

# New search and rescue service

Former Army, police, rural fire service and special forces personnel are joining a new voluntary Queensland search and rescue group, helping locate people and solve cold cases. According to Mackay-based president of the Qld Remote Area Tracking (QRAT) group, Emitt Brown, this is not only providing a much-needed professional service with expertise in tracking, but helping thwart depression for many of the volunteers.

"When they discharge out of the Army, they've got all these skills ... but their key qualifications are no longer utilised," he says. "It's getting them back out there and using those skills – doing something meaningful."

The group currently has two teams, one based in Mackay, and the other on the Sunshine Coast, and they are regularly called upon by Queensland Police and the Rural Fire Service to be first responders in operations from Cape York south to Ipswich. "We basically go wherever we're asked to go," Emitt says. "This month we were searching for a 14-year-old boy down on the Sunshine Coast and a cold case."

There are 30 "activation-ready" personnel in QRAT, and many more in training. "We have very high standards," Emitt says. "It can take up to six months of training to have them come on board." As well as proving they have advanced navigation, bushcraft and communication skills, activation-ready volunteers have to be able to be self-sufficient for up to 72 hours. "So they have to be able to carry a pack weighing 35–40kg." Emitt says one of the advantages of their teams is that they don't 'clock off' at the end of a day. "Some organisations get to night time and they pack up and leave. Us – we stay out there. We don't go home until the person is found or the search is called off."

As QRAT has highly skilled trackers, the teams are often called in quickly before a search site is 'contaminated' by people wandering over possible signs and signals. Although many of the searches unfortunately result in recovery of a body, rather than a living person, Emitt says at least that gives the families and friends some closure. But he describes the "awesome" feeling when they do find someone alive.

Emitt, who is a fire alarm technician, says he and several others formed the group two years ago after being influenced by former SAS soldier Rich Hungerford, who runs a Maleny-based survival school and does a lot of work supporting ex-services personnel. He says although they have received a couple of small grants, most funding for QRAT is coming out of their own pockets, and they would love to find a corporate sponsor. "A couple of us have put in about \$45,000 and whenever I can afford it, I buy more uniforms. We'll never get that money back, but we don't care because we're saving lives."

For more information or to donate, go to <https://qrat.org.au>.



*One of the founders of QRAT, Nathan Gelhaar, during a training exercise 50km west of Mackay, Qld.*



## Flying high

Many readers were moved by our story on Top End ringer Shadae Boylan (Roundup issue 125), who has for years battled with endometriosis, which had severely affected her career and ability to get a helicopter pilot's licence. We are pleased to announce that in late July Shadae managed to complete her commercial helicopter licence with a low-level rating and R44 endorsement. She has been doing further training at Pearl Coast Helicopters in Broome to become a mustering pilot.