ON 23 NOVEMBER 1992, THE KEATING LABOR GOVERNMENT made a momentous decision: to lift the ban on gays, lesbians and bisexuals serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). This was before traditional alliance partners New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and it represented a significant step in Australia’s march towards LGBTI equality. It was not an end, though; gays and lesbians still experienced discrimination in the ADF, and there would continue to be a transgender ban until September 2010. Intersex people never had an explicit policy and, depending on their intersex variation, may be allowed to serve. Even before these milestones, LGBTI people were serving in Australia’s defence forces, fighting in wars overseas, participating in peacekeeping missions and serving within Australia. For over a century their stories have been silent; it is time to hear their voices.

This exhibition commemorates not just the 25th anniversary of open service, but also the contributions that LGBTI service personnel have been making since the Second World War.
After pressure from the US, the Australian Army adopts a policy to arrange medical discharges for homosexuals.
IN 1943, AUSTRALIA’S MILITARY HEADQUARTERS in Melbourne received some disturbing news from US Army investigators in Port Moresby, Papua. They had discovered that Australian soldiers were engaging in sex with American soldiers and, even worse perhaps, were practising ‘the female side of homosexual intercourse’. (This adds weight to the American novelist Gore Vidal’s assertion that ‘During World War II, the Australian soldiers had a reputation for rolling over on their stomachs most obediently’.) While the brass investigated, the Chief Medical Officer struck out on his own, interviewing 18 soldiers who had either been caught by the investigators, or who came forward voluntarily. The deal seems to have been that if they shared their stories with the Medical Officer, they would be given medical (as opposed to dishonourable) discharges, and sent home.

Their stories reveal a vibrant homosexual life among the soldiers stationed in New Guinea – days and nights full of pleasures and conviviality. Many of them referred to themselves as ‘the girls’, who, having found each other, proceeded to become close friends, partying together and sharing sexual adventures. Neil declared that since arriving in Port Moresby and ‘getting in with the Kamp crowd’ he had been out every night. Morrie said the same. The American Red Cross canteen was a popular place to gather, to cruise and to pick up and it was here that Gerald first got to be part of the kamp scene. Jack added the troops’ canteen and the sergeants’ club as popular cruising spots. The beaches and the dense, encroaching bush provided privacy, as did air-raid shelters and trucks. The scene provided a variety of sexual and romantic opportunities, from casual pickups, to short passionate flings, to long-term love affairs.
Truth runs a cover story reporting on an “unsavory cell of homosexuals” in the national service training camp at Puckapunyal, discharging five men immediately.
Women in the Services During World War II

WOMEN PLAYED AN ACTIVE ROLE DURING WORLD WAR II not only on the home front, but also about 70,000 served in the women’s auxiliary services. Life in the services meant that women who were attracted to other women were able to live in an environment dominated by women. The services also provided an opportunity to break away from social expectations around marriage and family. Recruitment material produced by the services emphasised the femininity of women who served, perhaps in order to address social concerns that military service would produce ‘masculine’ women. Women who were attracted to other women did manage to find each other in the services, although the consequences of being caught were severe.

Historian Ruth Ford interviewed one woman, Betty, who described two women in the Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) who were discharged after they were caught kissing in the boiler room.

The services also provided an opportunity to break away from social expectations around marriage and family.
While many women were discharged from the Services after their sexuality was exposed, Carole Popham and Christina Dennis opted to leave the WRAAF on their own choice in 1968 after falling in love. They knew that there was a possibility that they would be posted separately or face other consequences if their relationship was discovered. They are still happily together today.

Women in the Services After World War II

Between 1951 and 1984, each service operated separate female-only branches. Once again, lesbian and bisexual women made a significant contribution. These women had to carefully guard their sexuality as they faced persecution, punishment and discharge if it became known to officials. Witch-hunts loomed frequently. Women suspected of being lesbians were interrogated — often for long periods of time, asked to name others and were quickly discharged. These practices primarily targeted only the women’s services until the mid-1970s.

