

# NUNAWADING MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

## MINI NEWSLETTER No. 6

### Australian Forces Use Mini Drones

*Australian Defence Force are actively using drones that you thought were science fiction and some of the stuff used in a Terminator movie.*

#### The Black Hornet Nano

Nano Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) will soon be rolled out to Army soldiers in Brisbane following the completion of the Black Hornet program.

Brigadier Susan Coyle, commander of 6th Brigade and the Army's only UAS unit, 20th Surveillance Target Acquisition Regiment, said the Black Hornet Nano UAS rollout was a significant achievement for Army.

"UAS are a game-changer for the Army, providing enhanced situational awareness for better mission execution for Australian soldiers," BRIG Coyle said. "The issue of the Black Hornet Nano UAS to our soldiers is an exciting example of adopting tactical robotic technology."

"The Australian Army is now the biggest user of nano UAS in the world. It is also the first in the world to proliferate this technology to the conventional forces down to combat platoon level," BRIG Coyle added.

"Experience of UAS operations overseas and in Australia have provided Army with unique expertise that is in high demand.

UAS represent a defining opportunity for the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force."

The Black Hornet Nano UAS rollout and sustainment is an \$18 million project and is a key capability milestone for the Army as it continues to be a technologically advanced force. The unit measures around 10 x 2.5 cm (4 x 1 in) and provides troops on the ground with local situational awareness. They are small enough to fit in one hand and weigh just over half an ounce (16 gms, including batteries).



The UAV is equipped with a camera, which gives the operator full-motion video and still images.

An operator can be trained to operate the Black Hornet in as little as 20 minutes. The air vehicle has three cameras; one looking forward, one looking straight down, and one pointing downward at 45 degrees. A Black Hornet package contains two helicopters, and since a 90% charge is reached in 20-25 minutes, the same as its hovering time, when one needs to be recharged the other is ready to fly. Top speed is 11 mph (18 km/h). In October 2014, Prox Dynamics unveiled a version of its PD-100 Black Hornet with night vision capabilities,

fitted with both long-wave infrared and day video sensors that can transmit video streams or high-resolution still images via a digital data-link with a 1 mi (1.6 km) range.

***Australian Defence Magazine and Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia***

## Aerovironment's Wasp-AE Mini-UAVs

The Australian defense department selected AeroVironment's Wasp AE small unmanned aircraft system for use by the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The Australian order will deliver mini-drones within a period of three-year period, and support the systems for ten years. The contract is worth A\$101 million (USD 74.6 million), of which the about half (US\$36.5 million) will be the original manufacturer's share.

This is the largest Australian order for Wasp-AE to date. In 2014 XTEK placed an initial order worth A\$7.7 for Wasp AE for the evaluation and training of Australian forces. The current order will support full-scale fielding of the systems.

The Wasp AE weighs 2.8 pounds, operates for up to 50 minutes at a range of up to five kilometers and delivers live, streaming color and infrared video from its pan-tilt-zoom Mantis i22 AE gimbaled payload. Launched by hand and capable of landing on the ground or in fresh or salt water, the Wasp AE provides portability and flexibility for infantry, littoral or maritime reconnaissance operations.

AeroVironment is working closely with Australian partners XTEK, GD Mediaware and Sentient Vision to modify and introduce the WASP AE solution for Australian requirement. XTEK and AeroVironment will provide local maintenance, training, and field support to serve the immediate needs of ADF while expanding AeroVironment's global support capabilities.



Australian Army soldiers Corporal Doug Coombs (left) and Corporal Matthew Molloy (left) from 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) with a Wasp AE and a PD-100 Black Hornet unmanned aircraft vehicle at Gallipoli Barracks, Brisbane, on 5 October 2016. Photo: Sgt. Janine Fabre, Australian Defence



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Bombardier Jarrod Logan launches a Wasp AE unmanned aerial system from a paddock 20km south of Canberra to survey blazing scrub in the Orroral Valley. Photo: Corporal Julia Whitwell

Articles from *Defence Update Magazine*, by Tamir Eshel - and *Defence News*

# Popski's Private Army

**Popski's Private Army**, officially **No. 1 Demolition Squadron, PPA**, was a unit of British Special Forces set up in Cairo in October 1942 by Major Vladimir Peniakoff. Popski's Private Army was one of several raiding units formed in the Western Desert during the Second World War. The squadron also served in Italy, and was disbanded in September 1945.

No. 1 Demolition Squadron was formed specifically to attack Field-Marshal Rommel's fuel supplies, in support of General Montgomery's offensive at El Alamein, at the suggestion of Lieutenant-Colonel John Hackett. The unit became operational on 10 December 1942 as an 8th Army Special Forces unit. After the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) and the Special Air Service (SAS), PPA was the last and smallest of the three main irregular raiding, reconnaissance and intelligence units formed during the North African Campaign.



The Egyptian made headdress badge of No. 1 Demolition Squadron, "Popski's Private Army" being an engraved silver astrolabe on an elaborate stand.

Shoulder flash under



Vladimir Peniakoff

When the Second World War broke out, the 42-year-old Peniakoff applied to serve in the Royal Air Force, and the Royal Navy, but was rejected. He was accepted by the British Army, and assigned to garrison duties as an Arabic-speaking junior officer in the Libyan Arab Force (LAF). Not satisfied, Popski left his post and formed the Libyan Arab Force Commando (LAFC), a small group of British and Libyan soldiers who operated behind the lines in the Jebel Akhdar area of Cyrenaica.

