

Navy & RAAF News submission

Media Release 04/03

ACROSS THREE SERVICES OF THE ADF

Wollongong resident John Sperring may be a familiar face to some within the Australian Defence Forces, but the different uniforms he has worn over the years may cause some confusion. John joined the then-Australian Regular Army in 1973, as an Army intelligence operator. During his 30 year career he has served in all three branches of the Defence Force.

During Army service some of Warrant Officer Sperring's friends changed over to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and they soon encouraged him to follow. John traded his "greens" for a commission in the RAAF Intelligence Branch as a Flying Officer in 1985.

"The job initially involved air-related training and complemented my interest in flying and aircraft, so I realised this was a good career move for me at this time", John said. John enjoyed his 2 ½ year posting to Alice Springs with the Over-the-Horizon Radar the best during his Air Force service. His daughter, Sarah, was born there.

Flight Lieutenant Sperring transferred to the RAAF Reserves on retirement from the RAAF in 1995 but soon realised he could not continue his travelling from Wollongong, but could serve in the Royal Australian Navy Reserves and continue to provide Defence service. In 1995 John was commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy Reserves as a Lieutenant INTEL officer at the Joint Intelligence Centre in Sydney.

Another officer training course at HMAS CRESWELL put his service skills to the test. At first he was slower following some drill commands, as he translated each Navy-style "Ho" into "attention". . Army and Navy do have differences in some drill commands.

"For the first few days I would return the Navy salute in the Army/RAAF styled action, but I don't think anyone noticed," he said.

So now when you enter John's office at the Australian Hydrographic Staff office in Wollongong, you will notice all three coloured service caps on the bookcase.

Lieutenant Commander John Sperring RANR has observed each service's traditions and customs, but the changes in the last ten years have been interesting.

"Peoples' perceptions of how the individual services operate have changed, and how we work as a Defence force. It is now an open process of continual change gradually moving away from three single services. Each service does have its allegiances and loyalties but we are able to work together much smarter and as a very professional and capable tri-service organisation" he concluded.

John retains his three service caps in his office as a constant reminder to passing colleagues that all three branches together form the Australian Defence Force.

Lieutenant Commander Sperring continues to serve at the Wollongong-based Australian Hydrographic Office using skills and experience acquired across Army, Air Force and now Naval experience. Additionally he is joining 338 (Illawarra) Squadron Australian Air Force Cadets as Operations Officer in his former rank of Flight Lieutenant.

One wonders if John's service in all three branches of the Defence Force is a first.



Photo Caption:

Shows LCDR John Sperring, RANR at his desk at the Australian Hydrographic Office, Wollongong with his tri-Service hat collection.