Nola Strawbridge, who managed to avoid detection by officials, remembers a “big purge” of lesbians in the Women’s Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) between 1964-65. Six women she knew were discharged.

Jules Hendy, who had been previously identified as a man, had been identified as a woman, had undertaken a rare overseas posting, and discharged in 1968 after her sexuality was discovered. Courtesy of Jules Hendy.

Julie Hendy’s very promising career in the WRAAC ended with a discharge with “Service no longer required” in 1968 after her sexuality was discovered.
Royal Australian Navy adopts a policy on “Abnormal Sexual Behaviour” in addition to an existing policy on “Unnatural Offences”.

1969
THOUGH HOMOSEXUAL CONDUCT WAS still illegal in the 1960s and '70s, authorities often turned a blind eye to men who were discreet. This was particularly the case for officers.

Numerous gay men served in Vietnam, though many either did not yet realise that they were gay or did not participate in homosexual activity while in Vietnam. Of course, some did – Dr David Bradford recalls an occasion when his regimental sergeant major brought an American private back to his tent for some very loud sex.

From the Navy, gay sailors recall numerous sexual encounters on ships, and there was even a homosexual subculture at the base HMAS Creswell. The Navy still had specific rules against “Unnatural Offences” and “Abnormal Sexual Behaviour”. Contained within these regulations were provisions to differentiate the “confirmed homosexual” from those who were experimenting, or those claiming to be homosexual only to secure a discharge. Enforcement of these rules against homosexuality would step up in all three services after 1974.
*CAMP Ink* publishes a story about a dismissed lesbian from the WRAAF; mainstream coverage prompts the Defence Minister to order the services to come up with a consistent policy on homosexuality.
First tri-service approach to homosexuality establishes a framework whereby service police investigate all cases. Those found to be homosexuals may either request their own honourable discharge or be discharged dishonourably.

1974
Any suspected case of homosexuality was to be referred to the service police to investigate.
Anna van Netten spent ten years as a driver in the WRAAC and remembers lesbians being targeted.

Yvonne Sillett was forced out of the Army in 1989 when her sexuality was discovered. Courtesy Yvonne Sillett.

Witch-hunts in the 1980s

The 1980s witnessed an escalation in the number of witch-hunts. This was due to the growing public awareness of homosexuality and the stigma that surrounded gay men and HIV/AIDS.

Men who served during the 1980s describe the stress of having to compartmentalise their lives, serving in secret during the day and trying to maintain a personal life in the evenings. Women tell similar stories.

Anna van Netten remembers “going out to the bars in Sydney, they used to send undercover female MPs, military police, and they’d find out who the lesbians were. Then they’d call them in.”

Yvonne Sillett joined the Women’s Royal Australian Army Corps in 1979. Rising rapidly through the ranks, she ended up with a top security clearance and eventually trained eight platoons at Kapooka. She remembers “you couldn’t really trust anybody because you knew if it got out that’s the end of my career.” Yvonne’s sexuality was eventually exposed and she was subjected to interrogation. After this, her military career came to an end after ten years of service.

Jennifer Jeffries (left) signed up to the WRAAC in 1979 and became a driver. She came to realise her sexuality shortly after joining. She believes rumours of her sexuality dogged her throughout her time in the military and ultimately she only served three years. Although she was not formally discharged, she believed knowledge of her sexuality “killed any chance of promotion, decent postings.”

JENNIFER JEFFRIES

... she believed knowledge of her sexuality “killed any chance of promotion, decent postings.”

