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COURIER

2/2 COMMANDO ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

https://doublereds.org.au/

Editor: Ed Willis

November 2026

UPCOMING EVENT

77th Annual Commemoration Ceremony



Lovekin Drive, Kings Park, 3pm, Sunday 15 November 2026

Association members, their families, friends and other supporters are reminded and encouraged to attend this year's 77th Annual Commemoration Ceremony.

This year's address will be delivered by Paul Harrington, whose father Reg Harrington (WX13252) was an original member of the 2/2 serving in 6 Section of B Platoon during the Timor campaign.

The ceremony will again be live streamed online for those that cannot attend and for later viewing. Save the link and make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel while you're there: https://live.doublereds.org.au/

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

The Association AGM was held at Claremont Showgrounds commencing at 5.30pm on Monday, October 12, 2026.

Sue Epps had previously advised that she would not be continuing as a Committee member. The meeting thanked Sue for her service on the Committee that included a stint as Secretary.

Rob Crossing moved that current positions and committee members remain. Carried unanimously.

As a result, Noel Strickland continues as President, Ed Willis (Vice President) and Colleen Thornton-Ward (Treasurer). Ed Willis volunteered to fill the Secretary position and was elected unopposed.

Other committee members are: John Burridge, Louis Crossing, Rob Crossing, Peter Epps, John Denman, Geoff Payne, Murray Thornton and John Cramb.

AUSTRALIAN ARMY 'JONATHAN CHURCH GOOD SOLDIERING AWARD' RECIPIENTS UNDERTAKE LA RENDE [NO SURRENDER]! TREK IN TIMOR-LESTE - 26 July – 2 August 2026

Recipients of the 2026 Australian Army Jonathan Church Good Soldiering Award undertook the *La Rende! Trek* in Timor Leste from 26 July – 2 August 2026.
The recipients of the Award are announced each year, on Army's birthday – March 1st. The award is named in honour of Tpr Jonathan Church who, in

1995, risked his life to carry a Rwandan child out of harm's way after he survived a brutal massacre. Tpr Church's actions personified the values of the Australian soldier. The soldiers and junior officers who receive the award are recognised as exemplars of Army values: leadership, compassion and ethical soldiering.



September 2026 defence.gov.au/news/armynews News 9

Walking in footsteps of heroes

This year's recipients of the Jonathan Church Good Soldiering and CA's Instructors of the Year awards did a battlefield tour of Timor-Leste.
Cpl Michael Rogers reports.

Warmth of people a highlight

SURROUNDED by clouds almost 3000 metres above sea level, Cpl Sarah Vella experienced reaching the summit of Mt Ramelau to be the highlight of her battlefield study tour to Timor-Leste.

She was one of 12 through the same mountains as the soldiers of 2/2 Independent Coy in WWII, and experiencing the generosity of the Timorese people who supported them, that left the biggest impression.

From July 26 to August 2, recipients of the 2026 Jonathan Church Good Soldiering and CA's Instructors of the Year awards walked in the steps of 2/2 Independent Coy, bringing to life the history of one of Australia's lesser-known World War II campaigns.

The group completed the 90km La Rende Track. Meaning 'no surrender' in Tetum, its name was inspired by the Australian commandos who fought a guerrilla campaign against Japanese forces on the island from 1942 to 1943.

The track links mountain trails and supply routes used by the company as it traversed the country during the campaign.

The tour began in Dili, where participants visited significant Battle of Timor sites, including the former Dili Aerodrome, where the company first engaged Japanese forces on February 19, 1942.

The group then moved into the mountains, visiting ambush sites, gun positions and villages where Timorese families supported Australian soldiers throughout the campaign.

For Cpl Sophie Harris, walking the same ground as the commandos created a deeper appreciation of what they endured.

"Every stop we learned a bit of history. It makes you think about and compare the conditions," Cpl Harris said.

"Someone's walked this exact same path before, carrying heavy weapons, with boots falling apart and no proper food, and we're doing it in hiking boots with poles and day bags.

"It adds a whole other layer and really makes you appreciate the efforts they put in to fight."

As participants trekked through remote communities, coffee plantations and rugged mountain ranges, they gained a greater understanding of the enduring relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste.

Cpl Vella said the warmth and generosity of the Timorese people left a lasting impression.

"It was a bit overwhelming. Seeing how the country has bounced back from the devastation and war over the years, and coming out of it with no malice was pretty breathtaking," she said.

