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# Royal United Services Institute of Australia

*Promoting national security awareness*

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## National President's Column: brothers and sisters in arms

I am not a great fan of social media, having seen it often create more harm than good, especially through cyber bullying. Its use often struggles to rise above the banal; and good manners seem in short supply. Yet it cannot be ignored. More and more businesses have to use it to gain a presence in the market place.



What I did not envisage is the powerful and positive use social media can be put to when it is married to a tried and true concept – in this case mirroring an infantry battalion's radio net using the social media platform of Facebook.

In early 2013, a number of site-managers on the Royal Australian Regiment Buddies Facebook site saw an unfilled need to respond to calls for emergency assistance from former members of the Royal Australian Regiment, Special Air Service Regiment and 2 Commando Regiment. There had been a spate of suicides within the veteran community; and cases of a person or his/her family in dire straits with problems such as potential suicide, depression, financial, welfare or other pressing needs.

This recognition spun off the Royal Australian Regiment Overwatch – a social media based programme with a mission to identify those at risk, act to prevent self-harm, and assist them along pathways to tackle their own crises. As the original focus of the programme changed to encompass the three Services, the name was changed to Overwatch Australia.

Overwatch Australia now has over 4000 volunteers across Australia – all former ADF members. It has the reach and capacity to provide 'boots on the ground– first response' support to most parts of Australia within two hours of confirming the location of a targeted client. It does not seek to duplicate the capabilities of any existing ex-service organisation, nor seek to offer personal or professional advice. Rather, it seeks to identify relevant resources; and to assist the member in need to contact the relevant professionals; while offering fraternal support from its own volunteer members. In fulfilling its mission, it has forged pathways with DVA, RSL Care, Legacy, VVCS, Soldier On, and Veterans-Off-The-Streets Australia.

The incidence of calls is increasing as Overwatch's 24 x 7 call support becomes better known within the Defence family. From May to December last, Overwatch responded to 83 calls.

At a time when the defence debate is overwhelmingly focused on platforms and networks, we need to be responsive to the clarion call of many of our distressed brothers and sisters in arms. Overwatch Australia is an excellent example of the military ethos of mates helping mates.

**Brent Espeland**