Jennifer Jeffries

Delia Quigley joined the RAAF at 17 but left after completing her 3-year sign on period after a work colleague outed her to her Warrant Officer. She remembers “I begged him to let me leave quietly rather than report me to the Service Police.” The stress of having to constantly be vigilant was too high a price for many to pay.
Five members of the Gay Ex-Services Association are turned away from laying a wreath at Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance.
A scandal rocked the RAAF Academy in 1982 when one cadet attacked another who had tried to seduce him. The police investigation uncovered several men who had sexual relations with the cadet, including RICHARD GRATION — the son of an Army general who later became Chief of the Defence Force. The RAAF Police investigation followed the usual tactics of intimidating interviews, where Richard and others confessed. Authorities pressured to discharge the cadets, but Richard received legal advice from the head of Army Legal Services that the evidence may not be admissible because it was coerced. The Brigadier convinced the Defence Minister to set up a Court of Inquiry investigating the RAAF Police practice. The Court of Inquiry found that while the evidence was generally accurate, minor procedural errors collectively disadvantaged Richard and the other cadets. They were not discharged, and instead received written warnings.

IN LATE 1981, SHANE Duniam realised that he was under surveillance by RAAF Police at Point Cook. One night, as he passed the not-so-inconspicuous police car parked outside his house, he pulled up next to them: “I just put my brakes on, wound down my window, ‘Hey fellas, I’m going to Mandate tonight, I’m probably home about 3:00 in the morning. You can have the night off.’” A few days later, Shane was summoned to an interview that lasted most of the day. Police questioned him about his sex life and about other men they were investigating. They also searched Shane’s house, where they uncovered letters from another airman in Canberra. Shane was one of five men discharged in December 1981, and he returned to Tasmania feeling “shell-shocked” and “shattered.”

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A Court of Inquiry investigates police practices relating to homosexuality at the RAAF Academy. The Court of Inquiry recommends not discharging four cadets because police evidence may be considered inadmissible.
In 2015, DEFGLIS began the annual tradition of laying rainbow wreaths on Anzac Day in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Townsville and Brisbane. At Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance, Max Campbell, surviving member of GESA, had the honour of laying the wreath flanked by currently serving LGBTI members.

THE GAY EX-SERVICES ASSOCIATION

GESA, the Gay Ex-Services Association, was founded by a group of five men who knew each other because they worked or partied at Mandate, a gay bar in St Kilda. As they got to know each other, they inevitably shared their stories, discovering that all but one of them had been in the Air Force and all but one of them had been kicked out as a result of anti-gay policies. Maybe, they decided, it was time to ‘get a little bit political’.

A group was formed, a name was dreamed up, badges made and they decided to lay a wreath on Anzac Day in 1982 during that part of the day when members of the public were invited to participate. As they climbed the steps to the Shrine, they were turned away by police, under the direction of Bruce Ruxton. He went further, telling the Weekend Australian the next day that ‘I don’t know where all these queers and poofers have come from. I don’t remember a single poof from World War Two’. Buzz Kennedy, a columnist for the same paper surveyed his mates from the 2/32, 2/28 and 2/43 Battalions and reported that they had all agreed: ‘ours was an entirely heterosexual mob’.

Kennedy declared. He went on snidely to question the gay veterans’ credentials: ‘With the visual evidence of the size of the gay community in 1982, the question has to be: where were they then?’

Almost immediately, others wrote to the papers to correct the memories of these two old war-horses. A doctor reported that ‘while the recorded number was small, they did in fact exist’. Another noted that the batman (personal attendant) to no fewer than three of the most famous Allied generals was ‘one of the gayest fellas I have ever met; “gay as a Christmas tree” in fact’. A third declared that there had been ‘quite a few [who] were tolerated as long as they took no for an answer’.

ON ANZAC DAY 1982, A SMALL GROUP OF ex-servicemen approached the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne to lay a wreath in memory of the mates they had served with. Bruce Ruxton, then Victorian state president of the Returned Services League, intercepted them. There is ‘no way you can lay a wreath’ he declared, summoning a nearby police officer to escort the men away. The problem was that these soldiers were members of the Gay Ex-Services Association and ‘poofers’ were not the sort of people that Ruxton wanted to see included in a day of remembrance that was starting to take on a sacred aura.

