

Big Read

Tribute to a legend

Poet and fellow Vietnam Vet Bill Charlton from Sydney penned this tribute to Roy 'Zeke' Mundine in 2013 and was only too happy to let The Daily Examiner publish it in honour of his recent appointment as Indigenous Elder of the Army.

Bill writes his prose for the soldiers and their families. "I have many hundreds even thousands of poems about individual soldiers but Roy is special to my heart. He is a grand old warrior and a legend to the younger men in the Army."

I was 20 years old when I first met Zeke
 He was older than me but still at his peak.
 The Army life seemed to suit him back then,
 And he looked after his boys like an old mother hen.
 He was sarcastic and dry, but full of good fun,
 And no better soldier ever carried a gun.
 His locker was crammed with suits and fine clothes.
 There were none better-dressed when an occasion arose.
 He excelled at Rugby and was as fit as the rest.
 His complete Army skills could outstrip the best.
 And he could out-spin the best in the land.
 When out on the town I had seen him first hand.
 A plantation owner in Malaya no less,
 What he would be next time was anyone's guess!
 People believed every word that he said,
 As he played out each part off the top of his head.
 We travelled by train to Newcastle one night.
 He was worried about some-one that he had to fight.
 So at Fassifern he opened his case to reveal
 All this medical gear, up till now he'd concealed.
 There were bandages that he wrapped, all round his head.
 A full plaster cast that went on his left leg.
 His right arm in plaster was held by a sling.
 He looked like a patient from the Emergency Wing.
 "A real bad car accident!" he said with a smile.
 "That should keep him at bay for awhile!
 "There was nothing this digger wouldn't do for a joke.
 Good-natured, good-humoured, he was that kind of bloke.
 In South Vietnam he was wounded, more dead than alive,
 Only Zeke had the strength and the will to survive.
 As a young soldier's mentor, none were finer than he.
 I salute you Roy Mundine, you're a legend to me!
 © Bill Charlton 2013

A man of substance

Grafton-born Roy Mundine has been appointed the inaugural Indigenous Elder of the Army for his leadership, courage and commitment not just to the armed forces but to his Aboriginal heritage

Lesley Apps

lesley.apps@dailyexaminer.com.au

WITH his 75th birthday just around the corner, you would imagine Roy 'Zeke' Mundine OAM, or Uncle Roy as he is known, might be ready to hang up his army boots after a distinguished and often life-threatening, 36-year career with the Australian Defence Force.

But those thoughts were put to rest once the loquacious, Bundjalung man answered the phone from his Sydney home to talk about his appointment as the Army's first appointed Indigenous Elder.

"You were lucky to catch me," he laughs. "I've been all over the place lately. Turkey (Lone Pine Commemorations), South Australia, Alice Springs. Everyone wants me to go to everywhere now. The Defence Force, Aboriginal organisations, the Government. It's been flat out."

Born in Grafton's Runnymede Hospital, to Roy 'Fardi' snr and Olive 'Dolly' Mundine, 'Zeke' as his army mates know him, grew up in the family home in South Grafton attending St Joseph's ("on the old site") and Grafton High School.

His father was a road grader with the then Department of Main Roads

while his mother (who also worked as a lab attendant at the University of Technology when they later moved to Sydney) raised 11 children, both parents determined their off-spring would be well educated.

During that period in the 1950s and 60s Roy's mother and father were ground-breakers, managing to achieve things that member of the 'white' community took for granted including securing a loan to purchase the family home in suburbia, work a government job for regular wages and drink in the pub with his workmates. But none of that came easy and their determination inspired Roy jnr

