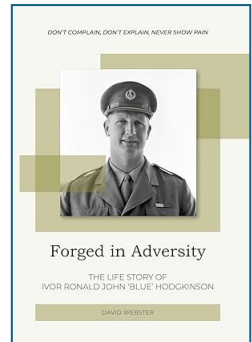


Forged in Adversity – the Life Story of Blue Hodgkinson

I am grateful for the opportunity to share the story of Blue's long and remarkable life with you. In the time available I can only focus on a few highlights which I hope will provide a better understanding of his adventures during his 83 trips around the sun.



I will start with Blue's early life. Blue was born in Perth on 9 June 1931, and his family suffered the effects of the Great Depression more than most. He was the youngest of three boys – their mother Dot doted on them, and her love was strongly reciprocated.



Blue's father was not a good role model spending time in Fremantle gaol on more than one occasion, and the dole was often the family's only source of income. We are told that character is forged in adversity and in Blue's case this was certainly true.



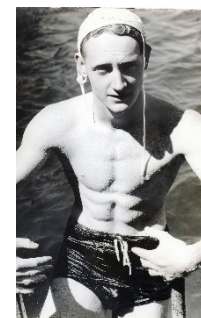
Blue's first memories at the age of four are of two white tents which formed the family home beside the railway line at Wiluna 500 kms north of Kalgoorlie.

His father had found work as a fettler on the rail line and was the only member of his gang who could drive the metal dogs or spikes into the sleepers with one blow. Blue would inherit his father's exceptional strength - and stamina.

The family then moved back to Perth where they occupied a single room in a boarding house and Blue commenced his schooling and experienced the challenges that accompany early character formation. When confronted with the option to fight or flee, he opted to stand his ground and fight- on many occasions.



Living close to the centre of Perth also meant he was close to the Swan River which would be his happy hunting ground in his early life and the scene for his many aquatic triumphs.

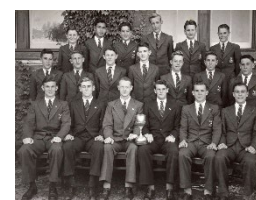


From the age of 12 until he attended Scotch College, Blue learned many of life's key lessons on the streets of Perth as a paper boy. He sold papers on weekday afternoons and from 11.00 am to midnight on Saturdays. - the 4 Pounds per week he earned was given willingly to his beloved mother Dot to help put food on the family table. There were also turf battles and the occasional punch up to ensure that his street corner was not lost to the opposition. He learnt early how to "seize and hold ground"

The Highgate Hill School that Blue attended had a policy that all children must learn to swim and then attempt the lifesaving certificate. This was the start of Blue's competitive swimming career, and he excelled at every facet of the sport. Such was his ability that Blue was offered a sporting scholarship to Scotch College in Perth starting in January 1948.

His involvement in the various sports at Scotch College –

including hockey, rowing, swimming and wrestling - resulted in Blue failing to matriculate. This meant that Blue did not meet the entry standard for Duntroon. His scholarship was extended by Scotch



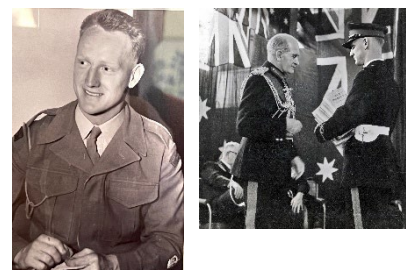
College for a further year. Needless to say, all the sports master were thrilled.

At the end of 1949, Blue passed his exams with flying colours and - as captain of most of the sporting teams in which he was involved - repaid his scholarship fees in spades.

It was here that he joined the school cadet unit, attended a cadet camp at Swanbourne, topped the course and became a cadet lieutenant. His cadet experience motivated him to apply for entry to Duntroon.



Blue's selection for RMC was a no brainer, and he marched into Duntroon in Jan 1950. Again, he excelled at sport, loved the field work and did well in his studies. He was an outstanding cadet and graduated second in his class.



It was during his four years at Duntroon that Blue made a number of lifelong friends.



The Chapter of the book dealing with Blue's four years at Duntroon was mostly written by one of his classmates – Brigadier Ray Sunderland AO –

text

Dear David, thank you for the wonderful book you have written about my late good friend Ivor. I am absolutely amazed by what you have written not only is it a true history of a great man you have produced a most readable story beautifully written. I am still reading and the rereading the story and finding much I did not know.

In March 1954, Blue was posted to 1RAR in Korea. It was here that Lt Hodgkinson first met Pte George Mansford. Blue always maintained that the standard you set was determined by the faults that you allowed to go unchecked. He noticed that the carrying handle on George's Bren gun was not in the correct position and



suggested that George adjust it. It was just on dawn after a long nighttime patrol and George's response to Blue is not able to be repeated in polite company. Instead of making an issue of it, Blue laughed it off – it was the start of a great lifelong friendship. The that the two men would work together closely over the next two decades culminating in 1972 when Blue was the CO of 1 RAR and George was his Operations Officer.

Blue was then posted to the Airborne Platoon at Williamstown as its commander in 1955. Apart from thoroughly enjoying his time with the airborne platoon there were two significant events that must be mentioned.