On his return to Cairo in the middle of 1942, Peniakoff was invited to join a Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) raid in the area he had just left. In doing so, he learned much about their procedures, but also lost his left little finger to an Italian bullet. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for his previous intelligence reporting and petrol dump raiding while leading the LAFC for three months behind enemy lines, and for the operation with the LRDG. While he was away, the LAFC was disbanded. He was given the nickname Popski, from a *Daily Mirror* cartoon character, by Captain Bill Kennedy Shaw (the LRDG's Intelligence Officer) because his signalers had problems with "Peniakoff".

Formation, and initial actions

Shortly after this No. 1 Demolition Squadron was formed, the smallest independent unit of the British Army at 23 men all-ranks. The original officers of the unit were three friends who had served together in the Libyan Arab Force: Popski, Robert Park Yunnie and Jean Caneri.



Vladimir Peniakoff with his Jeep during a raid on Barce, Libya

Lieutenant Colonel John Hackett\*, who coordinated British raiding operations, asked Peniakoff to give the new unit a cover name, but vacillated. The unit's name ultimately came from Hackett's exasperation at Popski's delay: "You had better find a name quick or we shall call you Popski's Private Army"—"I'll take it". PPA was unusual in that all officer recruits reverted to lieutenant on joining, and other ranks reverted to private. The unit was run quite informally: there was no saluting and no drill, officers and men messed together, every man was expected to know what to do and get on with it, and there was only one punishment for failure of any kind: to be immediately returned to unit. It was also efficient, having an unusually

small headquarters.

Events proceeded rapidly; the Germans and Italians were expelled from Egypt and Libya shortly after PPA became active. A joint LRDG-PPA patrol discovered the gap in the mountains that let Bernard Montgomery launch an outflanking move around Erwin Rommel's defense at the Mareth Line. The PPA was also among the first elements of Eighth Army (moving west) to linkup with the British First Army and American II Corps (advancing east) in Tunisia in early 1943. Many PPA raiding and reconnaissance operations were carried out around the time of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, including taking the surrender of 600 Italians.

The summer of 1943 was spent in Algeria and Tunisia recruiting and training new volunteers from the LRDG, SAS, Commandos and Royal Armoured Corps for the fight in Italy, bringing the unit's size up to about 35 all ranks, with two fighting patrols and a small HQ. For a short while PPA experimented with using 1st Airborne Division's gliders to deliver them and their jeeps behind the Axis lines in Sicily, but their part in that operation was cancelled at the last minute.

## Italy

In September 1943 an advance patrol of PPA sailed to Taranto on board the USS *Boise* and headed inland, where they discovered the hitherto unknown weakness of the German 1st Parachute Division opposing 1st Airborne. As a result of this success Popski was allowed to increase the size of PPA to 80 all ranks; throughout the Italian Campaign about 100 men were actually deployed at any one time.

Three fighting patrols, each of 18 men in six jeeps, and one Tactical HQ patrol of four jeeps were formed and given great autonomy. Each jeep was armed with .50in and .30in machine guns, giving the patrols immense firepower for their size. The men trained hard for amphibious, mountain and parachute operations, demolition and counter-demolition, reconnaissance and intelligence gathering.



**Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir "Popski" Peniakoff and his gunner / driver Corporal Cokes in their Jeep in Italy**



**PPA Patrol - Italy 1945**

They were deployed in many roles, often clandestine, and for several months even operated as regular front line troops, holding a sector of the Allied front line, badly depleted after the withdrawal of forces for the D-Day landings in Normandy, nipping around in their jeeps to fool the Germans into believing that they were opposed by much larger units.

Several operations used DUKWs or small landing craft called RCLs (manned by Royal Engineers who became known as "Popski's Private Navy") to sail up the Adriatic and get behind the German front line, escorted by the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces.

Throughout the bitter winter weather and fighting of 1944 and 1945 PPA undertook their operations ahead of regular forces,

in support of British, Canadian, Indian and Polish armoured, infantry and commando units. They located targets for the Allied Air Force, chased Germans out of rear-areas, saved bridges, captured many prisoners and guns, and accepted the surrender of the entire German garrison at Chioggia.

At various times PPA worked alongside other secret units such as the LRDG, SAS, No. 1 Special Force (SOE), Phantom, 'A' Force and Office of Strategic Services. Along the way they adopted many strays, including Russian, Italian and German POWs, Italian regulars and partisans, both royalist and communist.

Popski was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) in November 1944, during joint operations (such as "Porterforce") with the 27th Lancers and Italian partisans of the 28th Garibaldi Brigade, to liberate Ravenna. Shortly afterwards he lost his left hand to a German rifle-grenade.

At the end of the war Popski's Private Army sailed some of their jeeps on RCLs to Venice, where they drove around St. Mark's Square, the only wheeled vehicles ever to have been there. The unit was disbanded four

months later on 14 September 1945, after hunting for Himmler, disarming Italian partisans and discouraging Josip Broz Tito's partisans from encroaching on Austrian and Italian territory.

By this time PPA personnel had gained between them a DSO, a Distinguished Conduct Medal, 6 MCs, 10 MMs, and 14 Mentions in Despatches; King George VI had personally requested an account of the unit's exploits.

*\* Lieutenant-Colonel John Hackett, born in Western Australia and Later General Sir John Hackett he was instrumental in the formation of the Long Range Desert Group, the Special Air Service and Popski's Private Army. Later in the war he commanded a Parachute brigade at Arnhem, wounded and captured, then escaping. Later to command the British Army of the Rhine in 1966 before retiring.*

*He is the author of "The Third World War, the Untold Story", a novel and well worth reading, ((Was my boss! Mel Green)*