VICE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE

MINUTE

VCDF/OUT/2009/564

DH&AT (CP3-7-18)

For information:
ASPSS (CP3-7-061)

VCDF SUBMISSION TO DH&AT: CONSIDERATION OF THE AWARD OF A MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION TO THE 1 RAR BN GP (SOMALIA)

Reference:
A. DH&AT Minute DH&AT/OUT/2009/085 dated 22 Jul 09

1. Ref A advised the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal is conducting an inquiry into the recognition of Australia Defence Force Service in Somalia between 1992 and 1995. Enclosed is a submission from LTGEN Hurley which outlines supporting arguments for the award of a Meritorious Unit Citation to the 1 RAR Bn Gp.

2. The formal submission outlining Defence’s position will be distributed separately.

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25 Aug 09

Annexes:
A. Submission to the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal – Consideration of the Award of a Meritorious Unit Citation to the 1st Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) Battalion Group – LTGEN Hurley
SUBMISSION TO THE DEFENCE HONOURS AND AWARDS TRIBUNAL –
CONSIDERATION OF THE AWARD OF A MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION
TO THE 1ST BATTALION THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT (1 RAR)
BATTALION GROUP

I am writing to request that the Tribunal look favourably on the matter of the whether or
not to award a Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC) to 1 RAR Battalion Group for its service

I have not included a summary of the Battalion Group’s performance as I am sure that
that material is available to you. What is important is what actions and achievements
distinguished the Battalion Group’s performance to the point that special recognition is
warranted.

There can be no doubt that the Battalion Group was successful in fulfilling its mission.
The people of the Bay region were provided with the essentials of life. But the Group’s
efforts went further then this. The Group’s approach to fostering cooperation with the
large and varied NGO community and the close rapport it established with the clan and
tribal leadership enabled it to achieve progress across a broad spectrum of social, legal
and political aspects of Somali society. The success of the Group and the manner in
which it conducted its activities has made its performance a case study in the study of
peace operations for well over a decade.

It is one thing to herald one’s own achievements as a military force but one must be
judged by the reactions of others. On the conclusion of its tour the Group was presented
with a humanitarian award by the leadership of the NGOs operating in the region in
recognition of the manner in which the Group supported the achievement of humanitarian
objectives. This award marked a sharp turnaround from attitudes towards the Group on its
arrival that varied from disinterest to subdued hostility. The local community and its
leadership recognised the Group’s efforts by staging a farewell dinner and concert on the
eve of its departure. The highlight of the evening was the singing of a specially written
song that told of the friendliness and success of the Australian soldiers and the legacy
they would leave behind. Finally, several months after the Group had left Baidoa I
received a message from an Australian officer serving on UNISOM II. He spoke of the
opportunity he had had to visit Baidoa as the first Australian since the Group had left. He
reported that as he drove through the main street his uniform was recognised and that he
was swiftly surrounded by a crowd who in English and Somali were cheering and calling
that the ‘Australians were back!’ He described it as one of the most emotional moments
of his life.

There are many reasons why the Battalion Group’s efforts have not been recognised to
date and these must be respected. But if you seek to recognise excellence, then the
successful achievement of a mission in a manner that attracted international accolades
and which deeply touched the lives of the people it was sent to help should qualify. This
was a ground-breaking deployment for the ADF – out of region and quite different to
other peace keeping operations. A decision to award the MUC to the Battalion Group
would be a highly appropriate way in which to recognise the efforts of great ambassadors for the ADF and Australia.

D J HURLEY
Lieutenant General