Firstly, during one of their exercises Blue was interviewed by a Miss Janet Vasey a young journalist from the Newcastle Herald. Jan was the niece of Major General George Vasey. [A sad aside, Gen Vasey died in March 1945 when the Hudson aircraft he was travelling in, crashed into the sea off Cairns. He was on his way to PNG to command the 6th Div.



Blue married Jan in December 1956 and their only child Francis, was born in August 1959. Francis had 3 children one of whom followed in his grandfather's footsteps and joined the Army.

The second event would impact the rest of Blue's life. Whilst preparing for a parachute demonstration on a windy day in Canberra, Blue jumped as a drifter to enable the DC3 pilot to gauge the strength of the wind. He landed hard on that jump and chipped a bone in his knee. This accident would eventually lead to four knee replacement operations, many arthroscopies, a failed attempt to fuse the bones and stiffen his leg and the finally the amputation of his leg in 2007.



He never complained.

In October 1955 Blue was posted back to WA and reunited with his family. His postings to 17 National Service Training Unit and Adjutant of the 16th Battalion allowed him to devote a great deal of time to aquatic pursuits on his beloved Swan River.



Such was his prowess with the oars that within a short time he was promoted to the position of stroke – or captain – of the WA eight. The WA eight achieved a lot under Blue's leadership and in May 1958 on the Nepean River in Penrith would have won the Kings cup but for their number 4 losing consciousness with about 300 metres to go. They pressed on with 7 oarsmen to claim second spot.



As the captain of the WA eight, Blue asked if his posting to RMC as Adjutant could be deferred for 12 months to allow him to compete in the Kings Cup in June 1959 which would give him a chance of winning selection in the crew to represent Australia in the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. The request was denied by the then Commandant of RMC. The WA eight (with Blue's replacement on board) won the 1959 Kings Cup. The WA crew went on to represent Australia in Rome the following year - but without Blue on board, they did not do well. We can only speculate on what might have been achieved if Blue had been allowed to retain his captaincy of the WA crew. Blue described this episode as one of the greatest disappointments of his life.



Blue duly took up his post as Adjutant CSC at RMC in Jan 59. He was well aware of all the tricks that cadets engaged in and they provided no end of daily challenges.



But there was one incident that presented a particular challenge – the fake assassination at Lumby’s – if you would like to know more about this fascinating incident, ask me about it during question time.

Blue was then promoted major and attended the staff college course at Quetta during 1962. It was of course an accompanied posting. He thoroughly enjoyed his sabbatical with his family, his interaction with the host nation students as well as the company of his fellow foreign students. His exploits are addressed in the book.



On return from the staff college course at Quetta, Blue was posted to command C Coy 3RAR and deployed to Malaya in mid-1963. In 1965, Blue and his company were involved in the CLARET Operations (top secret). This involved Australian troops crossing the border into Borneo to ambush and disrupt Indonesian forces attempting to infiltrate.



His company deployed from its Serikin Base camp on 12 such operations including two major contacts.



Prior to his departure for Malaya, Blue noted in his memoirs that he was 31 years of age and had never fired a shot in anger. His solution to this perceived weakness was to attach himself to Bob Guest’s platoon as a rifleman - effectively placing himself under command of one of his platoon commanders.



Blue took part in a linear ambush beside a river. When the ambush was sprung, three Indonesian soldiers including a machine gunner appeared on the left flank where Blue had positioned himself. Blue moved to confront the threat, and the enemy soldiers were killed. Bob Guest with one of

his sections and joined Blue attacked the remaining enemy - forcing them break contact and withdraw.

In the second encounter in mid July 1965, Bob Guest's platoon was again involved in a river ambush. Six Indonesians were killed in the initial springing of the ambush and five wounded. After a prolonged engagement, Blue and the platoon withdrew supported by British artillery back to base leaving 13 Indonesians dead and five wounded.

Bob Guest received an MID and Blue was awarded the MBE for his outstanding, courageous (and unconventional) leadership of Charlie Company during the CLARET operations.

At the end of 1966, Blue arrived in Vietnam to take up the appointment as 2IC of 5RAR. Blue assumed the role of OPSO in addition to his duties as Bn 2IC for the last 3 months of 5 RAR's tour - a challenge he no doubt relished. During his time in 5 RAR, Blue, again had no shortage of challenges. Not long after his arrival, OC C Coy Major Don Bourne triggered an antipersonnel mine which killed him, his 2IC and Kiwi FO. This was followed by further fatalities. During a search and destroy operation in the Long Hai Hills, the leading APC of B Company hit a 500lb bomb set up as a land mine killing six and wounding several others. OC B Coy Major John McQualter ran forward to take control, when he too triggered a M16 mine. He died of his wounds a few weeks later on 5 March 1967.



Max Carrol recalled that "Blue did a superb job during his time with 5 RAR". Robert O'Neill - who was IO at the time - described Blue as "a very bright man with a strong background of knowledge and experience in counter-insurgency warfare - Blue came 'as a



breath of fresh air and he re-energised the team. He was awarded an MID for his leadership and professionalism.

When 5RAR completed its 12-month tour of duty in April of 67, Blue was posted to 2 Field Force Victor the US HQ controlling the war in Vietnam.

