the Royal Air Force.

He died at a relatively young age and her grandmother subsequently went on to marry another man who had also served, a former Royal Marine. When asked about Bridget's decision to enlist, she says that: 'I think I felt a bit lost and the military kind of gives you a bit of direction. And at the same time, it kind of appeals to that ... desire to do something of service. I've never really, even now, I don't really want to do anything to just serve some corporate profit making thing.' She elaborates on the humanitarian role the military can play to support vulnerable people in nations needing assistance.

I knew there was other places in the world that weren't doing so well and we seem to do the kind of peacekeeper thing and go and help people in the region and stuff – and that kind of appealed to me, I guess. So not really the violent aggressor type – more the protection type notion of looking after people that couldn't look after themselves.

The theme of protecting others and the sense of duty individuals have toward the wellbeing and welfare of others is one that Bridget returns to throughout the interview and has guided her post-Army career as well. It is clear that she has a keen sense of service and feels an obligation to work for the betterment of society.

Bridget attended Melbourne High School (an all-boys school), which had an Army Cadets Unit and Air Force equivalent. This also made enlistment in the ADF a visible option. Initially Bridget was attracted to the Air Force Cadets because 'I had it in the back of my head that I might want to be a pilot'. Ultimately, she went with the Army Cadets. She remembers that in almost all of her high school years, there would be a couple of graduates going to the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) or the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Bridget made her decision to pursue a life in the military when she was in Grade 9 or 10. She says, 'It just sort of seemed like something that I could do, because I really couldn't pick a profession outside of the military and I really wasn't drawn to study.' She also ponders whether military life offered an option to move away: 'I wasn't specifically tied to Melbourne like a lot of my friends were. So I was like, "I can go do the Army thing".'

While Bridget did not actively think about transitioning until she had reached the age of 30, there is a growing body of research, particularly from the United States, that

has demonstrated that transgender people are disproportionately more likely than cisgender people (those whose gender identity aligns with the gender they are allocated at birth) to work in occupations such as the military. Some military personnel who later transition from male to female (MtF) may, in part, be motivated to enlist to conform to social pressures to align to hegemonic masculinity. Scholars also argue that some personnel who later transition from female to male (FtM) may find the military to be an environment where they are able to transcend gender expectations and adopt behaviours and attributes traditionally perceived as masculine.²³

Bridget notes that when she first began to actively explore her gender identity in the late 2000s, she found a transition diary on the internet which was run by an American sheriff who had a ‘network of law enforcement types that were trans in the United States, and I was like “Holy crap!”’ She continues:

Just the thoughts that they had and the way they described overcompensating by throwing themselves at their law enforcement type stuff and doing all those blokey things and super-duper overcompensating, it was kind of like – it really hit home and it was like: ‘Wow! What a similar character.’

Several other transgender participants in this project, both FtM and MtF, expressed similar sentiments for one reason they wanted to join the ADF: its masculine environment. While there are important parallels between the FtM, MtF and non-binary members’ lives and ADF experiences, there are also fundamental differences. The MtF members like Bridget also noted that they were, in retrospect, questioning their gender identities from a young age, even though they were not able to express their internal struggles. For the FtM members interviewed, the self-questioning would come later, and at the time they enlisted they actually identified as lesbians. Non-binary members of the ADF are only now coming to the foray, and the openly non-binary members were already expressing that gender identity in high school.

One common pattern across most transgender interview participants is that they joined the ADF at a young age. Bridget joined the Australian Army Reserve in 1997, immediately after finishing high school. She joined the Army full-time as an officer cadet in 1999 at Royal Military College, Duntroon and found that the life suited her. One

element of serving that she appreciated was the concept of working as a team and the ethos of looking after each other. She reflects, 'I guess that was something that was just part of my character. I wanted to look after my people. I think one of my bosses called me "the diggers' union rep" or something because I wanted to look after my people.' While she cared deeply about looking after those who served with her, Bridget was also keeping a personal distance from those with whom she served. She says that 'a friend from Duntroon days described my personality as prickly – and I guess that I was. I was pushing everyone away and just being, I guess depressed, for want of a better term.'

Professionally, Bridget progressed well in the military. She finished her officer training, served in the infantry and then did tours as a peacekeeper in East Timor in 2003 and 2008. Both of these deployments were well after Australia's initial intervention in East Timor leading INTERFET (International Force East Timor) in 1999. Though the immediate threat of violence had long since passed, there were still occasional flare-ups and these deployments were hardly a cakewalk. On the 2003 tour, she led an infantry team. In 2008, she was deployed as a logistics officer in the parachute battalion. She remembers these as 'interesting times' when there was a lot of organisational change within the Army. Bridget received medals for her tours and attained the rank of Captain, before considering applying for the SAS (Special Air Service Regiment).

At this point in life, Bridget had a wife, whom she had met at Duntroon, and a young family. Bridget remembers starting triathlons after her first tour to East Timor. She also became involved in ironman distance triathlon events: 'Did all that kind of stuff and was just training my butt off.' She says that she feels, in retrospect, that she was 'throwing myself into that and avoiding everything else'. Computer games provided another distraction during her downtime.

On one level, applying for the SAS held considerable appeal. It was a diversion from dealing with a difficult internal struggle over her gender identity. She remembers isolating herself from others, and 'no one could really tell why' she seemed depressed or was somewhat aloof. She says, 'They thought that was just me. I was just doing my own thing, being prickly, not having many close friends.' What was really occurring was a

voice in Bridget's head, telling her that 'stuff just didn't feel quite right still', and this voice was becoming harder to ignore. Bridget elaborates:

[I felt], like I, what I was doing was right and the way I was doing stuff felt it was kind of right. But just the way I was, just had never felt right ... I guess it was starting to really gnaw at me. And yeah, and then once you sort of acknowledge that internally and start looking for resources and looking for information, that's Pandora's Box. You know, and you can't close it.

Bridget was starting to realise that there was a name for the thoughts she had about her gender.

Bridget's quest to understand what she was feeling saw her seek out information on the internet. She is quick to point out that there was nowhere near as much information available about transgender people back then as there is today. That said, all of the transgender participants in this project started their research online as well, which makes one cognisant about how much more challenging transgender people must have found it to affirm their gender identity before the internet. She found information that seemed to align with what she was feeling and experiencing, although the information was not something to which she had been previously exposed: 'I'd find these blogs and stuff and [think], "What the hell is a transition blog?" and "What the hell is a transgender, or, all these terms?" Transgender, transsexual, gender identity disorder [now known as gender dysphoria] and all these things. And I was like, "No, this can't be right."' Once she realised that there were others who felt the way that she did and there were terms that described what she was going through, 'there was no sort of going back'.

There was little information available about being transgender from mainstream sources. Bridget says, 'I think I would have been happier if I could have found something on an actual health site.' She notes there is much better information available now. 'Government health sites have got all sorts of good stuff out there. So that kind of puts it into a little bit more generic terms and stuff that you can sort of understand and legitimises it a bit.' Bridget found the blogs of people who were undergoing the process of transition to be 'scary because of the words they're using and how even though they're painting things in the best light they can, they're being realistic about stuff and a lot of

people, especially in the States, had some pretty rough times'. The discovery of information was 'kind of a little bit enlightening; a lot scary ... I used to sort of look it up and find it and then just, ha! Like, you know, stop looking. Go somewhere else'. She also notes that she had a very real fear that others might see her doing the research. She remarks, 'That was one of the things that held me back'.

Meanwhile, the fitness required to join the SAS was extreme so Bridget trained with a routine that involved an extraordinary level of dedication. While her fitness was excellent, Bridget was becoming increasingly concerned about the psychiatric testing she would have to undergo to enter the SAS. She worried it would expose her as being transgender: 'I had a few insights into the process because of some of the people I'd worked with and some of the interactions I'd had ... I just worried that they would find out – that I'd be really tired and worn down on selection or something and they would find out.'

Bridget believes she subconsciously 'sabotaged' herself before her SAS selection course because of these fears. She completed a half ironman triathlon a few weeks before the SAS fitness test. This meant that she was still recovering from the physical exertion when she did her actual test. Still, she notes that previously, determination alone had been enough to take her through significant physical tests at Duntroon when she was only 'a skinny little runt'. Yet, this time, she fell just short of qualifying for entry to SAS selection. She was told to come back and retake the test in another month or so. She thought no, but still trained for and completed the full Australian Ironman Triathlon – clearly attaining physical fitness was not the issue.

