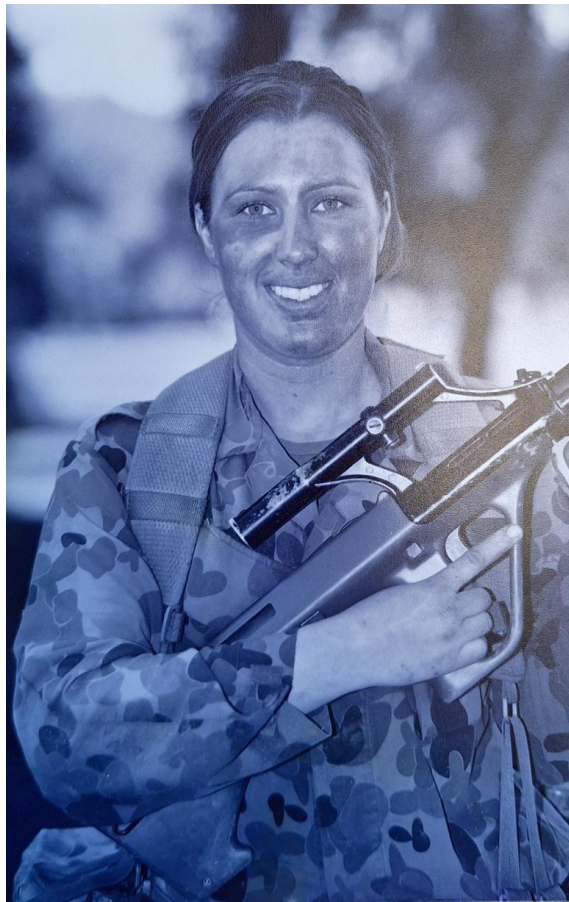


# Interview with (RET) SGT Melissa Van der Waal



ANZAC Day 2026



Kapooka 2005

1. What rank did you become in the Army and what was your main role?

I became a SGT in the Australian Regular Army. I served in the Australian Army as an ECN 074 Administration Clerk. My main role was to provide administrative and personnel support to ensure the efficient operation of units and headquarters. My duties included managing transfers and postings, preparing and processing signals and official correspondence, administering pay

and allowances, handling leave applications and records, maintaining personnel files, and processing promotions and discharge documentation.

I was also responsible for records management, data entry, drafting reports, arranging travel and movement documentation, managing confidential information, preparing routine orders, assisting with recruitment and onboarding administration, coordinating training records, and providing clerical support to officers and soldiers. The role required strong organisational skills, attention to detail, communication skills, and the ability to work effectively in a disciplined and fast-paced military environment.

2. What made you want to join the military?

I didn't actually know what I wanted to do when I left school. I found it hard to decide and commit to a university course I wasn't even sure I would have enjoyed. I ended up working and travelling. When I was 21, I got a job in a Returned Services League (RSL). One day, I was looking at all the memorabilia in the cabinets and thought that I could join the Army and I did.

3. What does it feel like to be in a war zone?

At first, it was exciting but a little bit scary. There were many new sounds and smells. There were also 21 different countries working from the same base. After about a month, it just becomes normal.

4. Did you have any difficulties being a mum while serving in the military?

No. I left the Army when I became a mum. That would have been very hard to be away from my kids.

5. Have you seen opportunities for women in the Army change over time?

In the past, women in the Army were often limited to administrative, medical, or support roles. Over time, the Australian Army progressively opened more employment categories to women, including combat and frontline positions. Women can now serve in roles such as infantry, artillery, armour, engineering, aviation, and special operations support, giving them access to broader career pathways and promotion opportunities.

6. Were there any female role models who inspired you?

Unfortunately, none that come to mind.

7. Do you feel like your time in the military has equipped you for your role as a teacher?

Yes, the Army helped me develop strong organisation, communication, leadership, and time-management skills, all of which are important in a classroom and workplace environment.

8. What was your favourite part of your time serving in the military?

Living in Darwin and having lots of friends and social activities. I liked moving to different locations around Australia at that time.

9. What was the proudest moment of your service?

All of my promotions and serving my country in East Timor and Afghanistan. Training other clerks below me was nice, too.

10. What challenges did you face as a woman in the Army?

One challenge was working in a male-dominated culture, where sometimes I felt pressure to prove myself or my abilities. Physical demands were sometimes hard, especially carrying heavy packs. Injuries occurred often, too, and recovery could be hard.

11. What is one lesson from your service that has stayed with you for life?

Achieving goals is so much better in a team and to be a good team player.

We are lucky to live in Australia.