During that time, he was invited by a US counterpart to participate in a 'firefly' (Night Hawke) mission. The task was to patrol the waterways at night using helicopters to locate VC watercraft. When found, they were illuminated by the choppers powerful searchlights and engaged using all the weaponry on board. An enemy barge was located and engaged by the crew. On the third pass, in Blue's words, 'I got a chance to empty my M60 into the barge which was alight and slowly sinking'. They were the last shots he fired in anger.



In November 1968 he was promoted LTCOL and was posted to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra replacing his friend Ron Grey as Chief Instructor Battle Wing.



Training students for service in Vietnam and was undertaken with great zeal. Blue would appear at lectures and field training activities without warning and woe betide anyone who was not performing to his high standards.



In May 69 while standing on the veranda of Battle Efficiency Wing HQ with Blue and George Mansford, the phone rang – I answered it to be advised that George's wife had died suddenly of a heart attack in Brisbane. I advised Blue of the message, and he directed me to give the phone to George who of course was devastated. Blue gave me the simple but clear message to take George home to Brisbane, stay with him and to report back daily until George's wife was laid to rest – which I did. Blue was



especially considerate in allowing us time to assist George over the next 12 months to spend as much time as he could with his four children during the peak of the Vietnam War.

In August 1970 Blue was posted as the GSO1 on HQ 3TF in Townsville in readiness to take command of 1RAR in March the following year. I arrived in Townsville in January 1971 and was called to Blue's office.

I was directed to form the Lavarack Australian Football team from units of the TF, join the local competition in town and win the flag. Again, the order was clear and simple. There was a clear expectation that the directed outcome would be achieved – just as he had done so often in the past. With Blue's help we turned a team of champions (3 – 4 from each unit) into a champion team and we won the flag, and Blue was there with the Task Force commander to cheer us on.



In March 1971 Blue commenced his final regimental posting with 1RAR - the same unit to which he was posted on graduation 21 years earlier. He spent his leave and the early part of 1971 re-writing the 1RAR SOPs in readiness for his period as CO.



When he assumed command of the Bn, it was scheduled to deploy to Vietnam for the third time but Labor's win in December 1972 included a promise to bring the boys home from the war. Blue's dream of commanding his battalion in battle was never realised and was a source of great regret.



The soldiers felt were unstoppable, bullet proof - and proud



Blue ceased duty as CO 1RAR on 21 Jan 1973 and moved to Canberra to take up a staff appointment in the Directorate of Infantry. It was from this posting that he resigned from the ARA.



His letter of resignation simply read: 'I hereby apply to resign my commission from the ARA on 12 August 1974. My reasons for resignation are not explicit except for the fact that I need a new challenge in a different direction. The application has nothing to do with dissatisfaction with the Army, the Army life or system. I will leave the Army with mixed feelings and regrets. However, whatever task I undertake in the future will require me to be young enough to participate and hence this premature request to resign'.



Thus ended 24 years of dedicated highly professional service that included deployment into four different areas of operations. His premature departure was a great loss to the Army.

On moving to Canberra, Blue and Jan purchased a property at Murrumbateman and they took to farming with a vengeance. Trying to make a good living off a small acre farm is no mean feat and Blue went back to work in Sep 74 as a clerk in the public service. Sadly Blue and Jan separated in 1976 while I was on a posting in London.



Blue met Mary during his public service role and they married in Sep1977. They had much in common – both followed a very healthy lifestyle, worked out in the gym together, worked hard on the farms together, took up golf with a vengeance in the 1990s, and enjoyed some overseas travel.

In Dec 89 Blue was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and  underwent 18 months of chemotherapy. It was during this treatment that he gave up the Devil's urine - to ensure the best chance of a full recovery – he kept the promise to himself and never drank again – another clear indication of his strength of character.

In the early 1990s, I met up with Blue at a dinner party at Fred Pfitzner's home. I mentioned that I had just had knee replacement surgery. Having had his first knee replacement in 1986, Blue knew exactly what I needed and directed me to report to the local pool in Canberra at 7.00 am sharp the following Sat morning. So, commenced over 15 years of swimming together regularly. Under Blue's tutelage I learned to swim according to the coaching manual. Our time in the water was always conducted in a competitive spirit – every lap had a purpose and every session a set of objectives. He would not let up until I could swim 40 laps without stopping. His encouragement included phrases such as 'am I wasting my time with you tiger' together with the occasional 'good, good, good'. We tried to keep up the swimming after Blue's leg was amputated but it wasn't to be and our years of swimming together ceased - but we did continue to meet in Civic and chat over coffee most Saturday mornings.



Blue's health deteriorated significantly after the amputation of his leg. His claim to have his conditions recognised by DVA for pension purposes was rejected. In February 1994, Blue wrote to his RMC classmate, now a psychiatrist, Dr Stewart Bartle, asking for his support in mounting an appeal. And another classmate – Alf Garland – was his advocate. After a detailed examination of Blue, Dr Bartle diagnosed him with severe chronic PTSD compounded by impaired mobility and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma with a poor prognosis. In his opinion, the severity of his pathology was extremely high in fact it was the highest rating that he had ever obtained. Blue was finally assessed to be TPI.