A columnist for the same paper surveyed his mates from the 2/32, 2/28 and 2/43 Battalions and reported that they had all agreed: ‘ours was an entirely heterosexual mob’, Kennedy declared. He went on snidely to question the gay veterans’ credentials: ‘With the visual evidence of the size of the gay community in 1982, the question has to be: where were they then?’

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Defence Instruction DI(G)Pers 15-3 updates the ban on gay and lesbian service.
An article in *Outrage* causes a stir when it names three RAAF Police who had been going undercover to catch gays and lesbians.
Defending the Ban 1985-92

As late as 1985 the ADF renewed its ban on gay and lesbian service in DI(G)PERS 15-3. It listed four justifications: 1. Homosexuals would threaten troop morale and therefore operational readiness; 2. They were national security threats because they could be subjected to blackmail; 3. Health risks (which was an allusion to HIV/AIDS); 4. To protect minors who were serving in the ADF.

Critics would point to the lack of logic behind these reasons. If there were no ban, then gays and lesbians would not be at risk of blackmail. The health and minors arguments played on false stereotypes about gay men as sexual predators and all having HIV/AIDS. A 1988 Melbourne Star Observer article argued: “Obviously, somebody forgot to tell the policy makers that all the drama described above is not caused by homosexuality itself, but by the irrational homophobic reactions of straight (‘normal’) people who the defence ‘thinkers’ evidently desire to enshrine for the maintenance of the fragile military (and male?) ego.”

There were few options to challenge the ban. Though, the Defence Force Ombudsman could not compel the ADF to lift the ban, but rather could only ensure that proper investigation procedures were followed. In 1989 the Ombudsman wrote: “In general I have few problems with the ADF’s stated policy, although I believe much of the statement is conjectural rather than evidential.”

This fake memo was left on a RAAF airwoman’s desk in 1992, while politicians were debating the ban. The document, probably written by a policeman who knew quite a bit (or too much) about gay lifestyles, is indicative of the homophobic attitudes of many service members in the 1980s and 90s.

Courtesy Lucy Kardas.
A lesbian dismissed under the ban files a complaint with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. The HREOC enters discussions with the ADF about her case and the ban more widely, but the ADF resists lifting the ban.
After Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, and Attorney-General Michael Duffy present their cases, the Keating Cabinet decides to lift the ban on gay, lesbian and bisexual military service. This does not include transgender service.

23 November 1992
IN 1990, A DISMISSED LESBIAN servicewoman lodged a complaint against the ADF in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC). The HREOC entered into negotiations with the ADF over this particular case and in the hopes of convincing the ADF to repeal the ban. In June 1992, though, the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, announced that the ban would remain. The HREOC then turned to Attorney-General Michael Duffy, arguing that the ban contravened Australia’s obligations under the International Labour Organization and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Fearing a split in the ALP, Prime Minister Paul Keating assigned backbencher Senator Terry Aulich to chair a Caucus Joint Working Group on Homosexual Policy in the Australian Defence Force. They interviewed gay rights advocates and service chiefs, examined the arguments about international law, and recommended, in a 4-2 split, lifting the ban.

The ban finally went on the Cabinet agenda on 23 November. Duffy argued the international law case to lift the ban, while Ray argued that the military was exempt because of the “inherent requirements of the job”. The majority of Cabinet sided with Duffy, making the decision to lift the ban. Prime Minister Paul Keating put out a press release declaring: “This decision reflects broad support in the Australian community for the removal of employment discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on grounds of sexual preference. The decision brings ADF policy into line with the tolerant attitudes of Australians generally.”

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G-Force forms as a support, advocacy and social group for serving gays, lesbians and bisexuals. The group would last until 1998.
Notwithstanding opposition within the ADF hierarchy, G-Force marches in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.
IN 1994, RAAF FLIGHT SERGEANT DAVID MITCHELL had a challenging coming out experience, finding himself isolated and suffering significant mental health problems. He managed to pull through the situation and, fortunately, found a generally supportive working environment where the little homophobia he encountered was usually quashed quickly by those in higher ranks.