When discussing how she feels about not moving into the SAS, Bridget says that 'it's frustrating because I know I would have liked that job if I could have got there'. She also reflects: 'I guess I couldn't just shelve all that internal baggage that I had.' It had become increasingly clear that she could not continue to go on as she had been doing, internalising her feelings, and that she needed to affirm her identity as a woman. As she contemplated this, she managed to secure a non-corps posting. At that time, the ADF still had exemptions from anti-discrimination laws to prevent women from performing combat roles. Bridget was prepared to accept this if she transitioned, as she 'didn't want

to take on every battle in the world' and believed it was an issue that could be revisited. She explains: 'By being in a non-corps type place I thought what a perfect environment. I can just keep sort of stepping through and switch hat badges kind of thing, do a few courses and just continue on.' Interestingly, at least one other transgender interviewee later delayed her transition until her combat position was opened to women. While Bridget accepted that she would perform a different role while serving as a woman, she also believed that the ADF would be able to accept her being transgender. Her experience proved to be wrong.

Bridget initially looked up some information about gender clinics and psychiatrists external to the military. Then she thought: 'Actually, you know what? It's probably better to just go through the front door and just do it through the system and let it run its course.' Around this time, the pressure she was dealing with internally was taking its toll. The Commanding Officer on her 2008 deployment noticed this, telling her that he was 'frustrated at seeing all this potential going to waste' and that she should seek help from a psychologist or he would refer her. She took the first step of speaking to a psychologist while on deployment.

The psychologist determined that Bridget was functional and still able to do her job, although she was exhibiting symptoms that appeared to be depression. In the military system, Bridget discovered that psychologists do not write a report when people self-refer unless there is some sort of mandatory disclosure safety concern. Bridget found the appointments with the psychologist initially did not lead anywhere productive, and she did not disclose her gender identity. However, the two did get to know each other. As it happened, at Bridget's next deployment in Wagga Wagga, she ended up in the same location as this psychologist. She saw him again, only this time, 'it took a while but I spilled my guts'. We gently ask, 'Was this the first time that you'd really spoken these things out loud?' Bridget answers quickly and adamantly: 'Yeah. Oh yeah. Really, yeah.'

The psychologist contacted the senior medical officer in the area, a civilian doctor on the base. Bridget spoke to the doctor, determined to 'answer any questions he asks, just spill my guts. And I did. I just laid it all out.' She remembers that he was cool, saying 'I haven't encountered this myself but I've got some colleagues that have and I can look

into this stuff for you and let me get back to you'. She continues: 'He took it pretty well for a sort of gruff sort of blokey sort of dude, and so I left his office, just feeling like totally numb and weird and tingly and just, like, "What just happened?"'

Bridget conveys the aftermath of her disclosure to the senior medical officer, surreal in its ordinariness: 'After doing that, I went back to my office and finished the day.' Meanwhile, the senior medical officer was conducting research and offered Bridget two options where she could seek further assistance from gender specialists, either in Sydney or Melbourne. He arranged contact with a psychiatrist and an endocrinologist in Sydney. Unfortunately, there was a wait of several months before Bridget's appointments, which she found frustrating because she was doing a course in between and everything was business as usual.

The course she undertook while waiting for the appointments was a high-level officer one focusing on tactics. It was specialist work with Bridget being one of the few combat people in her syndicate. She says, 'It was just so weird thinking I told the doctor all this stuff, hadn't yet seen the psychiatrist who specialises in gender, so I'm still like: "What the hell does this even mean? Can they fix me or do I go down this great path of all the other crazy people?"' Looking back, she is amazed that she managed to get through the course, attain an okay report and tick the boxes that she needed.

Finally, in August 2009, Bridget's appointment with the psychiatrist arrived. During a 90 minute consultation, the two had an in-depth conversation; she says it is 'hard to simplify' in the retelling. Bridget describes how 'We went through all the ins and outs of everything. So yeah, it was pretty full on, but that's when I kind of knew and it was like: "Wow, okay".' He told her that 'It's pretty much over to you now whether or not you want to pursue it [transition]. But you can't make it [gender dysphoria] go away.' Bridget emphasises that this had been her question. 'Is there any way I can deal with it or...'; the last part of the sentence is unfinished. The psychiatrist told her that 'Yes, you can deny that part of yourself', but made it very clear that there would be implications. Bridget again reiterates her position and the way that transitioning to live as her authentic gender could potentially impact her life in many ways.

I had a family and kids and my career and that kind of stuff. It was just, it's kind of like you're being pulled in two different directions I guess. But then you know one of them; it's not fake but it's almost like a cover of sorts. So yeah ... I knew I was running a risk but it was a risk that I had to take, to risk all that other stuff for this one key identity type thing. It just had to happen.

As Bridget had come to increase her knowledge about transgender people and the options available to them, she had also begun to undertake research on ADF policy towards transgender service personnel. While LGB personnel had been able to serve openly since November 1992, transgender personnel had not been included in this reform. The positive policies towards LGB personnel had still provided her with some hope. As Bridget mentions, 'the ADF had had, for quite some time, you know, the same entitlements and treated same-sex couples the same way they treat married couples [since December 2005].'

Rather than learning from the lessons of including LGB personnel, the ADF continued to draw a distinction between transgender and LGB personnel. In 1996, ADF officials had been prompted to address the issue of transgender service after the Australian Democrats introduced a *Sexuality Discrimination Bill* into the Commonwealth Parliament. The ADF submission held that transgender service was not in the interests of the military for three primary reasons. First, men might self-identify as women to exempt themselves from combat while women conversely could self-identify as men to serve in combat roles they were excluded from. Second, the ADF maintained that the assumption of another gender identity and dress 'could reduce team cohesion'. Finally, the ADF argued that the self-assessment of transgender identity did not require clinical or other independent evidence.²³

In 2000, the ADF introduced a specific policy, Defence Instruction (General) 16-16, 'Trans-gender Personnel in the Australian Defence Force', that effectively solidified what had been an informal ban on transgender service. The policy did include a statement that 'a member who is discharged in the above circumstances and subsequently undertakes successful gender reassignment surgery, may apply to rejoin the ADF as a person of their new gender'. Bridget was not the first transgender person to serve in the ADF, as other oral history interviews, publications and newspaper reports attest. Bridget

refers to the policy when she describes how service personnel who told the ADF that they wished to transition wound up being medically discharged. Those who wished to continue to serve then privately 'transitioned, they did everything and paid for everything themselves and then they reapplied'. All of this was done in highly secretive circumstances. As Bridget stresses, the policy and entire process 'forced them to be closeted'.

While the option of disclosing transgender status is a deeply personal decision that should be made on an individual basis, compelling someone to hide their transgender status against their will carries very real risks. There is the psychological toll of having to hide something substantial they have lived through. As Bridget points out, it is also a risk 'if you're trying to hide something and it gets found out at the wrong time, wrong place. That's worse than just being out and overt'. Bridget found this incredibly stressful: 'I don't think people realised how damaging that is.' She continues to recall how:

All my experiences are changing and stuff and you know, how people are looking at me and things like that were different and just, yeah, it was really odd and off-putting to sort of think: 'Hold on, they're trying to force me to keep this under wraps', when I guess I felt there was a bit more protection in being overt and honest and just being out there.

For Bridget, the 2000 policy 'just reeked of being out of date'. The concept that transgender people had a psychiatric disorder and needed to be discharged did not 'really seem right'. Bridget thought: 'that policy seems old and I'm pretty sure with a bit of reason, you can get that changed.' Her confidence was boosted when she researched what culturally comparable countries were doing in terms of transgender service. Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom all seemed to have adapted well to permitting transgender personnel since 1992, 1993 and 2000 respectively. Bridget made contact with some transgender people serving in the United Kingdom, including one transitioning woman at a similar rank level and combat corps as Bridget. She found that this woman still had her job and was 'just cruising and doing her thing and being a bit of an out advocate'.