One vital omission in DVA's determination was Blue's expected quality of life – including restricted physical activity and persistent feelings of stress such as emotional disturbance and outbursts, impaired social function, symptoms of depression, anxiety, worrying, insomnia, irritability and mobility of moods, and subjective feelings of distress. With this diagnosis, one cannot really predict a full and happy future.



Although deeply personal, his PTSD must be mentioned.

The killing of the Indonesian soldiers in 1965 haunted Blue and contributed to his condition. He described it in the following words: "The 'downer' occurs periodically and usually arrives after I am reminded of stressful, dangerous places or events. I have some pills which I take daily. They are supposed to harness these attacks. It feels as if the brain has closed and the vision impaired. There is no pain and there is no solution except to lie down and switch off. Sleep comes quickly. On awakening the problem has gone but the brain feels different.



I had a spate of visits from this unwelcome guest whilst I was recovering from my leg amputation”. He continued “No sweat, it’s all in the game with the bitter and the sweet. At least I am alive and the sun still feels warm on my back - so forget about it and enjoy this wonderful thing called life”.

Blue was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2007. Eventually his condition deteriorated to the point where he spent most of his time at home dozing in a chair having lost the will to get up and do things – and Mary became his full-time carer.



After long and careful deliberation, it was decided to place Blue in ‘Villagio St Antonio’ in North Canberra. The retirement village environment with its planned activities and dedicated staff brought life back to Blue in the form of reading of poetry and the daily newspapers to other residents. The staff of Villagio were wonderful to Blue and they became part of his extended family.



It was much easier to visit Blue in this environment than at home. And many of his friends did just that. (Including George). His deterioration was rapid and he finally succumbed to his various ailments on the afternoon of Sunday 5 August 2012 aged 81 with the Seekers playing softly in the background.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by answering a question some of you may be considering. Why a strong, courageous, highly trained and disciplined man like Blue was so traumatised by the killing of the Indonesian soldiers? That was our role in war – to close with and kill the enemy.



- Killing enemy soldiers at close range in a “kill or be killed” situation Blue showed exceptional steadiness - the kind of courage Moran called “character at its testing point,” when a man’s deeply ingrained qualities are revealed.
- Courage does not spare a man from the consequences of what he must do but rather it often exposes him more deeply. Blue’s actions were intimate and morally consequential. Modern psychology is clear that the closer the killing, the greater the psychological impact.
- **Blue carried** that burden alone, in silence, for decades. 
Don’t explain, don’t complain, never show pain. There was no public acknowledgement, no ritual absolution, no framework to help him absorb the moral shock of taking life in an undeclared operation that officially, did not exist.
- Moran tells us that every man has a finite “bank account of courage,” drawn down each time a man confronts fear. Blue’s account was drained early and violently, yet his courage held in Borneo; his character passed the test.
- Courage is not a shield against fear or trauma. A man’s true nature is exposed when fear strips away pretence. Courage is simply character in extremis - the outward expression of a man’s inner character when put to the test.
- **But the unspoken memory** of that day remained inside him, 
unprocessed and unshared. Over time, that unresolved trauma hardened into chronic PTSD compounded by illness, physical decline, and the slow erosion of his military identity.
- This was not a failure of courage - it was the cost of it. Blue was courageous in battle and courageous in suffering. His trauma was not the opposite of

his bravery; it was its long shadow — the price paid by a man who carried too much, for too long, because that is what men of his character believe they must do.

Further Questions



Plug My Book

Forged in Adversity: The Life Story of Ivor Ronald John 'Blue' Hodgkinson

Purchased Oct 2024

Paperback

[Overview](#) [Similar titles](#)

(Black and white version)
Born into an impoverished family in the shadow of the Great Depression, Ivor (Blue) Hodgkinson spent his early childhood learning life's essential lessons the hard way. Based on his memoirs and numerous anecdotes from those who knew him, this biography tells the story of his courageous and inspirational struggle to achieve his full potential in every field of endeavour he attempted.

Book Details

Print length	Language	Publication date	ISBN-10
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The Life Story of Ivor “Blue” Hodgkinson