The connection between the two nations featured throughout the tour, from stories of Timorese civilians who assisted Australian commandos during the war, to discussions on more recent Australian operations in the country.

Sgt Matthew Booth said learning directly from local communities was a highlight.

"It was just great to learn about a different culture I hadn't read much about prior, especially one that's so close to our Australian mainland," Sgt Booth said.

The group stayed in villages, shared traditional meals with local families, and learnt about Timorese customs and culture. "Walking through the villages was probably one of my favourite parts. Every single Timorese was happy to see us, happy to help," Cpl Harris said.

"There was never an interaction where they didn't want us there, and the fact that they would welcome us into their homes, it was very special. I've never experienced anything like that."

After completing La Rende, the group travelled to Balibo, where they learnt about the 1975 Indonesian invasion, the murder of the Balibo Five, and Australian operations conducted in the region between 1999 and 2013.

RSM-C WO1 Matthew Furey, who deployed to Balibo in 2001, provided briefs at locations where he once operated, offering participants a first-hand perspective on Australia's more recent history in Timor-Leste.

Award recipients hike through a Timorese village on the La Rende Track during a battlefield study tour in Timor-Leste. Photos: Cpl Michael Rogers

Jonathan Church Good Soldiering Award

THE recipients of the Jonathan Church Good Soldiering Award are announced each year, on Army's birthday.

The award is named in honour of Tpr Jonathan Church who, in 1995, risked his life to carry a Rwandan child out of harm's way after he survived a massacre. Tpr Church's actions personified the values of the Australian soldier.

Army's junior officers who receive the award are recognised as exemplars of Army values: leadership, compassion and ethical soldiering.

Participants on the battlefield study tour take part in a cultural exchange with a Timorese elder in Timor-Leste.

A story of grit and courage

IT was just before midnight on February 19, 1942, when the guns began to thunder.

For the men of Australia's 2/2 Independent Coy at Dili Aerodrome in then-Portuguese Timor, the Dutch Allied military fire brought a dreadful realisation.

What they believed were Portuguese reinforcements was, in fact, a 1500-strong Japanese invasion force.

A brutal firefight erupted. For six hours, 20 men from 2 Section held the airfield with guns, grenades, bayonets and bluff. Three never left the battlefield.

At first light, the survivors destroyed the airstrip with 10 tonnes of explosives before withdrawing into the mountains.

Outnumbered, surrounded and outgunned, 2/2 Independent Coy did not surrender. Its fight had only just begun.

On the site of the Battle of Timor's opening actions, recipients of this year's awards visited key locations from the campaign, including ambush sites, observation posts and gun emplacements, while sharing the stories of the men who fought there.

His story is incredible; a massive team player who led from the front.

—2/2DIA recipient Cpl Sarah Vella recounting the exploits of a member of 2/2 Independent Coy

2/2 Independent Coy was raised in early 1941, comprising soldiers specially selected for their mental and physical toughness, as well as their ability to live off the land.

Army Instructor of the Year Sgt Matthew Booth, Cpl Sarah Vella and Mervyn Wheatley, a horse breeder and kangaroo shooter turned sniper.

After losing friends in the infamous "ration truck massacre" on the morning of the Japanese invasion, LCpl Wheatley led ambushes, often choosing better sites than his commanders.

After one successful ambush, he stayed behind to cover his retreating mates, magazines laid neatly next to him as he picked off Japanese soldiers from a concealed position.

His commanders would often ask his advice because of his natural talent for the terrain combined with his skill at planning attacks.

"He seemed to be a quiet, confident soldier. He shows that you can gently guide even from those lower ranks using your confidence," Sgt Booth said.

"He was the best at his job and so they deferred to him. He didn't need to be the loudest in the group to have his point heard."

When the decision was made to withdraw from Dili Aerodrome, Cpl Kevin Curran led the demolition team tasked with destroying the airstrip.

A VFL footballer for Hawthorn before and after the war, Cpl Curran killed five Japanese soldiers with a bayonet and directed Bren gun fire to cover the sappers arming the explosives.

His story was told by Jonathan Church Good Soldiering Award recipient Cpl Sarah Vella outside the Kevin Curran Gym at the Defence Cooperation Program compound in Dili, near the airstrip demolition site.

"I've always been a firm believer that people who play team sports bring values and courage they learn on the field to their work," Cpl Vella said.

"He was the ultimate team player who led from the front. Like him, we should lead from the front, listen to our soldiers and pivot when you need to."