What he discovered as he was coming out was that lots of his comrades were less keen to follow his lead. Over and above the official policies tolerating gay, lesbian and bisexual service, there was still a lot of fear. Some gays and lesbians told Mitchell that they feared getting ‘their head smashed in’. What Defence needed, he decided, was an ‘organised presence’, a club that could take up the issues, but also provide a place to meet, relax and talk. And so, in 1994 G-Force was born. The group held regular meetings, published a newsletter and talked comfortably with the forces’ newspapers.

By 1996, they were ready to hit the streets in Mardi Gras. There were rules about what personnel could do in their uniforms, so they marched in civvies. And the crowd loved it.

G-FORCE is the story of how Flight Sergeant David Mitchell became the first active-duty gay military officer to openly march in Mardi Gras. A force within a force, G-Force was born to provide a place for the military gay community to come together and support each other. This book tells the story of G-Force's journey from its inception to becoming a beacon of hope and support for military gay and lesbian personnel. It's a story of overcoming obstacles, of finding strength in numbers, and of the constant struggle for acceptance and equality in the military.
Group Captain MIKE SEAH was one member who unsuccessfully applied for recognition of his de facto partner, appealing all the way to the Chief of the Defence Force.

G-Force vs Discrimination

ONE FOCUS OF G-FORCE’S ACTIVISM WAS FIGHTING FOR recognition of same-sex de facto partners. As early as 1993 the Army rejected a lesbian couple’s application to have their relationship recognised because the policy on de facto relationships explicitly defined them as members of the opposite sex. Same-sex couples therefore could not access benefits such as financial assistance during base transfers, travel allowances, married quarters, compassionate leave, education programs and even pensions. Despite G-Force’s lobbying, the ADF steadfastly refused to change its policy.

Chief of the Defence Force, General John Baker, wrote in one letter: “While you argue that the common [social] standard requires that the discrimination you complain of should be removed, I do not believe that common standards make such a demand.” The only entitlements G-Force successfully secured were access to Defence Health, base entry rights and the right to be notified as next-of-kin in case of death.

In late 2005, though, the ADF unexpectedly released a new policy on de facto recognition that was gender neutral, thus including same-sex partners.

It would not be until 2009, under a wider set of reforms by the Rudd Government, that the Department of Veterans’ Affairs would also recognise same-sex partners.
DI(G)PERS 16-16 formally bans transgender service, saying anyone who wishes to transition must leave the ADF.
Leading Aircraftm an JESSE KANE, serves as a RAAF photographer.

Flying Officer DANA PHAM is one of the first transgender members to join the ADF after the repeal of D(G)PERS 16-16. She ran into significant obstacles with Defence Force Recruiting, but successfully enlisted in 2014 and now serves as an officer at RAAF Base Fairbairn in Canberra.

BEFORE 2000 THERE WAS NO SPECIFIC policy on transgender service, though it was considered unacceptable under rules such as “conduct to the prejudice of good order”. Studies from the US have shown that pre-transition MtF people often join militaries as a place where they can “prove” their masculinity to themselves. They often put themselves in dangerous situations, preferring to die in combat rather than live with gender dysphoria. Pre-transition FtM people often find the military a place where they can safely exhibit “masculine” behaviours.

In the year 2000, after hearing news of a British pilot allowed to transition, the ADF adopted D(G)PERS 16-16, the first policy explicitly banning transgender service. The summative statement said: “a person undergoing or contemplating gender reassignment cannot be considered suitable for service in the ADF because of the need for ongoing treatment and/or the presence of a psychiatric disorder.” Transgender people thus had to serve in secret or face dismissal. It would not be until 2010, after two transgender members challenged the policy, that the ADF repealed D(G)PERS 16-16, permitting transgender people to serve and transition.

There has never been a policy on intersex service, and intersex variations have been treated as a medical condition. Some intersex variations have been allowed, while others have precluded people from serving on medical grounds. Intersex people required to medically discharge were often viewed as “Innocents”, unlike homosexuals or transgender people whose “behaviour” led to their discharges.

