



The history of the Australian Army can be divided into two periods:

1901–1947, when limits were set on the size of the regular army, the vast majority of peacetime soldiers were in reserve units of the Citizens Military Force (also known as the CMF or Militia), and Australian Imperial Forces were formed to serve overseas, and

Post-1947, when a standing peacetime regular infantry force was formed and the CMF (known as the Army Reserve after 1980) began to decline in importance. During its history the Australian Army has fought a large number of major wars, including: Second Boer War (1899–1902), First World War (1914–1918), the Second World War (1939–1945), Korea War (1950–1953), Malayan Emergency (1950–1960), Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1962–1966), Vietnam War (1962–1973) and more recently in Afghanistan (2001 – Present) and Iraq (2003 – Present).

However, since 1947 it has also been involved in many peacekeeping operations, usually under the auspices of the United Nations. The largest one began in 1999 in East Timor. Other notable operations include peacekeeping on Bougainville and in the Solomon Islands, which are still ongoing to this day.



Soldiers of the Australian 39th Battalion in September 1942

## **Malayan Emergency, 1950–60**

The Malayan Emergency was declared on 18 June 1948, after three estate managers were murdered in Perak, northern Malaya. The men were murdered by guerrillas from the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) An outgrowth of the anti-Japanese guerrilla movement which had emerged during the Second World War.

Despite never having had more than a few thousand members, the MCP was able to draw on the support of many disaffected Malayan Chinese, who were upset that British promises of an easier path to full Malayan citizenship had not been fulfilled. The harsh post-war economic and social conditions also contributed to the rise of anti-government activity.

Australia's involvement in the Emergency began in 1950 with the arrival of RAAF aircraft and personnel in Singapore. Dakotas from 38 Squadron were deployed on cargo runs, troop movements, and paratroop and leaflet drops in Malaya, while six Lincoln bombers of 1 Squadron provided the backbone of airl operations. As the capacity of army and police units operating against the communists improved, however, the need for air power decreased, and by 1952 Lincolns were increasingly used as part of combined air-ground assaults against the communists.

One of the major military successes of the conflict was one such coordinated operation in July 1954, east of Ipoh, in Perak state. In Operation Termite, as the exercise was known, five RAAF Lincolns and six from a RAF squadron made simultaneous attacks on two communist camps, followed by paratroop drops, a ground attack, and further bombing runs ten days later. The operation destroyed 181 camps and killed 13 communists; one communist surrendered.

By October 1955, when the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), arrived in Penang, the outcome of the Emergency was no longer in doubt, although a lengthy "mopping up" stage followed, largely undertaken by Australian troops. After several false starts 2RAR crossed to the mainland in January 1956 to begin anti-communist operations. Over the next 20 months, as part of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 2RAR participated in a variety of operations, mainly in Perak, one of the main areas of communist activity.

Their work consisted of extensive patrolling, watching for contacts in the rubber plantations, and mounting a perimeter guard on the New Villages, settlements which the government had established to provide infrastructure and services in outlying areas in the hope of denying the guerrillas access to their support base. Contacts were rare, however, and the battalion had a mixed record, killing two communists in an ambush on 25 June 1956 but losing three of its own troops.

2RAR left Malaya in October 1957 and was replaced by 3RAR in the same month. After six weeks of training in jungle warfare 3RAR began driving the insurgents into the jungle in Perak and Kedah, separating them from food and other supplies. Early successes for the battalion confirmed the growing ascendancy of the security forces over the communists and by April 1959 one of the main communist centres, Perak, was declared secure. By late 1959 operations against the communists were in their final phase and many communists had crossed Malaya's northern border into Thailand. 3RAR left Malaya in October 1959 to be replaced by 1RAR. Although operating in the border region 1RAR made no contact

with the enemy and was forbidden to move into Thailand, even when the presence and location of communists was known.

As the threat continued to dissipate, the Malayan government officially declared the Emergency over on 31 July 1960, though 1RAR remained in Malaya until October the following year, when 2RAR returned for a second tour. In August 1962 the battalion was committed to anti-communist operations in Perlis and Kedah, completing its tour in August 1963.