David Webster

Vietnam 30/50, 16 -17 May 2026

DON'T COMPLAIN, DON'T EXPLAIN, NEVER SHOW PAIN



Forged in Adversity

THE LIFE STORY OF
IVOR RONALD JOHN 'BLUE' HODGKINSON

DAVID WEBSTER

Blue as a Young Lad

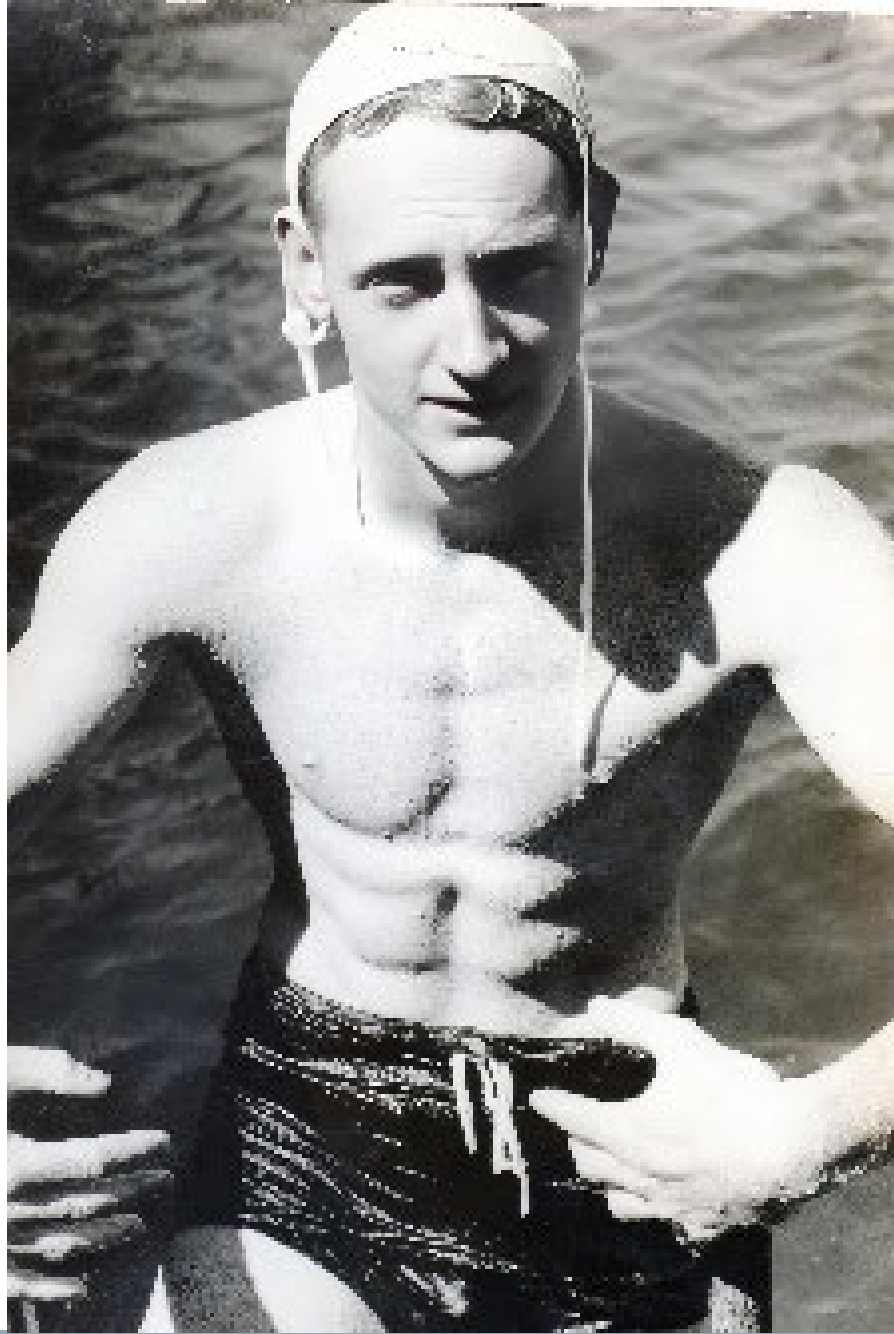


Blue's Father - Arthur James Hodgkinson



Perth City 1950s





A Love of the Water and the Gym

Scotch College Perth 1949





Scotch College
Perth 1949

RMC Duntroon





Duntroon Graduation 1953

Brigadier Ray
Sunderland AO

Dear David

Thank you for the wonderful book you have written about my late good friend Ivor. I am absolutely amazed by what you have written not only is it a true history of a great man, you have produced a most readable story beautifully written.



Korea 1954

Parachute Platoon, Williamstown 1955





Blue and Jan 1956



A Hard Landing

Back Home in Perth





Rowing on the River
in West Australia



Captain of the West Australian Eight



Adjutant RMC – Jan 1959

Quetta with the Family



OC Charlie
Company

Operation Claret





Charlie Company Base Camp

Serikin, Borneo

Operation Claret





2IC/OPSO 5 RAR 1967

5 RAR Lines 1967





Night Hawke Mission

Canungra 1968



Battle Efficiency Training





Dealing with a Tragedy 1969



Blue's Directive Form the LAFC and Win the Flag

From individual champions to a
champion team with help from Blue

GSO1
Headquarters 3TF Townsville



CO 1 RAR Lavarack Barracks 1972

Labor Brings the Troops Home

Jim Cairns Hosts
Vietnamese Delegation
24 April 1973



1 RAR Exercise Treble Change PNG 1972



Exercise Treble
Change
PNG 1972



Ex Treble Change George Mansford

I am in no doubt whatsoever that Treble Change was the most impressive test of soldiering I had ever experienced on a peace time exercise.

The Battalion, with its high morale, incredible spirit and immense unit pride had overcome the disappointment of not going to Vietnam and achieved a very high standard of battle discipline and readiness for any conflict.

Blue was immensely proud.

