

“3 RAR Para of SECDet IX”

by Captain Conway Bown
Official Army War Artist



‘3 RAR Para of SECDet IX – water colour on Arches cold press paper – 297mm x 420mm – Official Army Art Collection.’

“3 RAR Para shows a member of the Army’s 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR). 3 RAR (pronounced Three ARR-AY-ARR, not Three RAAH) is, at the time of writing, an airborne battalion. This means that the unit trains in parachuting skills so that if necessary, the soldiers can go into battle by parachuting onto the battlefield. A soldier trained in this skill is called a ‘Paratrooper’ or the shortened form ‘Para’ (pronounced PA-RUH, rhymes with Farrer).”

“During Operation CATALYST, the deployment of Australian soldiers to Iraq, one of the tasks assigned them was the security of the Australian Embassy staff in Baghdad’s International Zone, the area of the city where embassies were located and where insurgents still operated. The primary guards for the staff were military policemen (MPs) who would accompany the embassy staff and family members everywhere. To support this operation were infantry

soldiers to provide further security – in this case, paratroopers of 3 RAR – and members of the armoured corps who operate armoured vehicles who would provide armoured transport – and at the time were the Light Horsemen of 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment, Queensland Mounted Infantry. All three organisations, as well as other support staff, made up Security Detachment IX – SECDet IX.”

“As the war artist, I was lucky enough to spend some time with SECDet IX; with the MPs, the Paratroopers and the Light Horsemen as well as Signallers and cooks. Some of the paras agreed to pose for me so that I could take some sketches of them to use in the M1 Commemorative painting. The painting above is from these sketches and shows a para with his F89 Para Minimi (pronounced MIN-ah-MY)

THINGS TO NOTE:

Paratroopers: Paratroopers are airborne infantrymen. Their role is to be able to jump from aeroplanes and descend to earth by parachute (thus the adjective ‘airborne’ because they are borne on the air) as opposed to troops who arrive by helicopter which is known as ‘airmobile’ because they are mobile through the air.

Paratroopers have been in existence since the Second World War and the first forces to use this capability were the Germans and Russians. The Americans and British conducted huge airborne operations towards the end of the war. Paratroopers are 'shock' troops. That is to say, they arrive quickly and with enough force to 'shock' the enemy. However, because paratroopers must be able to carry everything they need with them; all their water, rations, weapons and ammunition, they are often lightly equipped and cannot remain in battle for long periods without being resupplied by land or air (ie truck, aeroplane, helicopter or even parachute). Their main advantage is speed, shock and surprise.

(Right: Captain Conway Bown sketches a 3 RAR paratrooper in Baghdad)

The Weapon: The Minimi is a fully automatic general purpose machine gun made by Fabrique Nationale Herstal in Belgium. In Australia it's known as the F89 Minimi, however this version is slightly different to the standard version:



- The calibre of the weapon is 5.56 (ie the diameter of the bullet is 5.56mm.)
- It is a fully automatic machine-gun which means that the trigger can be pulled once and rounds (bullets) will constantly fire without having to repeatedly pull the trigger again and again. It can also fire single rounds.
- This is a Para Minimi which means that it has been designed for the needs of Paratroopers. As such, the equipment has to be compact and so weapons for paratroopers often have:
 - Telescopic butt (the item that is pushed against the firer's shoulder);
 - Shorter barrel which makes the weapon more compact but reduces its overall accuracy;
 - Option for a belt feed or magazine feed. This means that a belt of ammunition can be fed into the weapon or, as shown in this picture, a magazine of ammunition is used.
- The magazine is the same as that used by the M16 Automatic Rifle which makes them easy to obtain through the Army's supply system.
- This weapon has both a bipod as well as a foregrip. A bipod is a device with two legs that allows the weapon to rest on the ground. This makes it very stable and accurate for firing. The foregrip allows the user to hold the forward part of the weapon with a standard grip of the fist (as the figure is doing in this image).

Operational: The Paratrooper is wearing some standard protective equipment including body armour and safety goggles. The body armour is designed to protect the wearer from shrapnel all over the vest and heavy Kevlar plates are inserted on the front of the torso and on the rear of the torso to protect vital organs from bullets. The rear plate in its sleeve is visible in this painting.

The Painting: Watercolour painting requires strict planning for it is difficult, if not impossible, to cover up mistakes. Light colours need to be applied first and usually allowed to dry before applying darker colours. (There are exceptions to these rules, of course.) One of the best ways to make your paintings 'sing' is to ensure that the colours are realistic and stark. Note the light colour of the uniform and the boots against the dark background. It makes those colours stand out. Also note the impact of the shadow on the light background. Very stark. Very striking.

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