The company destroyed its radios to prevent them falling into enemy hands in the event of defeat, and was soon running low on ammunition, food and medicine with no way to call for resupply.

A series of raids on Japanese positions yielded radio components that Sig Max Loveless used to construct a radio, restoring contact with Australia for the first time in two months.

Cpl Sophie Harris, who with Sgt Harris told the story of Sig Loveless, a radio technician from Hobart who worked for days to build the radio affectionately named Winnie the War Winner.

"He got the job done with what he had, which wasn't much, and it's just inspiring. So much pressure was put on him, so many people's lives were in his hands, but he was able to do it," Cpl Harris said.

With resupplies and support from local Timorese, 2/2 Independent Coy sustained a successful guerrilla campaign until its withdrawal in February 1943.

For the award recipients, the battlefields of Timor offered a reminder that today's soldiers stand on the shoulders of those who fought before them, according to Sgt Booth.

"They were trained for this role and, when the time came, they carried it out with great effect. It took real courage and grit to continue fighting independently," he said.

The La Rende! Trek is organised and conducted by Dili-based Australian tour company Maddog Adventures: "Embark on a pilgrimage as you follow a trail that connects sites of significance in the guerrilla campaign fought by Australia's first commando forces in Timor-Leste and the Kriadu, Timorese people who walked alongside them, and honour those who bravely fought and lost their lives in 1942. Gain insight into the difficult terrain Australian forces had to endure during WWII and experience life in remote mountainous villages.

The whole trek traverses the entire island of Timor from North to South, some 130km. This expedition covers the first half of the trek from Bazartete to Hatu-Builico approximately 92km, 6 days of intense hiking. The trail crosses rugged ridges, crystal clear rivers, passes through Portuguese era coffee plantations, thick tropical jungles and crosses Mount Ramelau, which peaks at 2,986m". https://maddogadventures.com.au/adventures/la-rende-trek/

Association Vice-President Ed Willis assisted Project leader Lt Col Mat Hunter in preparing the Award recipients to undertake the Trek by providing historical background briefings on the Timor campaign and identifying twelve 2/2 "junior leaders" (junior officers and JNCOs) who were notable for their leadership and conduct, who were to be studied "in depth" – two for each participant. (A difficult choice, many others could have been selected). Here are the Jonathan Church Award recipients details:

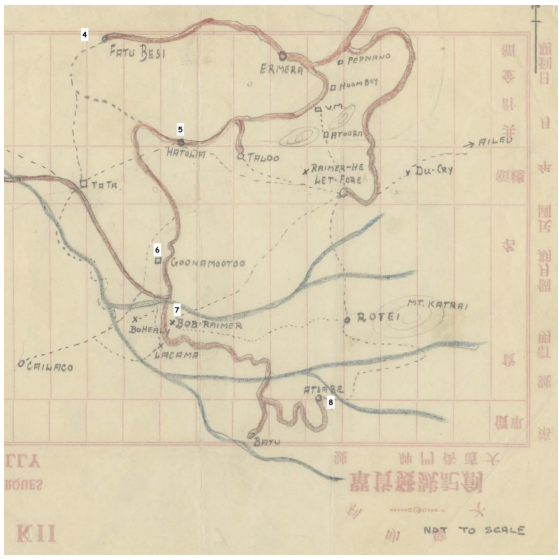
Rank	First Name	Surname	Trade	Study Leader #1	Study Leader #2
SGT	Wade	Newcombe	Combat Engineer	Pte Vince Wilby	Lt Don Turton
CPL	Sarah	Vella	Cavalry Scout	Cpl Kevin Curran	Lt Dave Dexter
CPL	Sophie	Harris	Transport Driver	Pte Max Loveless	Lt Col Doig
PTE	Jonathan	Kennedy	Medic	Cpl Ray Aitken	Pte Joe Poynton
SGT	Matthew	Booth	Transport (Marine Tech)	Pte Doc Wheatley	Lt John Rose
CPL	Siannah	Nicholls	Medic	Cpl Alan Luby	Lt Archie Campbell

Participants presented a brief profile on each junior leader at a relevant site along the Trek; e.g., Ray Aitken at Bazar Tete. The information provided in the individual soldiers records on the "Men of the 2/2" database on the Doublereds website proved invaluable in this regard.

The Trek was successfully completed and the participants reported positively on their experience in the September 2026 issue of the Australian '*Army News*': https://armynewspaper.defence.gov.au/army-news/default.aspx#

Lt Col Mat Hunter and one other of the Trek participants were invited to attend the Association's November Annual Commemoration Ceremony but,

unfortunately, this could not be arranged because of other commitments.
It is possible the next group of Awardees will participate in the 2027 Trek.