DINNER AND ART IN THE Paddock

STAGED BY THE GALLERY FOUNDATION



www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au



WE WISH TO THANK: OUR HOSTS - Fiona Leviny and Michael Rowe at Turtle Creek

OUR MASTER CHEFS

Nathan Earp

Austin & Co Waterside Dining - Grafton
www.austinandco.com.au

Antony Perring

Irons and Craig - Yamba
www.ironsandcraig.com

Mary Drum

Caperberry Café - Yamba
www.caperberrycafe.com.au

Peter Nicholson

Nicholson Fine Foods - Yamba
www.nicholsonfinefoods.com.au

OUR ENTERTAINERS

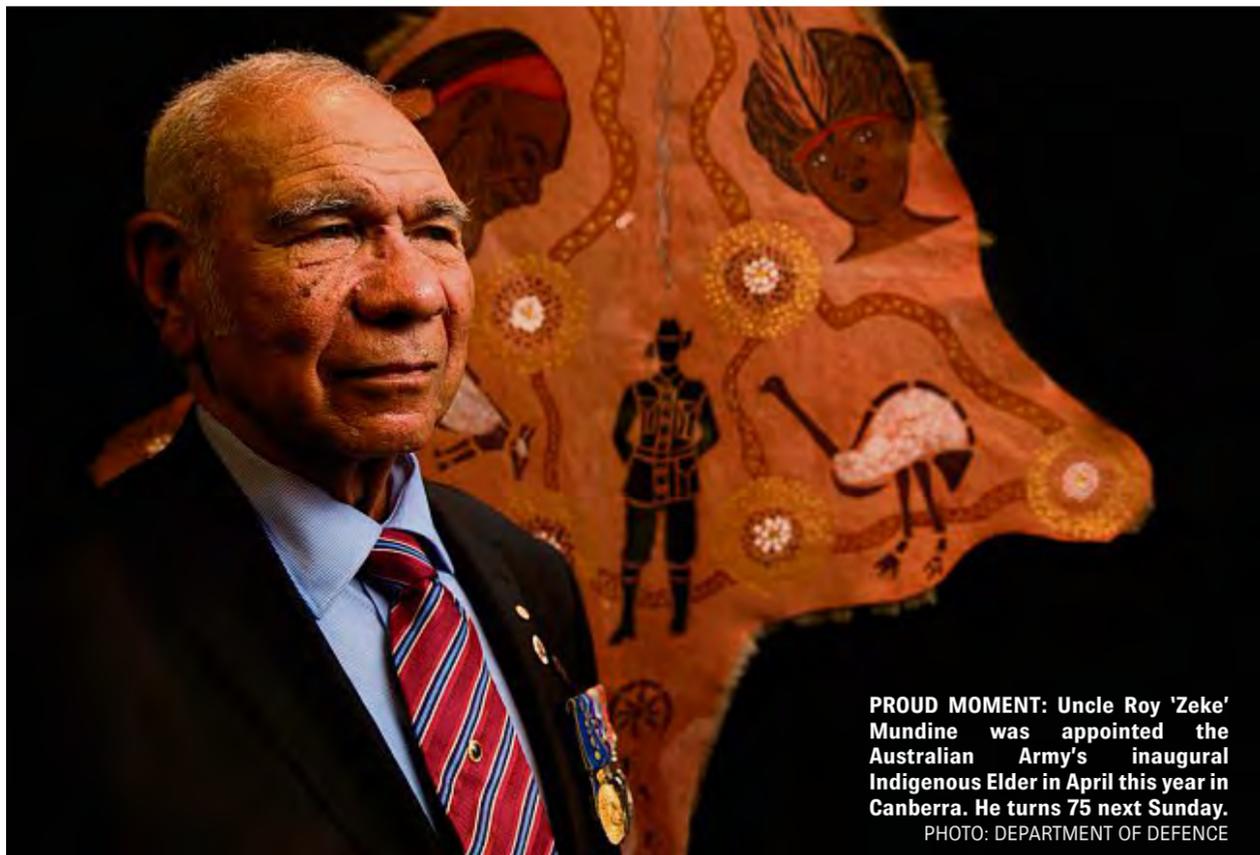
- Swag Manouche
- Jane Logan
- The Treble Trio - Bronwyn Gell, Helen Tucker and Kim Connor
- Dan Fahey
- Nick and Jennifer Carr
- Paul Commerford and Sam Cashman

OUR SPONSORS

Yamba Fair Butchery
 Botero Coffee
 Jilly's Teas
 Roving Coffee Van
 Coopers Beers & Ciders
 Golden Grove Estate Wines
 Symphony Hill Wines
 Merilba Estate Wines
 Toppers Mountain Wines



OUR ARTISTS AND LOYAL SUPPORTERS - from up and down the mighty Clarence River!