Part of Bridget processing her identity as a transgender woman meant telling others. While she did not feel that she had any ‘super-duper close friends in the military’ that needed to be told, she did tell friends from high school, along with family members. She also spoke to her boss and then his boss ‘with the help of the psych, because it was really hard to spit the words out’. She remembers: ‘We did it and thought things were going to be okay from that meeting ... they were like, “Well you’re still the same person and okay”’. She had no sense from her initial meeting that she would encounter significant difficulty with the military managing her transition process, though she now believes the higher echelons were ‘quietly freaking out in the background’ when they heard she was transitioning.

In November 2009 Bridget began hormone treatment. She also took one of the steps followed by many transgender people as part of the process of affirming their gender identity, which is to write a letter, informing co-workers about their transition process. Bridget wrote such a letter just before Christmas that year, informing her boss before she submitted it. Her letter told her colleagues about ‘how the process works; and it’s a medical thing; and this is what I’ll do; and I guess I’ll take some leave, work on my appearance, let my hair grow, do all this stuff and come back’ in around four months. The letter told them about the name she would be using and asked that they do their best not to misgender her. While she was nervous about how people might respond, the levels of support she received from her colleagues took her aback: ‘All the instructors were like, “We need you on the courses.” Like, “Hurry up and get your shit together and then come back because we need you to help us instruct. Otherwise we’re going to have to fly instructors in”’.

Bridget emphasises the difference between the levels of encouragement and acceptance she received from lower ranks, compared with those ‘high up the chain’ who ‘didn’t give the soldiers and lower ranks credit for their acceptance and openness’. It is a point she returns to later in the interview:

That’s something that’s going to really get me. Every time I retell sections of my story or think about stuff, I’m just like, ‘The soldiers were awesome; the hierarchy was not.’ It’s disappointing because I think we’ve got really awesome soldiers.

We've got really awesome people and they deserve better. You know, they deserve, yeah, they just deserve better leaders, basically.

Bridget describes the 'hostility and resistance at every step of the command chain from then' onwards, which made her experience 'really, really difficult and painful'. She was told that her decision to transition would have 'political outcomes and become a PR nightmare'. Based on her extensive international research, Bridget was able to point to ways the ADF would be able to deal with her transition positively:

There's me going, 'Hey, we can front foot this, here's some articles from the UK media. Here's the UK MOD's [Ministry of Defence's] statement in that article. And I'm like, you know, 'Delete UK MOD, insert ADF and just, we're done ... We can front-foot this; we can make this a positive thing', and they're all like 'No, no, don't tell anyone, keep it quiet'.

In December 2009, command informed Bridget that she was not allowed to dress as a woman at work while she was still legally male. She recalls an incredibly traumatic process: 'Every time they made me fight for something, like you know, telling me to cut my hair whilst, after a few months of me being on hormones and saying, "You have to cut your hair. You have to adhere to male dress standards and whatever."' Some (though not all) other transgender members have expressed similar problems – even after the ban was lifted – in matters of dress, pronoun usage and even accessing prescribed hormones at base pharmacies. Misgendering a transgender person, such as forcing them to wear the clothing of the gender they do not identify with, may cause considerable trauma.

Bridget was compelled to take long-service leave to continue her transition. This was not necessary from a work standpoint, and it had long-term implications for her. She has raised this: 'I sort of said, "You kind of forced me into taking this thing which I didn't really need to take." I could have gone back to work and should have been able to.' She notes that 'Since that time when I went on leave at the end of 2009, I haven't properly been back to work'. This occurred because in March 2010, she received a termination notice on medical grounds in line with DI(G) PERS 16-16.

Bridget appealed her termination within the ADF and lodged a complaint the same month with the Australian Human Rights Commission. It is interesting that Bridget

embarked on the same route that a brave dismissed lesbian had taken in late 1990, culminating in the end of the LGB ban. The Commission entered into conciliation with the ADF, and the ADF withdrew Bridget's termination in July 2010. In September 2010, the ADF released a DEFGRAM (Defence telegram) announcing the repeal of DI(G) PERS 16-16; the transgender ban was gone, though there was nothing clear to take its place. There were also lots of questions: Would the ADF pay for Bridget's and other transgender members' medical care, including gender reassignment surgeries? What would be the medical classification of members going through transition? What would be the standards set for ADF applicants going through transition? How would the ADF present transgender service to the media? Would the ADF implement training modules or guides around transgender service? How would the ADF deal with transphobia? Only gradually since 2010 has the ADF grappled with these and other questions. Most importantly for Bridget, one early policy decision was that the ADF would support medical care for any member undergoing transition, including paying for gender reassignment surgeries.

The toll of having to battle continually each step of the way impacted on Bridget's health and she was forced to take sick leave due to the stress. Her stress was further exacerbated by the ADF downgrading her psychological and medical ratings to a level that would not enable her to deploy, despite positive medical references testifying to her ability to do so. The issue of medical downgrades has been an ongoing problem for transgender members undergoing hormone treatment or gender reassignment surgery, with a new medical policy from April 2015 issuing a blanket set of downgrade guidelines instead of examining each case individually. Feeling she had little option but to draw broader attention to her situation and the experiences of other transgender personnel, Bridget went public with her story. In November 2010, she and her then-wife did an interview with a television show *Sunday Night* and also shared the story with the magazine *New Idea*.

Even though the next few years were marked by more transgender members coming out, and the Diversity and Inclusion sections of the ADF, Department of Defence and the three services were slowly working on guides and policies on transgender inclusion, for Bridget the fight for transgender rights in the ADF was over. In 2013,

Bridget was medically discharged from the Army. She says, 'I guess it was a long time coming. There was a lot of reviews and redresses and levels of arguing the case, I guess. And doctors and stuff trying to sort of, I guess, look after me to soften the crash a bit.' She continues to explain that medical professionals noted the damage her experiences caused.

They came to the conclusion that definitely it was broken before I did, and they were kind of waiting for me to get to that conclusion myself and accept it because I couldn't. I don't think I would have accepted being medically discharged a few years earlier. I just wouldn't have been ready. That would have been pretty disastrous, I think. And so I sort of fought it and pushed and we were trying to push for a new medical class that would sort of allow me to be in and administered by Defence but then sort of do my study, sort of transition in to a new thing. But they just didn't want to; the hierarchy didn't really want to run with that. So yeah, so they just discharged me and kind of, luckily sort of the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) picked me up, I guess.

We asked Bridget whether she would have stayed in the Army for the long term had she been treated with the respect and dignity she deserved. She tells us the constant moving involved with the military life would have become increasingly difficult. She had also been experiencing some 'struggles with my partner at the time and just interpersonal stuff between people and just how I dealt with the world'. Bridget and her wife have since separated, and they share custody of their children. This considered, eventually she probably would have left the Army for more stability. She would have stayed much longer than when she was forced out, though. Now, she reflects, 'I didn't feel like I'd achieved all that I wanted to achieve. I left before my time was up. So yeah, it definitely feels like something I didn't get closure on ... if the support was there, I would have stayed on for a bit, yeah.'

As Bridget's case illustrates clearly, ignorance and a failure to accept transgender people saw the ADF lose an enormous amount of talent. She points out that allowing transgender people to serve as their authentic gender only enhances what service personnel offer the ADF. After all, the content of your character still remains, along with the training and expertise that has been absorbed. Bridget feels that being able to openly

live as who she is means that the self-defence mechanisms that she had to deploy are no longer needed. For her personally: 'I'd like to think that people don't think I'm prickly anymore and that they can actually approach me and talk to me, before they get to know me. Whereas I think people before they got to know me back then would have been like, "Oh God; What's her problem?"' not realising.'

Bridget is aware of the enormity of what she achieved in working to remove the policy which discriminated against transgender people. She is self-effacing about her contribution; as she describes it:

It was my final thing I did before I got out, you know, was to attack that policy and get it changed, and then I guess it opened the door, you know? However, you want to say it, it kicked in the door, or whatever it was ... and someone had to do it.

There's always the first. And I didn't want to. I don't know – it's not like you'd want to be remembered for doing any one particular thing, but I guess that's what I did.

Bridget is still living with the ongoing trauma of her treatment by the ADF. At the time of the interview, she said, 'I'm still sort of just in a really, weird isolated place.' Her story and her experiences show how military change has often been driven by those who have made significant sacrifices at enormous personal cost. Everything she went through affected Bridget's 'self-acceptance and self-esteem and just everything'. She says that she was 'still working through that stuff now' by seeing psychologists. She found an ex-military psychologist, who had been beneficial because 'they understand that loss of that aspect of your identity, because they deal with other people that are medically discharged ... so they get how important that is'.

