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Committee Secretary  
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Po Box 6100  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**Australian War Memorial Submission to the inquiry into the Defence honours and awards system.**

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission.

The Australian War Memorial is a strong supporter of the Commonwealth's existing system of military honours and awards, which provides a uniquely Australian hierarchy of recognition for service, leadership and gallantry; it also carries on the traditions established by the earlier British Imperial system of honours and awards. Since its institution in 1975, the Australian system has not been challenged by an involvement in a truly global conflict, or one in which the nation has committed large (i.e. division-sized or greater) forces. It is therefore, although nearly fifty years old, still in a relatively early stage of its evolution.

The experience of the British Empire in the First World War, during which awards for distinguished or gallant service were made in the thousands rather than dozens, demonstrated the ways in which a global conflict can impact a well-established tradition of recognition. Between 1914 and 1918, the British system of honours and awards was transformed through the addition of new decorations such as the Military Cross (MC), Military Medal (MM) and Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). The repurposing of others, such as the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) as an award for gallant or life-saving actions not undertaken in the face of the enemy, and even the advent of Congratulatory Certificates issued at corps or divisional levels to recognise courageous conduct, were responses to this increased need to identify those who had distinguished

themselves. The proliferation of gallantry awards at various levels also created a wide general understanding of which award was the appropriate recognition for any act of leadership or gallantry.

Similarly, Australia's involvement in conflicts in the Middle East over the last 20 years has begun to transform – albeit in a rather less dramatic fashion – the nation's system of honours and awards. At the commencement of operations in this theatre, the ADF's primary combat bravery awards, the Star of Gallantry (SG) and the Medal for Gallantry (MG), were little known even within the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The only recipients of the MG to that time had been four members of United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) for their actions at Kibeho in Rwanda, and one member of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) for actions in East Timor. Around 40 awards of the MG were made for operations in the Middle East, and while a proportion of these were made to Australian Special Forces soldiers whose identities and actions remain obscure, the remainder, with more detailed citations to a variety of ranks and roles, have securely established the medal's position as being broadly equivalent to the historic MC or MM, ensuring that the MG has recognition and respect within the ADF and also, to some extent, in the wider Australian community.

No awards of the Star of Gallantry had been made before the start of Australian military operations in the Middle East. Of the eight SGs which have now been awarded, two were for historic actions dating to the Imperial awards period. The remaining six have all been made to Australian Special Forces soldiers whose identities and actions remain hidden. This has led to a natural perception that the SG will only be awarded for covert operations, and that full citations for the acts of gallantry performed are unlikely to be made available to the public. Unfortunately, it also means that the SG, and the qualification for its award, remain completely unknown. There is a broad expectation that such actions must exceed those required to receive the MG, but at the same time fall short of the extraordinary level of heroism which would lead to the award of the Victoria Cross. Is it thus equivalent to the historical Distinguished Service Order (DSO) or Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)?

Following the 2012 Amendments to Regulations governing award of Australia's Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) and Commendation for Distinguished Service, confusion has arisen regarding their differentiation from the Conspicuous Service Cross, (CSC) and Conspicuous Service Medal (CSM). The Conspicuous Service awards were explicitly created to reward performance in non-warlike situations, while Distinguished Service awards originally

recognised command and leadership in action or on warlike operations, but since 2012 have specified only the 'warlike operations' element.

There are clear parallels between the Australian DSC and the (Imperial) Distinguished Service Order (DSO), an award instituted in 1886 and available to commissioned officers only. Originally intended to recognise "meritorious or distinguished service in the field, or before the enemy" and ranking second only to the Victoria Cross (VC), the pressures of the First World War and the massively increased numbers of individuals requiring recognition, led to a large number of awards of the DSO which could not be regarded as being made for actions under fire. By the end of the war, it had evolved into an award which could be granted to junior officers for outstanding gallantry in the face of the enemy, or increasingly, to more senior leaders at battalion, brigade or divisional level for outstanding leadership in terms of the planning and execution of operations. Lack of clarity as to its purpose, and the perception that the DSO had become a staff officers' award, led to its being termed the "Domestic Service Order" by elements of the armed forces.

The Australian DSC would appear to be experiencing similar criticism based upon a similar lack of certainty regarding its purpose. At present it is unclear whether the award is to be granted for excellence in the planning and conduct of operations, or for gallantry in the execution of those operations, or both. Those who have engaged in face-to-face combat with their nation's enemies are justifiably inclined to believe that their experience, and the risk of death or injury that comes with it, should place them (and any medallic recognition they receive) in a separate category from any other. Given that Australia has control over the form taken by its own honours and awards system, it seems reasonable to address this by ensuring that there is a clear distinction between combatant gallantry and distinguished leadership awards. The DSC appears to have been intended to fulfil the latter requirement and, if so, this intent should be better publicised.