PROUD MOMENT: Uncle Roy 'Zeke' Mundine was appointed the Australian Army's inaugural Indigenous Elder in April this year in Canberra. He turns 75 next Sunday.

PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

and his 10 younger siblings.

Now Uncle Roy is doing the same to several generations through his new role and a distinguished career. And when inquiring about his other siblings he rattled their names off with military precision – “Graeme, Warren, James, Phillip, Peter, Charlie, Djon, Anne, Olive and Kaye. You don’t want to know what they’ve all been doing now. That’ll take all day.” (The Mundine children have worked in politics, government organisations, the arts, publishing, armed forces, the church, and greatly contributed to the rights of Australia’s Indigenous people.)

After graduating from Grafton High School young Roy Mundine worked in a timber sawmill for a short time before the opportunity came along that would change his life forever.

“The lady from the employment office told me the army was recruiting and suggested I join so I took the exam and passed. Then I caught the North Coast Mail train to Sydney to sign up and went to Wagga Wagga for training and never looked back.”

During his long career with the army, Uncle Roy encountered life-threatening injuries, and performed

acts of heroism during active service that gained him the respect of those around him (read more about this in details in our excerpt from Army News), a respect that continues today and the impetuous behind his recent appointment.

“I got a phone call from Lt Gen David Morrison (Chief of Army) and he said what are you doing? I said ‘having a cuppa and reading the paper what are you doing?’ Then he said to me ‘why don’t you come down to Canberra. I want to talk to you’.

“Next thing I know there was some conference going on down there and then they were saying congratulations to me,” he said.

While Uncle Roy said it was a real honour to be appointed the inaugural Indigenous Elder of the Australian Army, he wasn’t going to let all the new attention faze him.

“I don’t mind doing all these things, sometimes I have to bite my tongue at some events but nothing’s a problem after being in the army where they were trying to shoot me and blow me up. I never thought I’d get this far and be able to do something like this.”

Uncle Roy said he did try



HONOUR: 'Zeke' Mundine OAM is surrounded by Generals, including CA LTGEN David Morrison AO, MAJGEN Stuart Smith AO DSC (son of Bernie Smith, KIA March 1969) and RSM-A WO Dave Ashley AM.

PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

to retire and “get a hobby and go to the RSL” but said they (the army) “said I’d be bored.”

Now’s there no chance of that with the Army’s Indigenous Elder in demand all over the place by people chasing his honourable presence.

“They make jokes that Justin Bieber must be around whenever I’m out doing things, lunch with the governor, opening this and that.”

But among some of the pomp and pageantry that goes with Uncle Roy’s new role, he said one of the most important aspects of

the job was visiting schools and justice centres.

“I’m there to encourage the kids to get an education. And if you can’t go to uni, get a trade. Without those people a country can’t go forward.

And it’s that kind of plain talking that earns Uncle Roy the respect he enjoys from all generations.

“Sometimes they (kids) complain because they have to make hard decisions. I just say to them some people fought in two wars and lived through a depression. You reckon you have hard decisions to make.”

Ralph honours his friend and hero

BRAUNSTONE resident and retired Sergeant Major of the Australian Army, Ralph Hindmarsh read about his friend and former Roy Mundine in his battalion’s internal newsletter Tiger Tales and thought Roy’s appointment as the inaugural Indigenous Elder of the Australian Army was newsworthy given his strong links to the Clarence.

Ralph holds the deepest respect for his friend and fellow Vietnam Veteran who possess “an exemplary service record.”