Bridget points out that going through the process of transitioning means that you're changing one aspect of your identity, but it should not mean that you have to change all of it. Yet for her, because of her treatment by the ADF, 'I've had to change everything and lose everything and start again.' That said, since our interview, Bridget has changed her career direction and has been more confident as a public advocate for social justice. In the 2016 Federal election she ran for the seat of Brisbane as candidate for the Australian Defence Veterans' Party. That particular race was all the more interesting because the both the Liberal and ALP candidates were openly gay men, with

the ALP member also being an ex-Army Major. After the election Bridget joined the Australian Greens and ran as a candidate in the 2017 Queensland state election. She was also nominated and shortlisted for a 2018 Australian LGBTI Award in the 'Hero' category.

Speaking to us and allowing her story to be included took considerable courage on Bridget's part. While she was a very high achiever in the military and takes pride in her accomplishments, sharing her story required her to revisit some very painful areas of her past. Her current partner, Emma, whom she hopes to marry now that same-sex marriage is recognised, is a source of ongoing support. Bridget has always believed in supporting the vulnerable. We sensed a realisation on her part that, even though it was painful, she knew that sharing her story had the potential to help others and to emphasise the pointless cost of discrimination. Bridget shows no signs of slowing down in her determination to speak out for social justice. She realises that her role in history has provided an important platform for change and she has shown ongoing resolve to work for reform for others who might also be vulnerable.

Vince Chong and Ellen Zyla

Vince Chong, a gay male officer in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and Ellen Zyla, a gay female other rank in the Navy, exemplify the new generation of LGBT personnel rising through the ranks of the ADF. They are witnesses to the changes in ADF culture and attitudes and have seen the progress in the 25 plus years since the LGB ban was lifted, and the work that still needs to be done to support LGBT inclusion. They also highlight the ways that many LGBT Defence members support each other and no longer have to serve in silence.

Vince Chong

In March 2017, *Cosmopolitan* magazine named two currently serving RAAF members among its list of the 50 most influential lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and allied Australians: Vince Chong, and transgender member Cate Humphries.

Wing Commander Vince Chong has been president of DEFGLIS since 2012 and was awarded an Australian Defence Force Gold commendation the following year for services delivered to improve diversity and inclusion. Under Chong's leadership, DEFGLIS was able to secure Defence support for participation in the Mardi Gras parade and he continues to ensure an inclusive environment for LGBTQI personnel.

The Vince of 2017 is starkly different from the closeted 17-year-old who commenced at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) in 1997. Over 20 years, Vince has grown to represent a new generation of leadership in today's ADF. His personal journey also mirrors the ADF's changing approach to LGBT service from mere tolerance to genuine inclusion.

Vince was born in 1979 in western Sydney, the son of immigrants from Malaysia and Brunei. Vince remembers experiencing no racism or ever feeling anything but accepted in primary school, but by secondary school the demographics of Asian immigration were reshaping his local community. Vince did not identify with the recently

arrived migrants, who had different backgrounds and upbringings from his Australian childhood. Vince describes these early years of high school as 'not alienated, but very alone and very unsure'. Over time, Vince did make friends and forged his own path as a Chinese-Australian. His parents forced him to take up the piano and swimming, and he did extremely well at both. Vince was also an excellent student, obtaining a tertiary entrance score of 98, opening up any career pathway he wanted to follow.

Vince's parents wanted him to enrol in a business, information technology or do a medicine degree. Instead, he made the unexpected decision to apply to ADFA. Vince thought that joining the ADF would be an opportunity to graduate into a role trained specifically for leadership. He chose the RAAF because that service had a higher entry standard. He also suspects there were some subconscious rationales linked to his sexuality.

I look back on it in retrospect, and I can't understand the rationale for my decision-making, it doesn't seem rational at all. We knew about bastardisation, we knew that people weren't treated well, we knew that you could be abused in multiple ways because of the news articles, and yet my decision was absolutely I want to be pushed through that. I kind of think back and I don't really understand how I could have come to that decision, other than maybe I'm trying to hide something or maybe I'm trying to prove myself. So, what I'm going to do is try and do something that is tough, because it's going to toughen me up and I'm finally going to be straight.

Vince had first begun to question his sexuality around Grade 6 during sexual education class. The students watched a video about HIV/AIDS and it discussed themes of homosexuality, including showing two men kissing. Vince remembers the majority of students were grossed out, but he had a slightly different reaction: 'I knew what I liked to look at, so, that kind of confused me a lot, because back then no one said it was okay to actually be attracted to men. That was wrong, because you had to be attracted to women'. During high school Vince never discussed his sexuality; he remembers every year thinking: '[this] will be the Christmas where I start getting attracted to girls, and it's going to magically happen, and if not by Christmas, then maybe by New Year, and it'll be my New Year's resolution this year to be attracted to girls'. Vince was 'terrified' of other kids thinking he was gay, showing the continuing stigma attached to homosexuality

in the 1990s. He would maintain this attitude as he commenced his Bachelor of Electronics Engineering at ADFA in 1997.

The first six weeks at ADFA are an intensive period known as initial military training, where the officer cadets learn weapons handling, marching drill and physical training. This was a challenging period for Vince because he was more accustomed to working as a quiet leader and did not mesh with some of the alpha males. The new social paradigm was also emotionally challenging: 'If you were to rank everyone in terms of how their performance goes, and you know I'm middle of the field, I'm middle to the back of the field, it's a really uncomfortable feeling'. After the first six weeks, ADFA cadets fall into a routine: reveille at dawn, then a parade practice or similar activity in the morning, then academic classes, then time for extracurricular activities and study before sleep. There would also be physical training sessions scheduled throughout the week, so it often felt like there was little free time. During semester breaks and in December, cadets would complete their service officer training modules, which for RAAF cadets like Vince was at the Air Force Officer Training School at RAAF Base Williams, Point Cook.

Since at least the mid 1980s, every few years the media has reported scandals about bastardisation and/or sexual harassment in the ADF, with several reports focusing on ADFA. These news stories have regularly sparked inquiries, the most recent high profile example being the 2011 Australian Human Rights Commission's *Review into the Treatment of Women at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA Report)*. Vince happened to be studying at ADFA during a major inquiry into bastardisation at ADFA, colloquially known as the Grey Report. The review, published in 1998, found a significant culture of staff tolerating bastardisation and sexual harassment, and the very structural operation of ADFA encouraged this behaviour. Third-year cadets were given almost free reign over the first years. Yet, as the Grey Report found, 'Unfortunately, some cadets at the defence academy are dishonest, emotionally stunted, insensitive bullies and cheats.'

Vince's memories of bastardisation and sexual harassment at ADFA align significantly with the Grey Report. He recalls that women were probably only 5 to 8 per

cent of the cadets. When women could not keep up physically, they were taunted to the point that some were injuring themselves. While he was personally never subjected to some of the extreme physical or sexual abuse, he had to undergo several embarrassing activities as part of 'traditional' hazing rituals. Vince was not personally aware of examples of extreme abuse, but he has no doubt that they happened because the culture gave rise to third-year cadets going unchecked. As he describes it: 'that kind of perpetual institutional behaviours ... weren't really okay ever, but because no one had really put too much thought into it, they just kept going until somebody got injured or some embarrassing situation happened'. ADFA did make concrete changes during Vince's third year in response to the Grey Report's 97 recommendations. Most prominently, reforms removed the power from third-year cadets, segregated male and female cadets and ensured that daily management of cadets was the responsibility of trained personnel and officers.

While the Grey Report and other inquiries have focused heavily on the abuse of women, the bastardisation and harassment has also targeted gay men. Vince was also well aware of this, hearing jokes such as homosexuality is 'legal but not compulsory'. Other jokes at ADFA reinforced a particular martial masculinity, where comments such as 'That's not very manly' or 'Why are you crying? You a woman?' were common. Vince remembers one lecture where an Army officer said that if a homosexual was discovered, they would be encouraged to discharge. This particular comment struck Vince hard.

That probably set me back quite a bit, because I was like: 'Well, I'm never, definitely, ever admitting that I might be gay now, because I might lose my job as a result of it. I've got to prove myself first, prove my worth to the organisation, and I'm already behind because I didn't do well in initial training, so people don't like me, or people don't think I'm doing well, so if I'm gay, I'm done for, totally.'