Ex Treble Change Peter Adamis

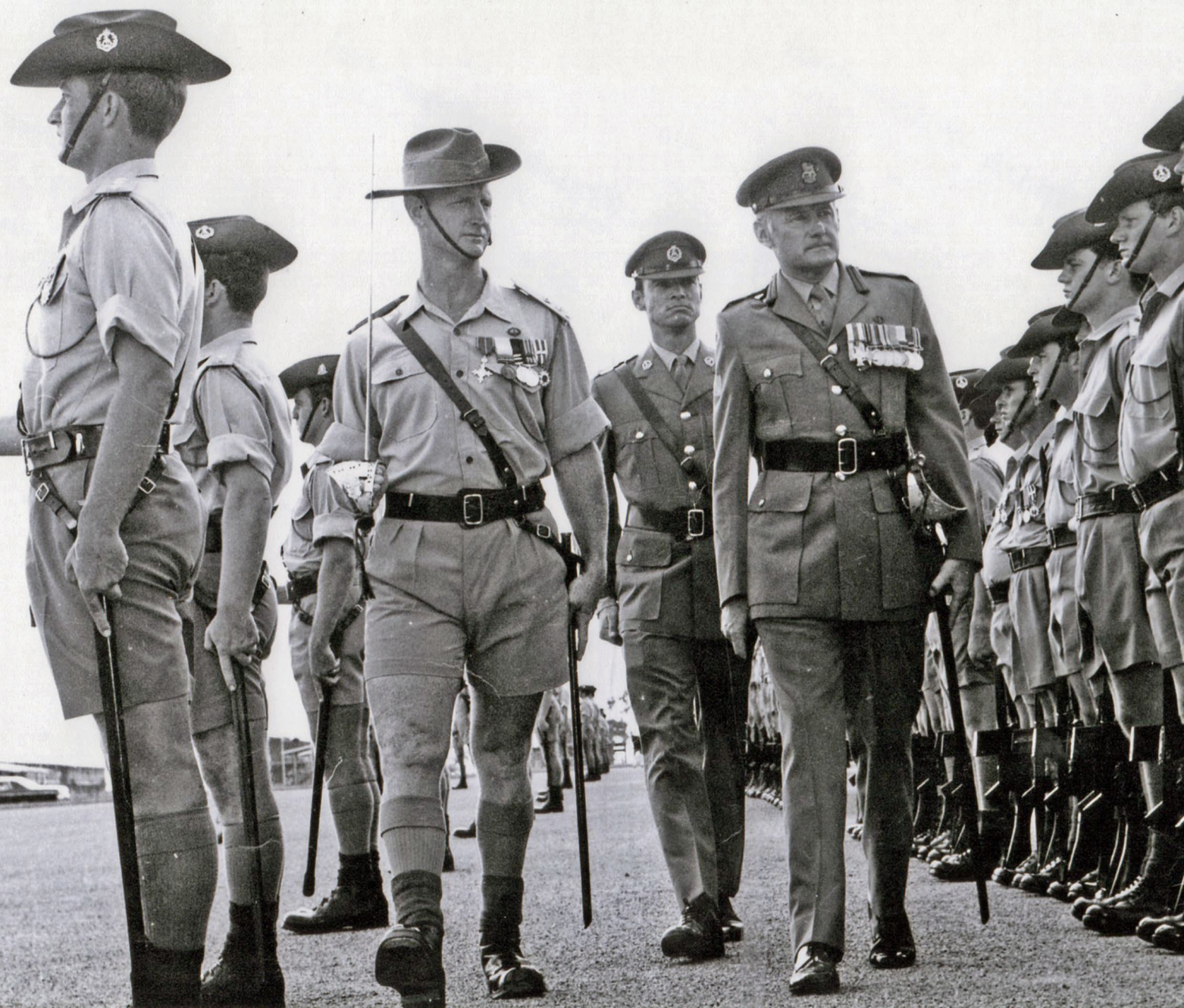
We learnt to adapt to the wilds of the jungle, roll in the mud and undergrowth, to smell like it, to listen to it, look like it, blend with it and above all be a part of it and never ever be afraid of it.

We wiped our arses with leaves that made our butts itch for weeks, (loo paper was needed for cigarettes), leeches on our bodies, tropical sores, raw feet from the constant rain, laughed, pissed on each other, played pranks, argued, fought amongst ourselves.

Ex Treble Change
Peter Adamis

*But, when it came to do the job on hand,
we were forever disciplined and
motivated as a team.*