In addition to air and infantry forces, Australia also provided artillery and engineering support, and an airfield construction squadron built the main runway for the air force base at Butterworth. RAN ships also served in Malayan waters had occasion to fire on suspected communist positions in 1956 and 1957.

Australian ground forces in Malaya formed part of Australia's contribution to the Far East Strategic Reserve, which was set up in April 1955 primarily to deter external communist aggression against countries in south-east Asia, especially Malaya and Singapore.

Lasting 13 years, the Malayan Emergency was the longest continuous military commitment in Australia's history. Thirty-nine Australian servicemen were killed in Malaya, although only 15 of these deaths occurred as a result of operations, and 27 were wounded, most of who were in the army.

## You've Gotta Laugh!

### The Humour of World Wars 1 and 2

Humour, like war, is a shared experience. For the soldiers of World Wars 1 and 2, as for soldiers generally, humour was camaraderie with a rueful grin, a wry expression of lives lived (and lost) together in the most extraordinary of circumstances.

It sustained the bonds of solidarity in the face of isolation, adversity or just plain boredom. It helped shape a group identity against a common enemy, often with racist effect. In its more caustic and satirical forms it expressed repugnance at the



"AT THE LANDING, AND HERE EVER SINCE"  
Drawing in Blue and Red Pen by DAVID BARKER

The face of pugnacious soldier larrikinism? Or a study in the effects of shellshock? This arresting image was drawn at Gallipoli by Australian David Barker and published in **The Anzac Book** in 1916.

conditions at the front, at military life in general, at the officer class at HQ and at the political masters and war profiteers at home.

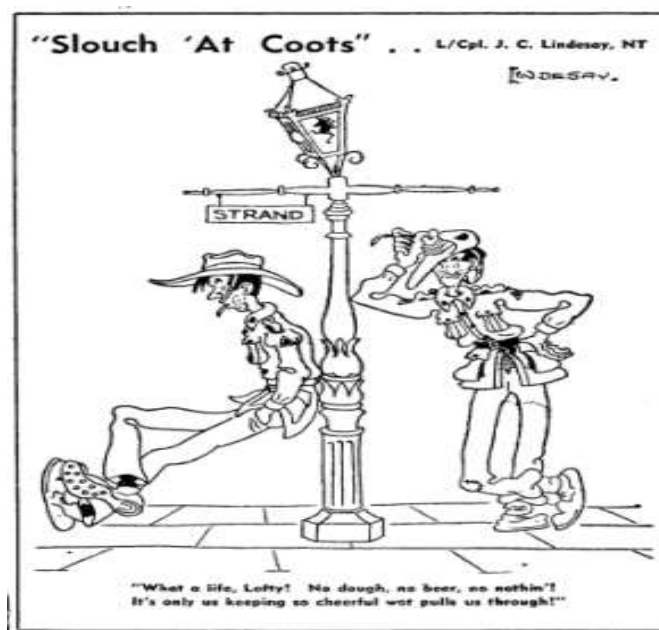
Written and illustrated in Gallipoli by the men of Anzac, *The Anzac Book* (London: Cassell, 1916), p22.

It evoked a common nostalgia for family and community. It nurtured resilience and helped men cope together with fear, hardship, deprivation and loss. Laughter, it was sometimes said, was the best medicine.

War humour had many targets. It maligned the enemy, whether frontline combatants or homeland occupiers. It ridiculed aspects of military life, like the petty tyranny of officer rule, lack of leave, poor rations, the drudgery of training. It made light of the hardships of the front, where, between periods of bombardment and combat, soldiers found good reasons to take issue with just about everything, fleas, food and the physical environment being favourite topics of the comically inclined.

At its worst, war humour vilified or patronised the Indigenous peoples of the war theatres: the cartoons and yarns tell of the 'Gyposes' of Cairo, the 'Boongs' or 'Fuzzy Wuzzies' of New Guinea, the mademoiselles of provincial France.

Some humorists offered their audience solace in the suffering and destruction of the other side.



What a life, Lofty! No dough, No beer, No nothing!

It's only us keeping so cheerful wot pulls us through