Vince tried to avoid situations where the other male cadets would talk about sex. In fact, Vince was terrified before his eighteenth birthday that, because he was still a virgin, the other cadets would embark on a tradition of taking him to Fyshwick and paying for a sex worker. Fortunately they did not do this and Vince's eighteenth birthday was a calm,

sexless affair. Vince stayed in the closet his entire three years at ADFA, though in his final year he did start to explore gay chat rooms on the internet.

Vince's first posting was at RAAF Base Richmond in western Sydney. He also began to explore his sexuality, though he was still secretive about his private life. Vince says of the years 2000–03:

I used to throw myself into work, I used to work ridiculous hours, in order to not have to deal with it. But then when I did deal with it, I went out to Oxford Street, and then started to explore, and started to meet people and then started to become part of the community.

There were no openly gay men in Vince's squadron, and ridiculing gay men was common. This did not extend to lesbians. As Vince puts it, 'lesbians were cool – gay guys, no, don't know why – but because the lesbians could come out to work-organised functions to strip clubs'. Vince would not go along to the strip clubs, making his work colleagues suspicious of his sexuality and further fuelling Vince's paranoia about being talked about behind his back. Vince started dating someone for the first time, but that relationship was interrupted in 2003 when he was deployed to the Middle East.

On short notice Vince was sent as communications engineer supporting the P3 Squadron in Iraq. This was only a four-month deployment because the RAAF was intentionally trying to cycle through as many people as possible to obtain combat experience. As officer responsible for communications, Vince oversaw the systems that allowed RAAF members to talk to one another – whether that be information technology, on restricted networks, or ensuring data flows from the coalition forces. This was a new role for Vince, which was a bit daunting, but he also appreciated the opportunity to learn. He describes the job as 'a very steep uphill learning curve, but at the same point in time, that was also a little bit of why I joined the military, for that excitement and that challenge'.

Vince's time overseas was also an opportunity to re-evaluate his life, and he started to become more open about his sexuality. He remembers: 'I did come out because a girl asked me when I was over there ... I didn't say I was gay; I said, "I'm bisexual" – don't know why, but anyway, that was the most I was willing to do, in a private

conversation, out the back in a shed somewhere.’ The Middle East deployment changed Vince in other ways when he came back. First, even though he had by no means been serving on the frontline, still returning to Australia was a shocking adjustment.

You had gone suddenly from this intense, seven day a week, focused environment where you knew the mission of the aircraft – where everyone was focused on enemy movements and that’s what everyone was monitoring. So you kind of had this heightened sense of awareness. And I kind of seem to recall coming back to Australia, it didn’t go away very quickly ... it’s not the sense that you felt like you were in danger, but the sense that you needed to be alert and ready to deal with whatever new contingency or new disaster was going to arise.

The other change was that Vince was more willing to take risks, particularly in relation to his sexuality. Vince broke up with the man he had been dating. To deal with both the adjustment back to Australia and to be more confident about his sexuality, he spent about two months of annual leave partying on Oxford Street, frequenting the many venues, and enjoying the life of a young, single gay man.

When Vince returned to work in early 2004, he again threw himself into the job while continuing to be secretive about his sexuality. A new posting in 2006 represented the next turning point for Vince. Vince served as the aide-de-camp to the Air Commander at RAAF Base Glenbrook, also in western Sydney. The Air Commander is the senior officer who oversees all operational capabilities for the RAAF. Vince describes the role of aide-de-camp as like one of the assistants in *The Devil Wears Prada*; the executive assistant works in the office while the aide-de-camp is responsible for running everything outside the office. One challenge that Vince found was that the Air Commander, Air Vice-Marshal John Quaife, was so adept at handling himself that Vince had to come up with ways to value-add, focusing on trimmings and other details at functions and meetings.

During that posting, a gay doctor serving as a Group Captain brought his partner to the Glenbrook Officer’s Mess Ball. Vince was pleasantly surprised to see both the Air Commander and his wife warmly receive the couple. The Air Commander was one position below the Chief of Air Force, and seeing that such a high-ranking officer had no problem with gay servicemen was an eye-opener. That same year, Vince met Harley, an

editor at the *Star Observer*. Vince made the decision to bring Harley to one of the mess functions – almost like a coming-out ball for Vince. He was nervous, but it was an anti-climactic event. Vince is fairly certain the Air Commander and Mrs Quaife suspected he was gay, and no one blinked when Harley was introduced. In fact, the only outcome was that the then-Chief of Air Force's wife later jovially scolded Vince for not having told her earlier. Since that public coming out in 2006, Vince has always had the support of his peers in and out of the ADF, and he has never looked back. Twelve years later, he is still with Harley.

The main challenges that Vince and Harley have had to overcome as a couple have not so much been related to their status as a same-sex couple, but rather being a Defence couple in general. They have had to endure Vince's postings taking him from Sydney to Canberra, the United States, Melbourne, Canberra again, and now Adelaide. The first significant challenge to their relationship was in 2009 when, after three years travelling between Sydney and Canberra, Harley made the decision to resign from the *Star Observer* and move to Canberra. The same day that Harley gave notice and terminated his lease, the RAAF advised Vince that they wanted him to post him to the United States within 30 days. This was a significant problem because under the rules of de facto recognition, extended to same-sex couples in December 2005, they needed to live together for 90 days. Heterosexual couples had an easy solution: they could marry and Defence would instantly recognise their relationship. That solution was not available for Vince and Harley. Luckily, in the end, there were delays to Vince's posting, and he and Harley had time to live together for the required 90 days.

Harley accompanied Vince on his postings to the United States, Melbourne and Canberra. Defence partners essentially give up their career trajectory with their first relocation, as part of the sacrifice of staying together as an ADF family. Harley also had stops and starts, finding work in Washington, volunteering where work was scarce, and then picking up his career again in Canberra as the editor of *The Mandarin*. Vince reflects on the challenges facing contemporary Defence families, both same-sex and heterosexual.

I think there's a bit of an expectation, well, maybe your spouse can just knit, look after kids, or join the community clubs or volunteer their time. I mean, it would define meaningful engagement. And of course, that's not true across the board. There are a range of professional spouses. And I think Defence is actually starting to recognise that it is important that you can't expect people to just volunteer their time for community organisations.

Other same-sex couples with a civilian partner have expressed similar views: the support system for Defence families assumes that the ADF member is a male breadwinner, with children and a wife who are not working. While some of the housing, health and travel allowance benefits can be generous, they tend to assume that the partner is not working and is able to uproot their life when the ADF member is posted.

The numerous postings showcase the growth of Vince's career in the past ten years. His posting in the United States from 2009–11 was as the Air Force technical liaison officer at US Navy Project Management Agency 265 for the F/A-18F Super Hornet. He was essentially the primary interface between the Australian and American project offices, managing the aircraft through all aspects of delivery and certification. 'Don't ask, don't tell' was still in place, and Vince and Harley witnessed American debates over its repeal unfold in 2010–11. Since returning to Australia in 2012, Vince has served in Directorate General of Technical Airworthiness (the military equivalent of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority), then the Capability Development Group in the Aerospace Development Branch, and in 2016 he undertook a Masters in Military and Defence Studies at the Australian Command and Staff College (Joint) and Australian National University. That course is designed for officers across the three services seeking future command opportunities. They learn critical analysis, staff and military planning, and ways to enhance officers' technical expertise and knowledge for joint force operations. In 2017 Vince was promoted to Wing Commander and posted to Adelaide as the commanding officer for the Surveillance and Response Systems Program Office in the Defence Capability, Acquisition and Sustainment Group. They provide sustainment of platforms to support the aircraft weapons systems, overseeing everything from spare parts to maintenance to complex repairs.

On top of these busy day jobs, Vince has also taken an active role in the LGBTI inclusion and support group for current Defence members. The Defence LGBTI Information Service (DEFGLIS) had been set up by then Petty Officer Stuart O'Brien in 2002 as an email distribution network to share information among serving gays, lesbians and bisexuals. The only visible presence was a Geocities webpage that posted information about LGBT support organisations in each state. By 2006, having just won the right to same-sex partner recognition, DEFGLIS was keen to increase the visibility of LGB service members. It was around this time that Vince was at a Sydney gay bar and met a Navy member who first mentioned DEFGLIS, which at that time was almost exclusively sailors. Vince then met Stuart O'Brien and offered to run communications for the group, thus beginning his long association with the organisation.

