

# Meredith Burgess

*Dream bigger, go harder*

Meredith was born in Lameroo on a sheep and wheat farm, completing her education at Murray Bridge. She was the only woman in her TAFE motor mechanics and metal fabrication pre-apprenticeship class and then joined the Army Apprentice School at Albury-Wodonga in the second class of female trainees where only 4 out of 13 graduated.

Postings included Adelaide, Warradale, and Townsville field units where she was often the only woman. When Meredith felt her expertise was not being appropriately used, she was encouraged to undertake officer training and was the first female apprentice to undertake training at Duntroon. Upon graduation, she was allocated to the Royal Australian Electrical & Mechanical Engineers at Bandiana, where they rebuilt leopard tanks and armoured personnel carriers, in charge of men she had worked with in her apprenticeship.

Meredith was posted to Kapooka as assistant quartermaster before promotion to the 6th Brigade Admin and Support Battalion, where she worked with prisoners at Rockhampton on joint US exercises.

In 1999, Meredith was among the first deployed to East Timor and arrived in Dili late at night where they could see fires. As no vehicle movement was allowed, they slept at the airfield only to wake next to a sewer and bodies, an horrific memory. Ration conditions included bucket showers every 3 days and 44-gallon drum toilets. Once portable toilets arrived troops in combat gear could hardly fit, and in the wet the sewage floated, these issues highlight the importance of getting logistics right. An amusing memory of this terrible time is that Meredith told her warrant officer that he could come to East Timor once she got a pizza in Dili. A few days later she was called to the airport for a hand-safe delivery that was a trunk of warm pizzas from Darwin. Troops were still on rations so her whole platoon hid away to eat the pizzas.

Meredith spent 5 months in East Timor before posting to Townsville as quartermaster and promotion to major. Her final task was redeployment for her old and new units simultaneously. Close tragedies on her return, meant this was a dark time in her life and with Meredith's posting as senior quartermaster adviser in Sydney, she showed signs of PTSD. While returning to East Timor for final redeployment, her relationship ended, and Meredith spiralled down. On her worst day, her 3-year-old niece rang to say she loved her. Meredith attributes that call to saving her life. She left the army under a medical discharge after 22.5 years. Despite the difficulties, Meredith feels the good outweighed the bad and would do it again in a heartbeat.

In 2006 Meredith moved to Rostrevor and found it a positive community. She has kept close links despite moving and appreciates the work council does. Meredith particularly likes the wider streets, the parks and natural resources. She is concerned with urban infill changing the character of Campbelltown and subsequent social issues.

Meredith sought an advocate at the Magill RSL and found members welcoming. 12-months later Meredith became Vice President and then President in 2013. At the RSL Meredith supports veterans' welfare with monthly veterans' lunches, community schnitzel days, and DJ. All community members are welcome.

As an experienced quartermaster, Meredith identified financial problems and initiated systems to rectify these. After negotiations the RSL moved the WWI memorial to The Gums and sold the plot to the Education Department turning around finances to ensure the RSL's future.

Meredith sees success changes over time; when she was sick it was getting through the day and now, a stable home, friends and family are high on her agenda. Acknowledging others and giving back to the community has always been important.

**“Follow your dreams, make sure they are big enough and then go hard.”**

Celebrating International Women's Day with the 'Women of Campbelltown' project – inspiring stories of local women, their achievements and contributions to the Community.

To see the full stories visit: [www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/iwd](http://www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/iwd)

Thank you to the women who participated and volunteer interviewers Di Booker and Katrina Spencer.