“He is thought of with the very highest of esteem with

our battalion (5th of the Royal Australian Regiment). He’s a real gentleman and well and truly respected.”

Ralph said Roy was one of those men who was always immaculately dressed and was an inspiration to not only the Aboriginal community but also young army officers.

“He is certainly proud of his race and very proud to be in the army.”

Ralph said Roy was also a real character.

“Whenever I see him he always says at the top of his lungs ‘Gudday ‘Rowdy’ how the bloody hell are you?’



RALPH Hindmarsh with the article about Uncle Roy in his battalion’s newsletter.

We’ve kept in touch over the years and he calls me out of the blue. Sometimes two or three times and

nothing for a while. I can imagine he’s only going to get busier now.”

Ralph said he was hoping to invite Roy up for a Vietnam Vets Day at some stage by he might need to take a number.

“He’s pretty popular fellow. He’s just returned from Turkey after being invited to attend the Lone Pine commemorations over there.

“It would be good to get him back to Clarence some day. Of all the people I’ve served with he’s up there on a pedestal along with the best.” – Lesley Apps

Australian Army Indigenous Elder

The following article and photographs originally published in Army News and reproduced in Tiger Tales. The Daily Examiner was kindly given permission from the Australian Department of Defence to re-publish it for this story.

The Army’s inaugural Indigenous Elder, Uncle Roy Mundine, was appointed by CA LtGen David Morrison at a ceremony in Canberra on April 18.

A Bundjalung man, Uncle Roy had a distinguished 36 year Army career, enlisting in 1958.

Before his retirement as WO1 in 1995, Uncle Roy was Mentioned in Despatches for his actions on April 25, 1969, during Operations Surfside where he was the leading section commander with 1 Pl, A Coy.

On approaching a suspected enemy area, the then Cpl Mundine deployed his section on the ground and move forward alone to reconnoitre the enemy position.

He sighted enemy bunkers and was about to signal further instructions when he detonated a mine that severed his lower right leg and caused severe wounds to his back and his other leg.

Member of his section started to move forward to his assistance into what was later shown to be an enemy minefield.

Although in considerable pain, Cpl Mundine ordered his section to stay out of the area and directed them to new firing positions after giving full details of the enemy bunker system.

For more than 40 minutes, he continued to give instructions to his section and refused to allow any members of the platoon to move near him until engineers had cleared a path through the minefield. This was typical of his outstanding leadership.

Uncle Roy was also awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1987 for his service as the Quartermaster of 49RQR.

Among his duties, Uncle Roy will represent serving and exserving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island personnel, advise Army’s senior leadership, and participate in events of Indigenous significance such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

Speaking at the ceremony, Lt Gen Morrison said the appointment signified Army’s com-

mitment to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“The appointment of the inaugural Army Indigenous Elder is an important milestone for Army and acknowledges the proud history of service that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have provided to the Army and our nation,” he said.

“Uncle Roy had a distinguished Army career and is a respected and active member of the Indigenous community. He is an influential voice on issue related to Indigenous veterans and young people.

“We are privileged that he has agreed to be the Army’s Elder.”

Uncle Roy said he was delighted to be the inaugural Elder and was looking forward to working with the Army on its Indigenous activities.

“I think it was a very good idea to appoint an Elder and it is a great honour to have been asked by LtGen Morrison,” Uncle Roy said.

“As the Army Elder, I hope to go out and talk to the younger people in Australia and enlighten them about the careers that are available to them in the military.

“Army is an awesome career which is great for young people as it gives them so many opportunities to do and learn new things.”

When asked how Army could encourage more Indigenous people to join, Uncle Roy said the key was getting out and meeting people.

“The big thing you have to be able to do is talk to people and let them see the Army as an attractive option,” he said.

“Getting out and talking to people about the Army and the experiences they can have will encourage young Indigenous people to start thinking about joining the services.”

● Uncle Roy attended his first official function in May at the launch of the Army Indigenous Song, ‘On Every Anzac Day’ at the Australian War Memorial.