A desire of many LGBT service members was to march in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras to show their pride in their own diversity as service personnel. Vince met with members of the ADF public affairs people and, not surprisingly, learned that there was external criticism against the idea of Defence members marching in Mardi Gras. Working behind the scenes was a savvy move, as Vince and the public affairs people together developed a public relations strategy and talking points. DEFGLIS received permission to march in the 2008 Mardi Gras in civilian attire, and they were amazed at the response: almost 200 people signed up to march. Vince recalls of 2008:

That phenomenal experience that people have today, they experienced back on that first march, with the roars and the cheers. But I think the biggest thing that we got out of it was that we brought an entire sector of the community together for the first time, for them to all see each other and actually network with one another.

Somewhat dampening the euphoria of participating in Mardi Gras were the harassing comments posted to online forums and discussion boards. Vince distinctly remembers one particular comment: 'Not only are fags marching, we've got an Asian leading the charge.' This was the first time Vince had experienced such blatant racism and homophobia during his ADF career, and it stung. He says, 'Someone's just made a horrible comment about me on this news article. And then not being able to do anything about it ... and I remember, I was a little bit disturbed. And then I got over it'. Over the years, Vince has regularly had to tolerate bigoted comments, mostly from online trolls,

whenever DEFGLIS or LGBT-related Defence matters have featured in mainstream or social media. He has developed a thick skin, but at times the online bullying has taken a toll on his and also the other members of DEFGLIS's mental health.

Vince took a hiatus from DEFGLIS while he was in the United States, but when he returned in 2012 he jumped back into a leadership role. Stuart O'Brien had been leading the group since its founding, and the time had come to set up a more formal structure to spread the workload. Vince became interim president in 2012, and over the next two years DEFGLIS underwent a consultative process to establish a new board structure, write a constitution, and incorporate. Its board now includes five elected office bearers; there are four additional elected board positions for a gay or bisexual male, lesbian or bisexual female, transgender or intersex person and opposite-sex attracted person. The board can co-opt up to another nine people. Each board member serves a two-year term, with half of the positions up for election each year. The president is limited to two terms – and having first been elected under the new constitution in 2014, that means Vince's presidency finishes at the end of 2018.

DEFGLIS functions as both an advocacy and social group. Volunteers have organised dinners in the various cities, and other social outings have included winery tours and an annual ski trip. Mardi Gras has consistently been the largest event and garnered more support from the ADF over the years. Numerous DEFGLIS members and representatives of the ADF and Department of Defence worked together behind the scenes, culminating in a decision to allow members to march in uniform from 2013. Marching in uniform has been a source of significant pride for LGBT Defence members. As Vince describes: 'It completely eliminated any doubt in people's mind that their service was valued. It was recognised that LGBTI people did contribute just like any other soldier, sailor and airman. Being LGBTI was not or should not be a source of detriment to their career, because they were able to contribute just as well as any other person'. In 2013, the Army also issued a rainbow pride lapel pin and cufflinks that its members may wear in the week before Mardi Gras. In 2015, the service warrant officers, the three most senior non-commissioned officers of the respective services, volunteered to lead the ADF contingent at Mardi Gras.

On the advocacy front, DEFGLIS has mostly worked within Defence in its development of education programs relating to diversity and inclusion. In one extraordinary case, in 2012, DEFGLIS was invited to present a submission and testify before the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee about how Australian marriage law affected same-sex couples in the ADF. As there are strict rules about Defence members' participation in political activity, Vince checked with the RAAF about whether he could testify. The advice was that Vince could appear as a private citizen, speaking on behalf of DEFGLIS and same-sex couples in Defence, but he had to be explicit that his views did not represent the Department of Defence or the ADF. Vince consulted with other members of DEFGLIS and spoke to the committee not only about his and Harley's experience, but also other challenges LGBT Defence members had when applying for de facto recognition. Several had their applications rejected for 'strange and varying reasons', with one couple even being told they were not allowed to apply. Marriage equality would remove this systemic form of discrimination.

The final major DEFGLIS initiative has been the annual Military Pride Ball, first organised in 2015. The DEFGLIS board felt that they needed a second major event each year to bring together members from across Australia to celebrate diversity and inclusion in the ADF. One of the strengths of the Pride Ball has been the mixing of people across ages, services and ranks. Just as Vince was only comfortable enough to come out when he saw the Group Captain and his partner at a mess ball, Pride Ball is an opportunity for LGBT Defence members to see how the ADF openly embraces their inclusion. Vince also believes that 'it gives people hope that there is no glass ceiling. There's certainly no pink ceiling. You can be what you want to be, so long as you're willing to play, work hard and be part of a team'. Keynote speakers at the Military Pride Balls have included Human Rights Commissioners, the Surgeon-General of the ADF (the highest ranked openly LGBT member) and even the Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs. In his inspiring speech in 2016, Griggs declared: 'We're not going to budge on the [inclusive] direction that we're on because we know it's the right direction, and we know it's the right thing to do, and it results in a fairer and at the same time more capable ADF.'

Vince is proud of his two decades of service, where he has grown both personally and professionally as a capable officer. Interestingly, when referred to as a career officer in an interview question, Vince rejected that label. In an insightful statement about the importance of career choices for all ADF members, Vince remarks:

I actually encourage everyone that they should always keep their options open and consider where they feel that they can bring their most value and what they think they're going to enjoy the most. And in each of those circumstances, I did consider getting out earlier on in my career. It seemed like a good opportunity at the time. It didn't pan out, and I stayed in. And Air Force continued to give me challenging jobs, and I've loved every one of those jobs and the great people and teams that I have been a part of ... I would love to continue to stay within Air Force. Our challenge is to remain attractive as an employer to our own workforce and those seeking employment for the first time.

Reflecting on the role of the ADF in general today, Vince says:

Defence is learning how we need to compete in the labour market, while continuing to deliver complex military effects in a chaotic environment. The character of what makes up warfare is different. We need to modify our approaches from training to how we deliver those effects. And I think we can only do that through having diversity of thought, having as many smart minds contribute to solutions for the future.

This nuanced understanding of the challenges, needs and vision for the ADF echoes why *Cosmopolitan* judge Annamarie Jagose sees Vince as such an influential LGBTI Australian. 'Vince offers a refreshing counter to the predictably conservative cast to some institutions – the church, for example, the police, the military: Ask; tell.'

Ellen Zyla

We first met Ellen at the 2015 Military Pride Ball. She was one of the co-emcees, and her wit and candour set a fantastic tone for the event. She co-hosted the annual event again in 2016 and 2017, demonstrating a keen ability to relate to a diverse audience with guests including the Vice Chief of the Defence Force, members of the NSW parliament,

corporate sponsors, and even a few academic historians. Ellen invited us to her home in inner western Sydney for an interview. Her story reveals much about the changing status of women and LGBT members of today's ADF, showing both how far the organisation has come in the past 25 years, and areas for further improvement. Ellen's story is one of overcoming barriers and obstacles with determination, common sense and a large dollop of good humour.

Ellen was born in Toowoomba in 1982. The family moved around for the first ten years of her life because her father served in the Army. After that, her parents divorced, her mother remarried, and a blended family was formed. From as early as the age of eight, Ellen showed a keen interest in music. She began playing the saxophone and performed in multiple school bands and ensembles. She remembers 'exchanging private lessons for babysitting and teaching', and 18 she also picked up the clarinet.

When Ellen heard a recording of the Navy Band around the age of 15, she knew she wanted to join when she grew up because she could combine the three things she loved: ocean, music and ships. The Navy Band would let her honour her family tradition of military service and do something for her country, bringing together worthwhile service with something she treasured. The Navy has Australia's oldest military band tradition dating back to before Federation. For most of its history there were even ship-based bands, but since the 1980s it has been primarily shore-based. Currently there are two full-time and four part-time Navy Bands in Australia.²³

By Ellen's era, the need for formal qualifications was on the rise and the level of education required to join the Navy Band was edging towards a university bachelor's degree. Ellen had commenced a degree at University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba, working in her mother's hair salon to pay the bills. Even though she had not yet finished the degree, she still managed to get into the band – due to her 'amazing ability', she laughs. In 2003, when Ellen was 20, the ADF announced an application period which included openings for clarinet and saxophone. The audition pack turned up and she sorted her application to join the ADF, which was a separate process to joining the band. There were no openings in the Navy Band – just the Army Band – but Ellen was okay with that. Ellen impressed the assessors at her first audition, but she needed to

decide which instrument to apply with. She went with the saxophone at the second audition, and the assessor said yes.

