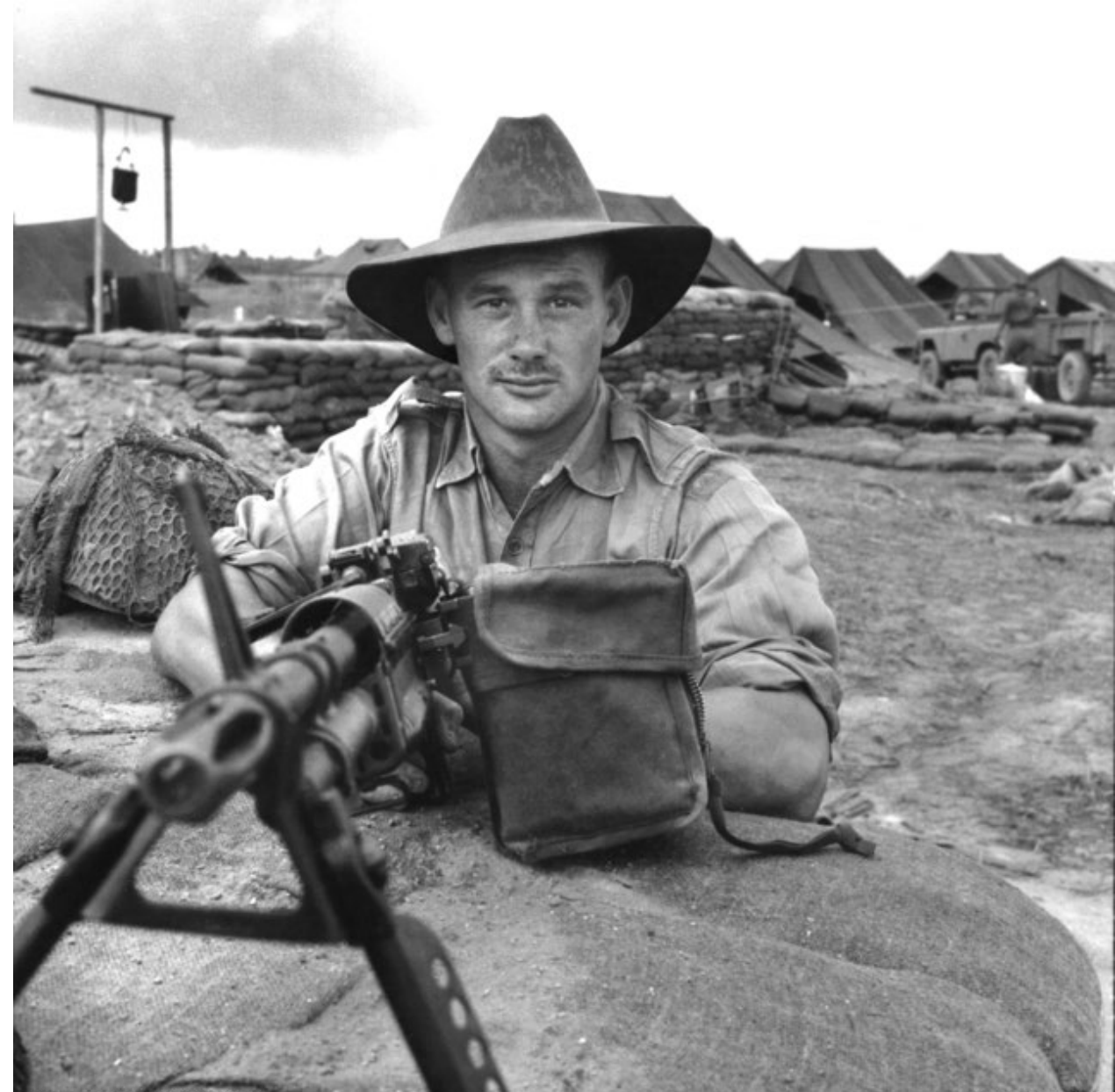


An Army Transformed?

