

From: Lieutenant General D.L. Morrison, AO
Chief of Army



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Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC, CVO
Governor General of Australia
Government House
Yarralumla ACT 2600

Yours Excellency,

As you will be aware, the Australian Army has a system of theatre and battle honours in place to recognise exemplary service by Arms Corps Units in combat and combat-related roles. Until recently, there was no provision for such recognition for outstanding service in dangerous operations short of war. The Army Battle Honours Committee, recognising that the Army now fights in ways different from the past, has amended the battle and theatre honours system to provide for the recognition of outstanding service in operations in other than declared theatres of war. Under the new system, actions by units in non-warlike but still hazardous conditions, and actions by non-Arms Corps Units, can now be recognised by the award of an Honour Distinction.

You will be pleased to learn that I have approved a recommendation for the award of the first Honour Distinction to 17 Construction Squadron, an Engineer Unit, for its work in Namibia in support of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in 1989-90. The Citation for the award reads:

17 Construction Squadron is awarded the Honour Distinction, **Namibia 1989-1990**, in recognition of its creditable performance in support of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group operation to manage the transition of Namibia to independence in 1990. Despite being deployed to provide engineering support, when the ceasefire broke down at the start of the mission, members of the squadron helped establish Assembly Points, which enabled the mission to continue. This activity was conducted in the face of hostility from elements of the former colonial power and personal danger arising from the breakdown of the cease fire. Later, 17 Construction Squadron became involved in the election process itself, providing security, transport and logistic support to election officials, monitors, other UN personnel, voters and polling stations. Members of 17 Construction Squadron ensured that, as much as possible, the election was able to proceed without interruption or interference and ensured that all parties were free from intimidation or duress. With the selfless support of individuals from other units of the Australian Defence Force, 17 Construction Squadron played a key role in the smooth and effective transition of Namibia from colonial rule to independence. The Squadron performed a role well beyond what was expected and brought great credit on itself, the Australian Army and Australia.

This is a significant occasion for the Australian Army. It is a very public acknowledgement of outstanding performance by soldiers who, in the past, would have been overlooked. For this reason, and because this type of award is so important to the morale and *esprit-de-corps* of our people, the Australian Army would be honoured if you would make the presentation of the award to the Officer Commanding the Unit concerned. There are no time pressures related to when the actual award presentation needs to occur.

Warmest Regards

David