There were more hurdles for Ellen to overcome to secure her career as a Defence musician. Even though Ellen had a long history playing sport, she still found the running aspect of the Army physical to be challenging. Army standards were very high, and after 18 attempts, she still had not passed the so-called 'beep test'. As Ellen was coming up to her last chance, word came down that there was an opening in the Navy Band, and fortunately for Ellen, the Navy physical was considerably less demanding. The timing could not have been more serendipitous; as she puts it: 'So I ran my nineteenth beep test and they went, "Congratulations, well done, you're joining the Navy."'"

Musicians undertake the same basic training as all other recruits, so Ellen commenced Navy recruit school at HMAS *Cerberus* in Victoria. Just a week before graduation, someone from the band approached Ellen. It turned out that they had only just discovered she was there! She says that this was 'quite a common story back then for our branch'. Still, they were pleased to have her because they definitely needed an oboe player ... except Ellen's instrument was the baritone saxophone. After a series of phone calls, the Navy Director of Music decided she could stay at *Cerberus* with her sax. Then there were discussions about Ellen playing the clarinet in Sydney. This confusion moved back and forth until finally, on graduation day, Ellen received word that she was off to Sydney as a clarinetist. When she finally made it to Sydney she was introduced to the Director of Music, who promptly told her: 'You're not supposed to be in the Navy.' Years later Ellen and the director had a laugh about this when he told her, 'You are one of my most valued members of my team'. At the time, though, his comment shattered her. Back at her apartment she bawled her eyes out, rang her mother and discussed her future. Her mother could see the bigger picture and knew Ellen's toughness: 'She went, "It's not fair, it's not good, but you now have a choice. Pull your socks up, get on and do your job, prove them wrong, or pull the pin."'"

Ellen stayed and took to military life pretty well, never regretting her decision. She had participated in numerous team sports in her youth and was a Queen's Scout. She understood the importance of rules and regulations, and the need for everybody to abide

by them and work as a team. Even if she were uncomfortable with a senior rank's tone or attitude, that would not affect her respect for rank and the need to obey. Being able to think like that was important because it helped her mental stability and to see challenging behaviour for what it was, not letting it get to her. She compared herself as a 21 year old with many of her fellow recruits, 17 or 18 years old, and saw the advantages that came with a bit more maturity.

At the time that Ellen was beginning her naval career, she was also grappling with her sexuality. Even as a child Ellen could sense that she was a bit different, though she did not understand it as a sexual orientation per se. All through high school and even at university she had boyfriends. Internally, though, Ellen was questioning her sexuality, and it was while she was at university that she began to think of herself as a gay woman. One event that prompted Ellen along was her younger sister coming out. When their mother asked Ellen to tell her sister it was just a phase, she responded: "I can't do that. I can't blatantly lie to her." I looked at my little sister and I gave her a wink.' Watching her sister's confidence, along with her sister's partner and some of her own gay friends, made Ellen think a lot about her own identity.

It was at Cerberus that Ellen felt free to be herself and to explore her sexuality with a new sense of comfort. She had her first relationship with a woman, which lasted 12 to 18 months. It was after recruit graduation that Ellen's girlfriend outed her to her mother. Ellen remembers having to explain it as: "Hi, Mum, I'm gay. Here's my first girlfriend." It was that, all in one moment. She was like: "Okay, that's great. I don't have any issues with that." Got a big cuddle, big kiss – but then the comment of "I'll tell your stepfather."

Though Ellen was out to her family and was more comfortable with herself as a gay woman, she still was not ready to be out to her work colleagues. As the relationship continued, Ellen concocted stories to explain about who the woman was, and when and where they met. The backpedalling and covering up made Ellen feel bad, but she felt it important to check out the lay of the land before coming out. She remembers that when discussing her partner, she would give 'false names, even false gender identity'. It is fascinating that Ellen was using the same strategies that LGB members had been utilising

a generation earlier to hide their sexualities under the ban. It was a horrible six months before Ellen decided to come out, and it turned out to be quite easy. The band was full of ‘flamboyant’, ‘fabulous’ people, most of whom were not at all surprised to hear she was gay.

This was in 2003, a decade since the LGB ban had been repealed. Yet, at the grassroots level, and in the minds of many LGB service members, not everything had changed. LGB members often assumed that straight colleagues did not want to know, though the experience of coming out often wound up better than they expected. Ellen’s experience in her early Navy career was that members’ sexuality genuinely did not matter to recruits of her generation, as long as everyone did their job. It is a telling indication of the cultural change that the command and so many service personnel were working for, and which was well underway in wider Australian society from which recruits were drawn. There was a degree of sexism at the recruit school, but Ellen is also cautious to note that there was (and is) a clear but important distinction between outright sexism and jovial banter amongst mates.

Ellen threw herself into her new life in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Band in Sydney. There was a lot of on-the job-training: ‘to learn the stock standard marches by memory, all of the official military musical salutes, your side drumming, your parade drill’. There were also deployments at sea, as was the case for all sailors after recruit training. Ellen’s first was to the Pacific: Vanuatu, Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island. The band’s job was to play music for the ship crew, international dignitaries and the people at the ports. Ceremonial sunsets were popular, as were school concerts and on-board barbecues. Over the years, she has participated in performances such as:

... memorial services at Martin Place. Our education program is pretty huge, so we go into schools and workshop and put on concerts in schools. Playing for royalty, playing for troops deployed, playing at sea, going to Scotland and doing the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, going to Brunei and doing a Tattoo for the Sultan of Brunei’s sixtieth birthday. The scope of what we do is so huge and so varied and that keeps it exciting.

These activities might be best described as the ‘soft diplomacy’ aspect of the ADF’s operations. One of Ellen’s colleagues calls military bands ‘the frontline of peacetime defence’. She describes it as ‘that happy, shiny, look-how-amazing-Defence-is’ work.

Other sailors did not always regard the band highly, referring to musicians as ‘oxygen thieves’. Fighting sailors imagined that the band crew were more highly paid and did not work much between performances. Often sailors assumed that band members ought to be doing other sailors’ jobs, not realising that band members *do* undertake other roles while on deployment. Ellen explains, ‘If there’s a whole of ship evolution, of course you get in, you muck in. You store ship, you ditch gash, you do all the dirty work. But then we work with the café party and the scullery guys so that at the end of meals, you go and you wash the dishes’. For at least a decade, commanders have made an effort to ensure the fleet sees the band as an actual unit, doing the duty set for it, just as the rest of the sailors do. Social media has been important, and being featured in the military newspapers as a serious part of the ADF has helped with the three service bands’ profiles.

Ellen worked in her own way to break down barriers on board, stepping outside the cosy group of band members (which might be as few as eight on a ship), making friends and proving that she and her mates were sailors too. In East Timor and the Middle East, she and the rest of the band showed that they were proper military people, often to the surprise of the Army soldiers. They were putting on shows, but with weapons on their backs. They were offering protection to civilian artists and displaying technical skills with the light, sound and staging of the shows. Ellen feels that exposure and interpersonal interactions have been having an effect, as sailors are now adopting more positive attitudes towards the band members. Of course, their fantastic performances help as well.

Attitudes towards women, too, seem to be changing. Military sociologists regularly argue that Defence forces reflect the values of wider society, so it is not surprising that members’ attitudes are diverse. Older men, in particular, who might have signed up as 16-year-olds in the 1970s, sometimes find it difficult to accept the ADF’s evolving culture. Ever since the gradual introduction of women on ships since 1985, some servicemen (and many ex-sailors) believe women have no place at sea, or argue that women are soft and have to be protected and helped. Lesbians are often objects of

titillation for straight men, and some sailors expect lesbian sailors to share in this. Alternatively, lesbians should be big and butch and be able to hoist heavy objects. That said, at least one other currently serving gay female sailor believes that gay women can sometimes deflect sexual harassment on ships: 'the second they found out I was gay and I wouldn't sleep with them, they stopped talking to me entirely'.²³

Occasionally, Ellen would witness stupid or insensitive remarks about what a lesbian would or would not know about something, or references to her as a 'fucking dyke'. In certain contexts, Ellen has been brave enough to chat with higher ranks when she felt uncomfortable with their language. In these situations, she has always been respectful of their rank, ensuring to discuss the matters politely, beginning conversations with expressions such as 'with all due respect, Sir...'.

