

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’.¹ 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.'² 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!³

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. ~~Following~~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 1963–1965. 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.⁴

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 ~~hi~~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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.’⁷ 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’.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.

¹ Brian McFarlane, *We Band of Brothers: A True Australian Adventure Story* (Newcastle: Exact Print + Design, 2000), 44.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ Steve Gower, *Rounds Complete: An Artillery Forward Observer in Vietnam* (Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2017), 99.

⁴ Tristan Moss, *Guarding the Periphery: The Australian Army in Papua New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵ Chris Dixon, ‘Redeeming the Warrior: Myth-Making and Australia's Vietnam Veterans,’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 2 (2014): 214-28; Mark Dapin, “‘We Too Were Anzacs’: Were Vietnam Veterans Ever Truly Excluded from the Anzac Tradition?’ in *The Honest History Book*, 77-91.

⁶ Jeffrey Grey, 'In Every War but One? Myth, History and Vietnam,' in *Zombie Myths of Australian Military History*, ed. Craig Stockings (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 190-212.

⁷ J.G. Pairman, 'In Which We Serve', *OutRage* (December 1988): 39.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Suzanne McDonnel and Peter Lalor, 'Ousted Army Gay Is Still Bitter', *Sunday Age* (21 June 1992): 2.