ALEX POLLOCK served in the RAAF in the 1960s and 70s as Wing Commander Neil Pollock (front row, second from left), a navigator flying test flights on the F-111s. Alex quietly discharged from the RAAF around the year 1980 to transition. She passed away in June 2005.

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ALEX POLLOCK served in the RAAF in the 1960s and 70s as Wing Commander Neil Pollock (front row, second from left), a navigator flying test flights on the F-111s. Alex quietly discharged from the RAAF around the year 1980 to transition. She passed away in June 2005.
The partner of a deceased Second World War veteran lodges a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee when he was denied a spousal pension. The UN finds in the complainant’s favour, but the Howard Government refuses to recognise same-sex couples for veterans’ pensions.
BRIDGEClinch joined the Australian Army Reserve in 1997 straight after high school and enlisted full-time in 1999. She was a decorated infantry captain who served two tours to East Timor. In early 2009, she was diagnosed with gender dysphoria and announced her intention to transition. In doing so, she challenged ADF policy that had effectively banned transgender service. The ADF attempted to discharge Bridget in line with D(G)PERS 16-16, however she appealed within the ADF and to the Human Rights Commission. After a conciliation process, the ADF withdrew her termination and repeated D(G)PERS 16-16 in September 2010, thus permitting transgender people to serve and transition. The process of working for reform took a personal toll, and Bridget left the Army in 2013.

AMY HAMBLIN enlisted in the RAAF in 2001, working in logistics transporting aircraft and other equipment, and even doing a four month tour in Iraq in 2006. Amy did not come out voluntarily, but rather in 2009 a mate caught her in a nightgown in her private residence and reported her. Amy recalls confessing, “Yes, Sir, after hours I live as a woman.” She subsequently challenged D(G)PERS 16-16 through the RAAF chain of command and even prepared a potential legal case. She never needed to lodge that case, though, as the transgender ban was lifted in 2010. Amy continued to serve until 2014 and then, tired of the institutional discrimination she faced, became a reservist. She continued in that role until November 2017.

AMY HAMBLIN transitioned in 2010 and also contributed to the first Air Force Diversity Handbook: Transitioning Gender in the Air Force in 2013. Based on consultation with Amy and other transgender members, the guide provides advice that transgender members can apply to their personal transition journeys.

Courtesy Amy Hamblin
DEFGLIS is founded as a support and advocacy group for gay, lesbian and bisexual Defence members. In 2011 they would change their name to the Defence LGBTI Information Service.
New ADF rules on de facto spouses recognise same-sex couples.
Department of Veterans’ Affairs begins to recognise same-sex de facto couples.
IN 2002, THEN-PETTY OFFICER STUART O’BRIEN commenced the challenging task of providing gay and lesbian “information and referral services to members of the ADF.” The network began as an e-mail distribution list and a Geocities webpage. The network eventually became the Defence Gay and Lesbian Information Service: DEFGLIS (renamed Defence LGBTI Information Service in 2011).

DEFGLIS has served as both an advocacy group for LGBTI Defence members, as well as a social group. Since 2008 they have marched in Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and since 2013 the Chief of the Defence Force has approved them marching in uniform. DEFGLIS also organises events such as a ski trip, meet-ups in the various Australian cities, and has made submissions to inquiries on LGBTI rights and veterans’ issues.

In 2015, DEFGLIS organised the first annual Military Pride Ball. This formal event brings together service members past and present, representatives from the ADF and the public service and allies for an evening to celebrate diversity and inclusion in the ADF.

Since 2015, DEFGLIS has also organised wreath-layings on Anzac Day to commemorate LGBTI service members.
ADF contingent at Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras allowed to march in uniform for the first time.
DEFGLIS begins annual rainbow wreath-lyings, with one of the surviving GESA members laying Melbourne’s wreath at the Shrine of Remembrance.
DEFGLIS hosts the first annual Military Pride Ball.
What stands out now, though, is the support LGBTI members provide each other – and provide each other openly – to advocate for a better ADF. They are no longer serving in silence.