The Australian Army's Road to Vietnam, 1949-1965

An Army Transformed?

- Australian Army, 1949: 32779 personnel (14543/18236)
- Australian Army, 1966: 69926 personnel (24583/1732/33526/8119)
- What changed, how did it change and why did it change?



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DNE/65/0104/VN

Menzies, 1949

- Viewed international Communism as united, centrally controlled and on the march;
- Situation analogous to 1937-9;
- Army's role to raise Third AIF and deploy in line with Allied strategy;
- Coalition took National Service scheme to 1949 election.



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HOBJ11 34

Korea

- The Korean War had enormous ramifications:
- Model for future conflict in Asia;
- Anticipated ARA primacy.



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HOBJ1883

Shift to South-East Asia

- 1955 onwards: Malaya key territory for defence of Australia;
- Indochina key territory for defence of Malaya.
- Sets stage for 1957 defence review: primacy of the regular.
- FESR + SEATO create framework for who Army will fight alongside and where it will fight.



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The challenge

- Malayan Emergency; Korea; French experience in Indochina.
- Spectrum of conflict – Army had to be able to fight across it, simultaneously.
- Organisational issue: constantly short of manpower, and requirements kept increasing.
- Abandonment of NS in 1959 not enough.
- CMF still critical in Army's thinking – it was the second echelon.



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THE PENTROPIC DIVISION

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

1. The division must be organised for anti-insurgent operations and for limited war which could develop from them; it must be prepared to operate independently, but will be backed up by logistic and combat forces suited to the task and terrain.
2. The organisation must not be tied down by aiming at every battle group being capable of independent operation; however, it must be practical to despatch part of the division on an independent role, the force to be predominantly infantry with its own logistic and combat support.
3. The division must be prepared to fight primarily a mobile battle in all types of tropical terrain - padi, hills, plateaux, open country, savannah, jungle - in a climate generally hot and humid but sometimes cold in the mountains, under extremes of wet and dry weather, by day and night, with poor road communications. Large scale protracted defence of a static nature is not envisaged.
4. The division must be prepared to operate in the face of a nuclear threat.
5. The division should have a nuclear capacity by having available to it the support of weapons which can fire both conventional and nuclear projectiles.
6. The division must be prepared to fight without nuclear support against an enemy who has vast numerical superiority.

Doctrine

- Pentropic adopted in 1959; abandoned 1965.
- Failure, but demonstrated Army's willingness to embrace the radical in pursuit of solutions to immense challenges.
- Evolution of CRW doctrine from 1955-1965 product of practical and intellectual.
- Embedded in Asia – able to draw on experience;
- Had a cadre of thinkers engaged with wider COIN ferment.

'EDUCATING AN ARMY':

AUSTRALIAN ARMY DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT
AND THE OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE
IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1965-72



Indonesia and Vietnam

- 'Key terrain' simultaneously narrowed and expanded in early 1960s.
- Indonesia emerged as a threat, culminating in the start of *konfrontasi* in 1963;
- Deployment of AATTV to RVN from mid-1962.
- Clear that the war in Indochina, if it occurred, would be in South Vietnam;
- But Army now faced possibility of war in PNG or the archipelago.



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Alternate methods

- PIR: raised in the early 50s, expanded in the early 1960s.
- Unique in Army history: both capabilities it required to run and the role it ultimately played.
- Special Operations capability: Commandos/SAS, later SASR.
- Specific tactical capabilities but also Army's interest in irregular warfare as a way of overcoming numerical inferiority – and even nuclear battlefield.



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EKN/69/0030/VN

National Service

- Despite forecasting and severity, conflicts in SEA not seen as existential.
- Political threshold for CMF not yet crossed.
- Army reluctantly accepted it could not meet recruiting targets;
- Agreed to a very limited form of conscription in 1965.
- Transformed Army in size and personnel capability.



