

THE BLACK BERET

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Cav Capers, November 1969 We are indebted to Norman Grinyer of the 7th Div Cav Assn, for this information about this famous piece of head gear. Norm is now curator of the Military museum, at the Lancer Barracks, Parramatta. According to Routine Orders the Beret is worn one inch above the eyebrows and tilted towards the right ear, and the badge of the Regiment is worn above the left eyebrow. The Cavalry, or the "Tanker" inherit the tradition of The Light Horse insofar as they always parade on the right of the line. On July 28, 1917 the name "Tank Corps" came into being, and with the success of the Tanks in 1917 and 1918 the future of the Tanks in warfare became established. With the establishment of the Tank Corps came the establishment of the Black Beret. Though the origin of the Beret is clouded in legend of one kind or another, the most popular one is told of a French commander, who after a successful assault, taking his Beret from his head and presenting it to a Tank Commander in grateful appreciation. The writer will not vouch for this as accurate, but it is at least a colourful tale. Sufficient it is to state that the French 3rd Division presented the 9th Tank Battalion with the badge of the French 3rd Division. Which up till the disbandment of the 9th Battalion was worn on the sleeve. The Black Beret became the distinctive head-gear of a "Tanker" and was worn by no other branch of the services. With the formation in 1928 of the Australian Tank Corps the Black Beret migrated into Australia in 1930. Prior to this the headgear of the Australian Tank Corps was a slouch hat, which inside a Tank was rather awkward. The members of the Australian Tank Corps proudly wore their Berets alone until 1938 when another Light Tank Company was formed in Victoria. Soon after this, Armoured Car Regiments were formed, but the Black Beret had arrived and was there to stay. War was declared on September 3, 1939. Immediately a Cavalry Regiment was formed to serve with the 6th Division. The Black Beret of Australian heritage now went to war. Three Cavalry Regiments were formed, the 6th, 7th and 9th Div Cav Regiments, each to wear the Black Beret, the heritage from the Australian Tank Corps and the inheritor of the Royal Tank Corps. While an Armoured Division was raised they did not wear the coveted Beret, but had an adaption in the form of a brown one. After the war, an Armoured Car Regiment was sent to Japan under command of the BCOF (British Commonwealth Occupation Forces). This regiment wore the Black Beret, and on their return to Australia became the nucleus of the 1st Armoured Regiment stationed in Puckapunyal in Victoria. The Black Beret came back into being with the CMF volunteer Army, with the re-establishment of Light Horse Regiments as Tank Regiments, so we saw such Regiments as the Prince of Wales Light Horse, the 10th Light Horse wearing a Black Beret, with the unofficial addition of a small emu plume worn behind the badge. With the outbreak of the Korean war, some of our "Tankers" went to see how these Centurian Tanks were shaping up to the conditions and the opposition shown them in Korea. In Vietnam, because of the situation, the Cavalry arm was recreated and armed with M113 and M577 armoured personnel carriers, and they wear Black Berets, the 1st Armoured Regiment, referred to earlier, is serving at Squadron level in Vietnam, and they too are wearing the Black Beret. It is interesting to note, that with the British adoption of the Beret for Tank crews, that most other countries have adopted the same headgear. Some have varied colours, the Egyptians prefer green but most seem to prefer black. The Beret, strangely, is the most comfortable headgear in the Tank, it is rakish, unique and brands a man for what he is...a "Tanker", and proud of it. This symbol is as unique as the "Kangaroo Feather" was to the Light Horseman, was a sign to all of what he was, distinct and different from the "Infanteer" and the "Dropshorter". The Beret has now become more familiar because of its more general issue, but the general issue outside the Tank Regiments is navy blue, and woe betide the uninitiated "Tanker" who comes on parade wearing a dark blue Beret. With the Australian Forces the Black Beret has gone to war with three separate armies since 1939 and will always be a part of the Australian scene. It is as Australian now as the slouch hat, and ask any Digger who, when on leave in Cairo or Alex, or perhaps in Beirut, what his feelings were when he saw a Black Beret in the near vicinity. Distinctive, yes...worn with pride, certainly, and focussion point for all other "Tankers". A migrant adopted by this county and given all of the national pride bestowed upon a symbol which becomes part of the nation. The 2/6 Cavalry Commando Regiment of WW2 is distinguished by being the only unit to wear the original hat badge (Large) on the Beret. Marking them as the senior Regiment of the 2nd. A.I.F.