*The soldiers felt were unstoppable, bullet
proof - and proud!*



Pride on Parade
Lavarack Barracks
1972



Staff Appointment
Canberra 1973

Blue's Resignation 12 August 1974

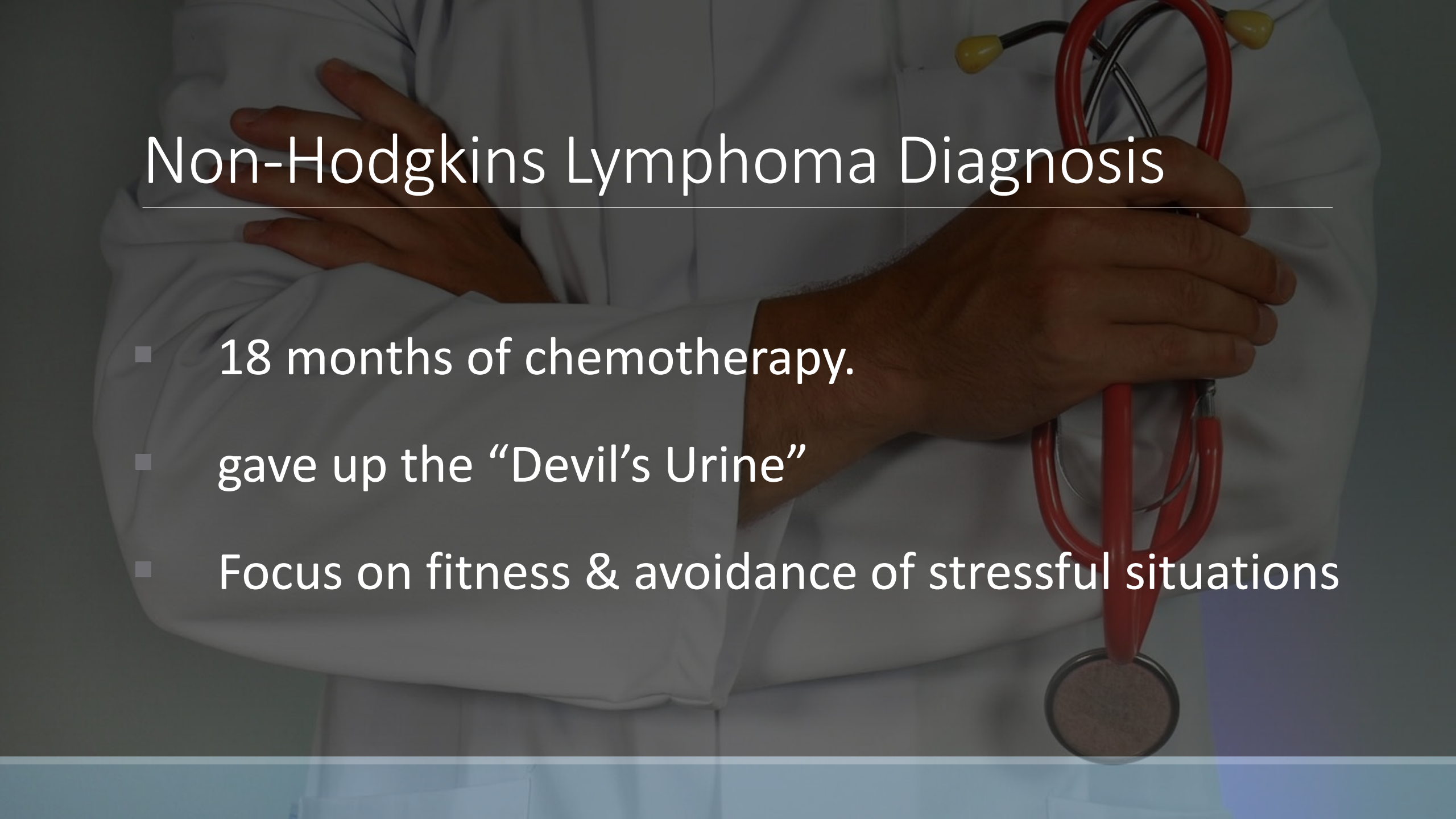
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I will leave the Army with mixed feelings and regrets. However, whatever task I undertake in the future will require me to be young enough to participate and hence this premature request to resign'.



Life After the Army
Farming, Fitness and Fun



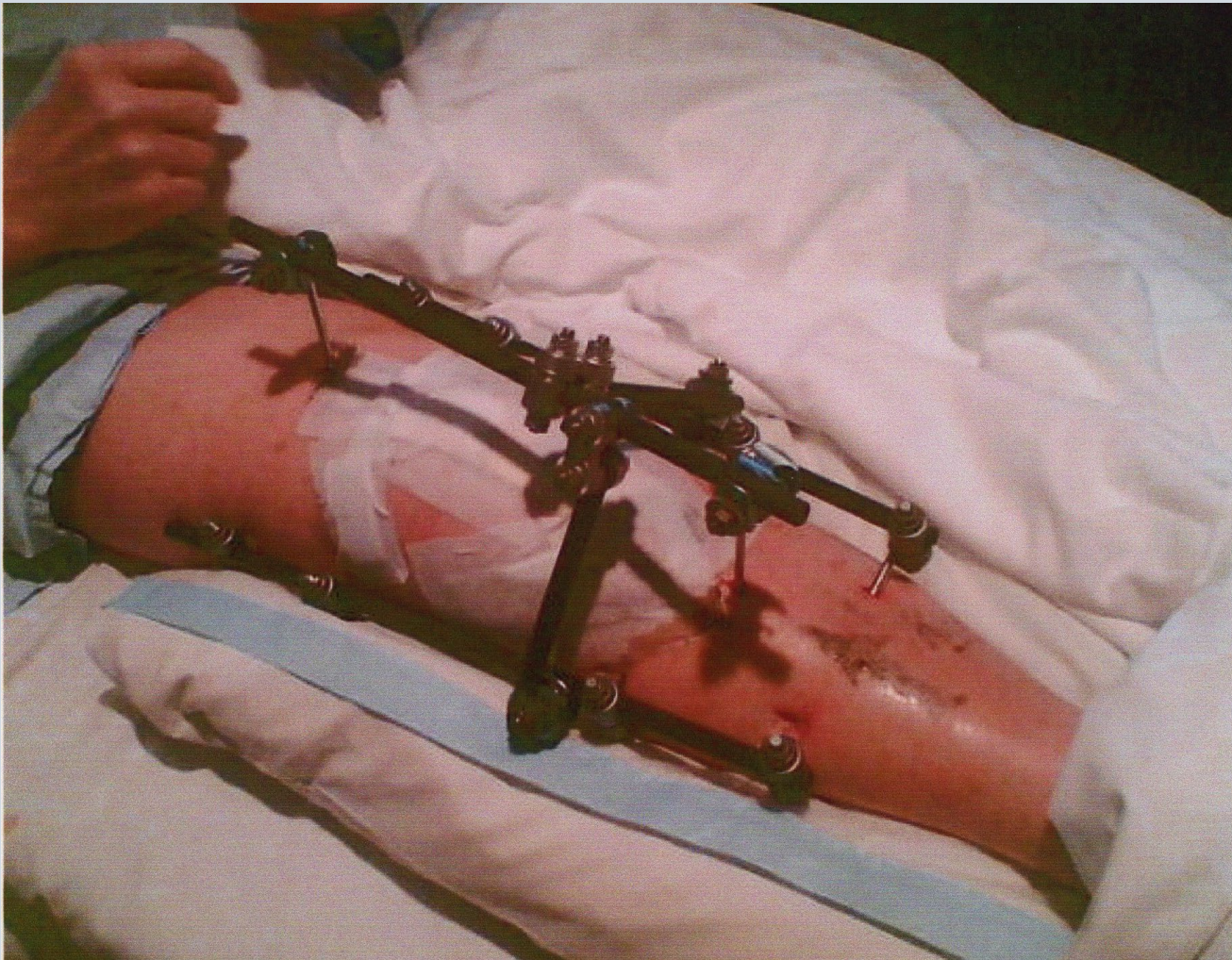
Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma Diagnosis