The Memorial is regularly contacted by researchers interested in honours and awards. This can include seeking details of the actions or circumstances that led to recognition being awarded, such as a citation or recommendation. There is also interest in why a recommendation may not have resulted in an award or in the issue of a different award from the one recommended. Historically, documentation of recommendations and citations has not been retained consistently. In some cases there is no extant documentation of why an award was made. We are not aware of records documenting the decision-making process that have been retained and deposited with the National Archives of Australia or the Australian War Memorial.

If the policies or eligibility criteria for honours and awards could be made publicly available, it would enable interested parties to perform their initial research independently. They would not need to contact Department of Defence or the Governor General's Office for advice on the documentation or to request copies. Additional publicly available documentation may reduce these enquiries, and also enquiries received by the Memorial.

To assist with future enquiries regarding honours and awards and the people who receive them it is important that relevant records are identified and sentenced for retention and transfer to the National Archives of Australia or the Australian War Memorial's collection, as appropriate. The Memorial holds many of these files in relation to historical operations, and the National Archives holds others; however, while some files contain recommendations, other files contain only lists of recipients. The processes of identifying these records (including those related to policy), offer a methodology for retaining corporate knowledge for future decision making.

Another consideration from recent conflicts is the development of policy regarding when the protected identities of award recipients can be revealed. The Memorial has collections, information and gallery displays associated with awards made to individuals who cannot yet be publicly identified. A framework to inform us when this information can be released, and our data updated, would be beneficial.

The Memorial has in the recent past contributed a submission to the Defence Honours & Awards Tribunal's *Inquiry into recognition for members and families of members of the ADF who are injured, wounded or killed in or as a result of service*. The Memorial's Director, Mr Matt Anderson PSM, and the Assistant Director, National Collection, Major General (Ret'd) Brian Dawson AM, CSC gave evidence to that inquiry on 13 May 2021. The Memorial has always found in its interactions with the Tribunal that at all levels its staff are professional and thorough, and provide comprehensive information in response to enquiries.

The Memorial maintains two significant Honours and Awards databases that are published on the Memorial's website. The databases provide details of recommendations and awards for military honours and awards to 120,000 Australians and link key source documents to their profiles. The Memorial continues to add names as information and source records become available.

During 2019–2022, the Memorial received correspondence requesting that all recipients of Australian military honours and awards since 1975 be included in the Memorial's Honours and Awards database, with the details of their awards. The database consolidates information indexed from the Commonwealth and London Gazettes as well as from official and publicly available records held at the Memorial. The Memorial's collection of official source records related to Honours and Awards ceased in the 1980s. However, in response to enquiries, the Memorial requested Defence Honours and Awards to provide the Memorial with Commonwealth Gazettes that mentioned awards, covering the period since 1975. All 83 issues of the Commonwealth Gazette provided by Defence were accessioned, catalogued and ingested into the Collection Management System (CMS). The names contained in those Gazettes were indexed (more than 2,700 names and awards) and published to the Memorial's website by July 2022. However, since then the Memorial has learned that the 83 issues of the Commonwealth Gazettes provided by Defence did not include all of the Gazettes that contain military awards – contrary to what was understood at the time. Thus a second phase of work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the missing relevant issues of the Gazette are identified, indexed and published.

The Memorial seeks to ensure that we retain relevant operational records surrounding the awards, and to make these documents publicly available in accordance with the Archives Act 1983. Based on the documentation and other records, the Memorial collects personal information regarding the awards: for example, photographs, personal diaries, oral histories and ephemera. The Memorial aims to tell these stories in the galleries and reflect the awards in our online databases and biographical profiles on our website.

*List of files held at the Memorial related to Honours and Awards*

The first three of these series include recommendations; the rest are mostly lists of recipients.

AWM28 Recommendation files for honours and awards, AIF, 1914–18 War – Covers only the First World War

AWM88 Governor General's Office honours and awards files – Covers From Second World War to Korean War

AWM119 Office of Military Secretary, Army honours and awards confidential working files – Covers part of Second World War, Korean War, Malayan Emergency, Confrontation and Vietnam

AWM276 Records of the Australian Army Assistance Group Vietnam (AAAGV) – Has a section specifically related to honours and awards in Vietnam, including files transferred from the former AFV

AWM330 Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations – Among the OHPK files are a small number of files related to awards covering some of the peacekeeping operations

AWM358 Honours and Awards records - Afghanistan (2001- ) – Very limited series only covering the four VCs awarded in Afghanistan

AWM418 Records of Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) – Unlike the series above, this is a mixed series, with only a very small part covering honours and awards. Those it does cover are listings rather than the award recommendations (most of these are in the closed period and will not appear in a front-end RecordSearch search)

There are many other series which include parts of the administration of the issuance of awards. In these series, there are administration files included as part of an administrative headquarters: for example, both AWM98 1ATF (1st Australian Task Force) and AWM103 AFV (Australian Forces Vietnam) contain awards files from the Vietnam War.

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