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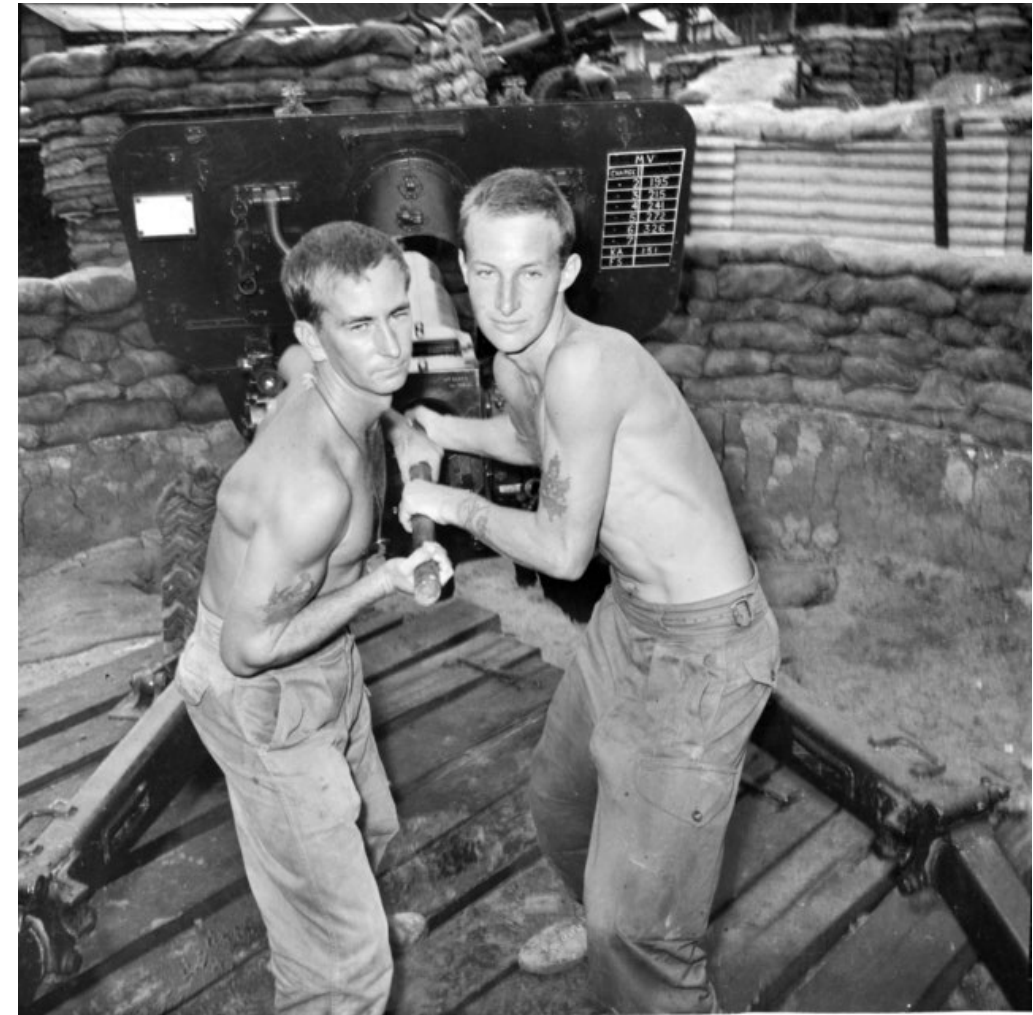
Vietnam and Indonesia

- Army arrived in Vietnam with a clear idea of how it wants to fight;
- But this idea was modified over time – need for combined arms, uncertainty over 1ATF role within overall CRW campaign.
- Confrontation: no clear idea but mastery of basics allowed it to adapt.
- Remarkable and understudied campaign.



So what?

- Army transformed between 1949 and 1965/6 in profound ways.
- Shift to a force dominated by ARA rather than CMF.
- Enmeshed in Asia – thinking about it and operating within it;
- Raised new capabilities – PIR, SASR – some of which survived to today;
- Emerged in policymakers mind as a versatile tool of state power.



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CUN/65/0785/MC