



RSL AUSTRALIAN FORCES OVERSEAS FUND

Don Rowe
Chairman
RSL AFOF (NSW Division)

History

The beginning of RSL AFOF can be traced to the decision to provide Christmas parcels to members of the Australian Army serving in Vietnam. In deciding to do so, the RSL National Executive felt that this was one small way in which closer contact could be maintained between the troops and the people back home. The RSL Australian Forces Overseas Fund (AFOF) was formally established on 26 January 1966 at the Sydney Town Hall, amalgamating the earlier fund established by RSL NSW and the Lord Mayor's Comfort Fund.

In anticipation of an increased commitment in South Vietnam, State Branches of the RSL were asked to give further thought to the matter, and the National Executive, in October 1965, decided to instigate a committee to organise and coordinate a fund and programme for the provision of amenities for troops serving in South East Asia. Each State Branch was requested to take whatever steps where appropriate to raise funds for the programme.

As a result RSL AFOF was initially established in NSW. Due to the continued interest of RSL National members states, RSL AFOF was subsequently expanded to become a National organisation with state Commissioners in 1966. The fund continues today providing comfort parcels, recreational equipment and activities to serving members of the ADF on deployment.

RSL AFOF (NSW Division)

RSL AFOF (NSW Division) principal object is the provision of comforts equipment and entertainment for Australian servicemen and women serving overseas or in such other areas as may be determined from time to time. This object is achieved through AFOF receiving donations and subscriptions and applying, managing and administering these funds in line with the principal object. The operations of AFOF (i.e. the trust) are managed by the management committee in accordance with the Trust Deed and the Rules.

RSL AFOF (NSW Division) began fund raising in 1966 and concert parties were dispatched to South East Asia. As well, a fully equipped recreation hut (65ft by 25ft) was provided at Nui Dai at a cost of \$6,500 and, for the in-country R & R centre at Vung Tau, yachts, water ski boats and equipment etc was donated. Amenities supplies provided by RSL AFOF were transported to Nui Dat on the "JEPARIT". A radio station was subsequently provided and over 50 concert parties were arranged to entertain the troops in Vietnam, with the best artists volunteering their services. Over \$400,000 was spent on food parcels, amenities and concert parties during Vietnam as a result of fund raising efforts of the RSL. The response of troops to these amenities and entertainments was overwhelming and justified and rewarded all those involved in Australia.

Following our withdrawal from Vietnam, RSL AFOF has continued to support Australian Forces on missions abroad. In 1982, the Fund provided Australian peace-keeping forces in the Sinai with three sets of video equipment, water-ski equipment and a television receiver. A small Australian Unit in Uganda received a video and a short wave radio, and a concert party went to Butterworth in Malaya. In 1988, the fund provided a coloured TV set and video recorder to the Australian Forces of UNIMOG, Teheran.

2009 saw our commitment increase with support for our troops in East Timor. RSL AFOF was able to supply ADF personnel with Canoes, Fishing Gear, Bikes and entertainment equipment such as X Boxes, PS2's, WII and IPod's.

In 2011 members of the Fund visited our serving troops in Afghanistan to seek what our troops actually needed. This resulted in more recreational equipment being provided, Challenge Coins being issued to all troops serving in the region on Remembrance Day 2011 and the establishment and refurbishment of the Memorial at Tarin Kot.

In 2013, RSL AFOF (NSW Division) commitment to supporting serving ADF members around the globe has continued with funds provided to HMA Naval Ships on deployment with Operation Slipper so as they are provided with Satellite TV services and support of Cultural Tours; Providing to the ADF troops serving in the MEAO with recreational equipment & amenities; Provide support to cover expenses, allowances and in theatre flights for Forces Entertainment personnel & entertainers; Provide support to the ADF troops serving in the Sudan, Sinai and Golan Heights with recreational equipment; Provide support to the ADF troops serving with the Afghanistan ANA Academy with recreational equipment & Provide support to the ADF troops serving in Operation ASLAN & Operation Paladin.

This ongoing support has led to a special relationship being formed between the ADF and RSL AFOF (NSW Division). This was shown by a request from the ADF to help support our ADF Personnel to attend the Allied Winter Sports Camp. This Camp allows ill and injured soldiers from Australia, the UK and the U.S., to join Canadians in trying an array of winter sports. The camp offers a host of benefits to injured soldiers that are about more than just physical rehabilitation. Winter camp also offers opportunities to ill or injured troops to become more active through sport. RSL AFOF (NSW Division) was able to help outfit the ADF Contingent in the appropriate winter clothing. It is hoped this commitment will be an ongoing one.

This supports RSL AFOF (NSW Division) policy of providing ongoing support of to our ADF personnel in whatever ways that we can be of service.

RSL AFOF has continued the tradition where we see volunteers from RSL State Branch, RSL sub-Branches and Civilians from the Defence Department and the Department of Veterans' Affairs joining with serving members of the Deployed Forces Support Unit (39th Battalion) at Randwick Barracks in NSW to pack over 3500 parcels, both May and November, for shipment overseas.

These RSL AFOF parcels were sent to all points on the globe where ADF personnel are serving. Australia has large numbers of personnel serving in these overseas missions. The packages contained various items to remind personnel of home, and included ANZAC biscuits, glucose confectionary, salted peanuts, muesli bars, lollies, a letter of appreciation on behalf of all Australians, and Membership contact details.

It should be noted that it is essential for the Fund to keep sufficient finances on hand, so that in the event of a sudden requirement, RSL AFOF can act immediately in support of our forces.

RSL AFOF needs the support of all Australians who share a love for our country, so that RSL AFOF itself can support these young men and women of our Defence Forces who serve where they are sent, often in areas of hardship so foreign to where they were born. It is therefore up to all of us to ensure this support continues, so that hardships can be relieved in some small way through the knowledge that friends in Australia are supporting and thinking of them.

John Boyle
Honorary Secretary