THE ADF HAS COME A LONG WAY IN 25+ years, moving from merely tolerating gays and lesbians to actively embracing LGBTI service for the diversity and capabilities they provide to the organisation.

Of course, there are still challenges for LGBTI service personnel. Not everyone in the ADF has embraced the inclusion agenda, though importantly the service chiefs have been vocal in their support for LGBTI members.

HIV positive people still cannot enlist, and those who seroconvert (contract HIV) while serving face restrictions on their opportunities for promotion, transfer and deployment.

Transgender and non-binary members have been particularly targeted by conservative media and politicians. A policy implemented in 2015 ensured transgender health care while concurrently making it more difficult to access surgeries.

In 2016 the ADF adopted rules allowing members to identify their gender as “Indeterminate / Intersex / Unspecified (X),” but still they must identify their sex as male or female. The Australian Defence Force Academy has been the main site where non-binary members have come out, and the services have had to grapple with non-binary members’ lodging, fitness standards, and uniforms.
We wish to thank the interviewees who generously provided material for this exhibition, as well as the following people for their assistance: Julien Varrenti-Osmund and Al Noveloso (ACU), Bronwyn Roper and Aimee Rhodes (Melbourne City Library), Kathy Sport and Nick Henderson (Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives), Lin Tobias for the panel design.

CURATORS:
A/Prof Noah Riseman (Australian Catholic University)
A/Prof Shirleene Robinson (Macquarie University)
Dr Graham Willett (Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives)

SERVING IN SILENCE?
Australian LGBTI Military Service since World War II
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AUSTRALIAN LGBTI MILITARY SERVICE SINCE WORLD WAR II

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Serving in Silence
Over 75 years of LGBTI military service in Australia
To commemorate 25 years since Australia lifted the ban on LGBT military service, this exhibition charts the changing experiences of LGBTI servicemen and women since World War II. It brings together photos, objects, documents and the life stories of current and former service personnel to explore the adversities, challenges and achievements of LGBTI Defence members.

Steve Sumpton:
Through the Screen
A photographic exploration of identity and perception
In his debut solo exhibition photographer Steve Sumpton recreates moments from his life that have helped shape the way he identifies with the LGBTQIA+ community. Manipulating visual cues to separate himself from these vivid, Crewdson-esque images, he invites you to connect with his work without restriction while bringing an awareness to the role perception plays on identity.

Shifting Elements and Camp Dogs: Kamahi Djordon King
A shift in focus towards multimedia
Originally from Katherine, Gurindji visual and performing artist Kamahi Djordon King has shifted his focus towards multimedia in this exhibition, showing the creation process of his painting as a film. Kamahi's artwork is inspired by nature. Kamahi has also begun to make sculpture, and this will be the first exhibition of his collection titled Tanha and the Camp Dogs, a homage to his late fur baby with her distinct colouring.

That’s My Man:
Nathan J Smith
“What does it mean to be a man?”
It's a tough question to answer, one that Nathan J. Smith just couldn’t fathom on his own and as such, turned to six of the most life changing and influential men he had ever met. What will a father, ex-boyfriend, lawyer, sponsor, counsellor and close friend reveal? Head to the exhibition and answer it for yourself.
Please join us for the exhibition launch by the Hon. Alex Greenwich, MP., Independent Member for Sydney

27 February 2018 (6:30pm)

Tap Gallery
259 Riley Street Surry Hills NSW 2010
Sydney, Australia

Please RSVP by 19 February 2018 to shirleene.robinson@mq.edu.au
Serving in silence? Australian LGBTI military service since World War II

by Managing Editor Posted on January 17, 2018

Mitchell Naughton reviews a museum exhibition on Australia’s history of LGBTI military service, running at the Melbourne City Library until 3 February 2018.