Ellen was also dismayed to discover that women could treat other women as badly as men did. Having made their way up the hierarchy, some female commanders were not supportive of others. Even so, at the broader policy level, change is well and truly underway. For example, in areas such as pregnancy, which would once have ended a servicewoman's career, they have a right to return to their positions after maternity leave. There are flexible working arrangements that can be sorted for new parents, including fathers. In the RAAF, there is even a Diversity Handbook on breastfeeding in the workplace. The shift towards the idea that the military is a workplace, rather than some world set apart for warriors, is one of the most striking changes of recent decades.

Ellen's observation of the experiences of male sailors is also enlightening. There's an old saying, she recounts: 'It's not gay when you're underway'. She watches straight men who, as soon as the ship passes through the Sydney Heads, 'kind of change [snaps her fingers]. They're not at home anymore'. The homoeroticism is so obvious to her, even if it is not to most of those men, and she finds it amusing. For gay men, the experiences are just as diverse as they are for straight and gay women. Ellen describes one dear friend.

The most flamboyant gay man you would ever come across. He was valet to the commanding officer (CO). He was amazing at his job. The CO loved him. He copped some pretty big stick from a lot of the guys about his sexuality. You knew

when it was getting to him because he'd really retreat inward, but most of the time, he could rise above it or he'd throw it back at them ... Just little, flick off comments that were enough to say, 'Oi! Buddy! Jog on, pull your head in! You've overstepped.'

One of the more horrifying stories Ellen tells is of five days that she spent on board a US Navy vessel. It was an all-male crew, with only two women officers who lived in the ward room and seemed oblivious to what was happening below decks. Ellen and three other Australian women had to be housed, despite their junior rank, in the ward room for their safety. Ellen was a smoker back then, and if she needed to go for a cigarette after lights out (or really anytime), a man would need to escort her through the male accommodation and living space which sailors openly referred to as the 'rape dungeon'. Her thoughts went to the gay men on board. She could be given protection, but as there were no women crew members: who was being raped?

This brief posting reinforced Ellen's sense of just how far the ADF has come as a social institution that values diversity. She saw the rigid racial divisions onboard the US ship, with African-Americans and Latinos each with their own social areas. She also saw the casual acceptance of a term like 'rape dungeon' and what that said about the place of women and gays in the US military. The infamous 'don't ask, don't tell policy' was in place from 1993 until 2011. Some scholars argue that the policy sent attitudes and practices backwards. The expulsion of highly skilled LGB members reinforced the idea that homosexuals were a threat to the military, service members and national security. In contrast, by the time Ellen was aboard that US ship, it was ADF policy to promote diversity and inclusion of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Ellen notes that Australia's was a top-down shift, but she also recognises the importance of the grassroots. Policy, developed and promulgated by the ADF top brass, had to be instilled in the rank and file. She sees the training instructors as key to this because they explain what is and is not acceptable behaviour to new recruits.

During her Navy career, Ellen has had a few relationships with other ADF members and civilians. In the Royal Australian Navy there are no limitations on consensual relationships other than if both partners are on the same ship. The commander has a right to separate them if they believe that the relationship might compromise the

sailors' performance. Partners also cannot be posted to the same warzone, and these rules apply both to heterosexual and same-sex couples. Being in the band involves meeting lots of new people and ample opportunities to develop romantic attachments. It also means that couples are often apart for extended periods, and more than one of Ellen's relationships has ended because she met someone new. Over time, Ellen shied away from relationships with other ADF members because, as she put it: 'I sleep with this person, but this person's slept with that person and that person and that person. The incestuousness of Defence lesbians is out of this world!'

There were also the problems that had roots outside the strains of the job. In one relationship Ellen became the victim of domestic violence at the hands of her civilian partner who had spiralled into alcoholism, depression and increasingly unreasonable demands. Family violence is a silent epidemic among LGBT communities, partly because of popular perceptions of domestic violence as straight male perpetrators targeting straight female partners. Victoria's 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence noted: 'Existing research suggests that intimate partner violence may be as prevalent in LGBTI communities as it is in the general population. The level of violence against transgender and intersex people, including from parents and other family members, appears to be particularly high.'²³ While many of the reasons behind LGBT partner violence may be the same as for heterosexual or cisgender people, there are also distinct reasons and barriers to accessing support services. Some LGBT people may fear being outed, have less family support, face discrimination from religious support providers or ethnic communities, or fear homophobia or transphobia if they go to the police.

Ellen is not the only LGBT Defence member interviewed for this project who has experienced partner violence either during or after their ADF career. These men and women were fortunate to get out of those situations, even if often at great physical, emotional and financial cost. The final straw for Ellen came when her partner hit her for the second time and tried to force herself on her. Ellen reported to her superior what had happened, and within minutes she was in a meeting with several men, including her divisional officer. They took her for medical treatment, where they recorded details about the violence and organised treatment. Ellen describes it all as 'very compassionate and understanding'. Doctors assessed her mental state, and she was given ten days' leave and

advised about available resources. Whether her colleagues were following a formal policy is not clear, but regardless, the management team were really implementing best practice to support colleagues experiencing family violence.

Given her strong character, it is not surprising that Ellen found herself involved in DEFGLIS. Vince Chong and his partner were in Sydney for Mardi Gras, preparing for the first Defence march in uniform in 2013. Chatting on the hotel balcony, Ellen impressed Vince with her attitude, and she quickly found herself marching in uniform with her side-drum, leading the DEFGLIS contingent. Not long after, she was co-opted onto the organisation's board. Ellen's first leadership role was to set up a women's network. It was clear to her that DEFGLIS was not adequately engaging with its women members, and she set out to remedy that. She says it was 'a hard slog' because the group was very much a gay man's zone, but through the 'amazingness' of social media she started to reach out. Any female member of DEFGLIS – gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex – is welcome to join this online network, and members are encouraged to share experiences, raise problems, and to explore solutions. Like the broader organisation, the DEFGLIS women's network is both social and informative.

Like all activists, Ellen occasionally found herself feeling like she was bashing her head against a wall, 'because you try and engage and you get absolutely nothing back'. Oddly enough, most of the resistance to the network came from women, with comments like: Why do we need this? What about inclusiveness? Why not do this work within the main group? Yet, Ellen found the male members of DEFGLIS to be supportive of the women's network. What worked, Ellen discovered, was having small events targeting particular member groups, such as inviting women with families to a picnic, hosting small sit-down dinners, or inviting speakers to events. The network now has about 40 or 50 members. Ellen thinks the main area that needs effort nowadays is around transgender issues. Gay men and women have made amazing progress over the past 25 years, but transgender issues are just starting to take off. DEFGLIS is already working in this space, facilitating an online transgender network which has approximately 25 members.

Another area where Ellen sees scope for improvement within Defence is in the relationships between higher and lower ranks, and civilian and military people. This has

been a challenge for DEFGLIS as well, as almost the entire board is consistently officers (Vince recognises this as a problem, and it is one reason he was so keen to recruit Ellen). When the Defence Department was starting its Defence Pride Network in 2015, Ellen was invited to the planning meetings. As an Able Seaman, she was the only non-officer present apart from civilian members of the Australian Public Service. Ellen was worried that the program was appearing like managerial-speak, and recruits and lower ranks would dismiss the network. Her idea was that Defence Pride ‘champions’ needed to be appointed at every level of Defence, rather than just the top ranks. Ellen believes there are significant opportunities if the hierarchic structure of the ADF, so often an obstacle to change, could instead be harnessed to transform the organisation’s culture.

Ellen is still a proud serving member of the Navy. She is still a musician, and she has no plans to quit. There are new fields that interest her such as policing or physical training instruction, and Defence is nothing if not diverse in its career options. Given the change she has witnessed and helped bring about over 15 years of service, she hopes to see more of it in the future: ‘Change is a good thing. Change is great. And I would hope that Australia can do that – and we can. The general populace – we can move forward and we can get all the amazing things that we want.’

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