- 18 months of chemotherapy.
- gave up the “Devil’s Urine”
- Focus on fitness & avoidance of stressful situations

Swimming Coach Extraordinaire

Every Sat Morning
for 15 years





All Attempts to
Save Blue's Leg
Failed

Severe Chronic PTSD Diagnosis

Dr Bartle
(Psychiatrist)

Severe chronic PTSD compounded by impaired mobility and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma with a poor prognosis.

The severity of his pathology was extremely high in fact it was the highest rating that Dr Bartle had ever obtained.

Blue was finally assessed to be TPI.

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One vital omission in DVA's determination to reject Blue's claim was his expected quality of life – including:

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He described it in the following words:

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To Close With and
Kill

“I had a spate of visits from this unwelcome guest whilst I was recovering from my leg amputation.

No sweat, it's all in the game with the bitter and the sweet. At least I am alive and the sun still feels warm on my back – so forget about it and enjoy this wonderful thing called life”.

Alzheimers Diagnosis 2007

Life at Villagio





Blue & George Enjoying Morning Tea

Villagio St Antonio
North Canberra

Conclusion

Why was a strong, courageous highly trained and disciplined man like Blue so traumatised by the killing of the Indonesian soldiers?

Killing enemy soldiers at close range in a “kill or be killed” situation Blue showed exceptional steadiness, - the kind of courage Lord Moran called “character at its testing point,” when a man’s deeply ingrained qualities are revealed.

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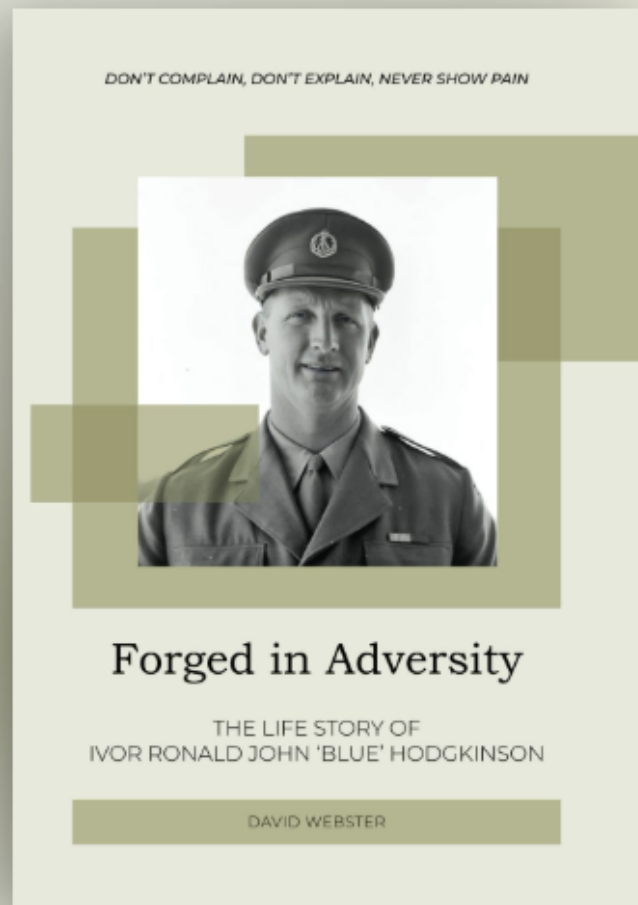
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