“I don’t know where all these gays and poofers have come from, I don’t remember a single one from World War Two.”

These were the words of Bruce Ruxton, head of the Victorian Returned Serviceman’s League during the 1980’s. However as Serving in silence? shows, this was in fact far from true.

This exhibit at the Melbourne City Library commemorates not only the 25th anniversary of open services in the Australian military but also the achievements, sacrifices and contributions that members of the LBGTI community have made to the Australian Defence Force since the Second World War. Curated and researched by historians Noah Riseman, Shirleene Robinson and Graham Willet, this exhibit is part of both a larger research project and a forthcoming book by the trio set to be published in September this year.

The exhibition itself starts with a bright colourful panel that quips how this is the “the war history they didn’t teach you at school” and indeed it is. From military drag artists performing for their fellow troops at the camps, to gay men dedicating love
songs to each other over radio, these are stories that many of us have never been told. Beginning with the crack down on homosexual acts in Port Moresby, *Serving in silence?* then explores the invasive medical examinations against suspected gays and lesbians through to the 1950s and 1960s, the “witch hunts” by military police in the 1970s and 1980s and finally the ban on transgender soldiers in the early 2000s.

While at times questioning the narrative that homosexuality was always hidden in the armed forces, this exhibit does not shy away from the darker elements of these stories. One of the exhibit’s strengths lies in its collection of firsthand accounts, with various letters, medical reports and military police interrogation transcripts on display for people to see and read, often displayed near photos of their authors or subjects. In fact, the entire exhibition was made using over 100 interviews with past and present LGBTI members of the ADF. These elements of *Serving in silence?*, especially when joined with the projected images of these service personnel put together by the Gay and Lesbian Archives, help drive home the reality of these accounts.


The exhibit’s other great strength is its attempts to engage its audience to investigate further. As soon as you finish the exhibition, you are greeted with a bookcase filled with further reading on sexuality in Australia, all of which can be borrowed from the City Library. Even when you sit down for a rest in front of the displays there are copies of the *ADF Staff LGBTI Guide* and the *Air Force Diversity Handbook* on display for you to browse. These are not only displays showing how and when certain attitudes in the ADF changed but also further reading for visitors about sexuality and
gender, discussing such topics as the difference between gender identity and biological sex. There is even a copy of Noah Riseman’s journal article *Outmanoeuvering Defence: The Australian Debates over Gay and Lesbian Military Service, 1992* which offers a more in depth discussion on the later period of the exhibit than could be displayed in the small number of panels.

The exhibit does well in discussing both the sadder parts of this history and the achievements of LGBTI members, as well as highlighting current inequalities in the ADF, such as the ban on HIV positive people enlisting and the difficulties for transgender members to access surgery. However, while *Serving in silence?* does a brilliant job of giving an equal amount of space between gay and lesbian stories, the exhibit would have benefited greatly from more stories of LGBTI people of colour, of which it is severely lacking.

As this exhibit comes hot on the heels of the legalisation of Same Sex Marriage in Australia, right in the middle of the *Midsumma Festival* in Melbourne and indeed only days after the first same sex weddings, it reminds us all how important and hard fought such victories and celebrations are. The stories of these men and women are important for all Australians, especially younger LGBTI Australians, as they teach us our own history, a history of those who suffered and fought injustice in the past so that we can celebrate equality today. However, it also shows us that we still have some way to go.

*Serving in silence? Australian military service since World War II* is on display in The Gallery at City Library from January 11 to February 3 2018 and is a free event. Following this it will be moving to Sydney, where it will be on display at the TAP Gallery, Surry Hills, from 27 February to 4 March 2018.

*Mitchell Naughton has recently completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in History and has research interests in both criminal and queer history. His thesis “The Royal Highwaymen” explored highway robbery committed by soldiers in eighteenth-
century London and he has also recently completed research on behalf of the National Trust of Australia into female prisoners at Melbourne Gaol during the late nineteenth-century.

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