Hand drawn map from the 2/2 war diary (1942) that covers the trek route between Fatubesse and Atsabe. Drawn on the back of a page from a Japanese message book

VETERANS ENGAGEMENT HISTORY (VEH) COMMITTEE OF THE DEFENCE COOPERATION PROGRAM – TIMOR-LESTE (DCP-TL) – New Website

Doublereds members and supporters will be interested to learn about a new website provided by the Veterans Engagement History (VEH) Committee of the Defence Cooperation Program – Timor-Leste (DCP-TL) team based at Sparrow Force House next door to the Australian Embassy in Dili: https://www.dcpveh.com

The web-site role is defined as:
"Members engage in exploring, documenting and interpreting wartime sites.
The VEH primary focus is to research, preserve and update records of 2/2 & 2/4 Independent Companies, Z Special and Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force operations during WWII, ensuring these locations and stories remain accurate and connected to established historical sources.



HMAS *Voyager* commemorative plaque at Betano

Sites of historical importance to both Timor Leste and Australia are hoped to be acknowledged and documented.
Through structured visits, events and research, members help sustain awareness of this shared wartime heritage and its ongoing significance".
An examples of Committee initiatives include a project to instal "WWII & Military History Commemorative Plaques" - https://www.dcpveh.com/plaques.html.

WWII Memorials installed by DCP-TL-VEH
1. Liberator A72-159 crash site near Maubisse – 18 May 2026
2. WWII and INTERFET Memorial Plaque in Oecussi – July 2 2026
3. HMAS Voyager Memorial Plaque - Betano – 28 August 2026

The Association is identified as one of the "Australian Stakeholders" on the website: https://www.dcpveh.com/australian-stakeholders.html
and also notes "Credit to Edward (Ed) Willis, Vice-President of the Association, for his informative book: *WWII in East Timor: an Australian Army site and travel guide*. Ed's book is actively used by the VEH team as a resource to locate and commemorate current sites of interest".

PROGRESS REPORT ON NEW PRMARY SCHOOL BUILDING AT DARE

Back June 2023 the Association received a letter from the administrators of the Dare School requesting funding assistance to

build a new school with photos showing the poor conditions at the existing school and the site of the new school.



Students in classroom at the new school

Sr Florentina Maria José, Coordinator of E.B.P Memorial School requested US$5K towards construction of the new school building that was approved by the Committee. Association President, Noel Strickland commented: 'Given the Association's long historical connection with the Dare site, I think this is a very worthy project'.

The new school was to be built on a larger and more stable site approximately 500 metres down the road from the existing school. 'With the Building the students will have decent classrooms, separate toilets, a decent kitchen, a proper library, a big open space to play, and safety because the new building will be built far from the street'.

Progress has been slow as construction has been largely dependent upon local volunteer labour and site access being hampered by successive lengthy wet seasons. Though the Association contributed an additional US$5K, lack of funding was also a limiting factor and the school could not have been completed without the generous intervention of additional donors.



The new school

Dick Pelling, Bruce Parker (Michael Parker Foundation), Segue Financial Services (Joy Smith Foundation), F. & L. Richards, and D. & J. Campion, who generously donated US$15K for the supply and installation of roofing components.

Timor Leste Vision (TLV represented by Joanne Pollard, Orla McSharry and Adalberto Nunes) organised an additional US$20K to provide building materials and labour to complete the fit out of the school and installation of a toilet block. Dili-based TLV staff are project managing the work including Phase 2, the construction of two additional classrooms and installation of access stairs from the road to the site.

A big thank you to Dick and his fellow donors and TLV for their invaluable support.

Work has now progressed to the extent that the new school has now been occupied.

Congratulations to the staff and students of E.B.P Memorial School, their parents and local community members for achieving this remarkable milestone!!

: https://www.facebook.com/2nd2nddoublereds/



2026 AFTER CEREMONY GET TOGETHER

The committee of the 2/2 Commando Association invites you for a drink and a chat.

After the commemorative ceremony in Kings Park on Sunday 15 November 2026, please join us for a drink and a bite to eat at the

SUBIACO HOTEL

465 Hay St, Subiaco

https://www.subiacohotel.com.au

We expect the ceremony to finish at around 4pm. Drinks will be from 4.15pm.

Hope you can join us.