

Lest we forget, an Afghan War day

DENNIS SHANAHAN AND BRENDAN NICHOLSON
THE AUSTRALIAN
MARCH 01, 2014 12:00AM

AUSTRALIA is to have an Anzac Day-style national commemoration for the war in Afghanistan, to ensure the bitter experience of returning Vietnam veterans is not repeated for those who have served in Australia's longest war.

March 21 next year - a month before the centenary of the landing of the Anzacs at Gallipoli - will be the first national day of commemoration for the war in Afghanistan, in which 40 servicemen have lost their lives.

The government intends to stage the commemoration once, leaving open the possibility that it could become an annual event.

Tony Abbott will announce the new commemoration in Darwin at a welcome home for troops who served in Afghanistan or as part of Operation Slipper in the Middle East, which includes those who served on bases in the emirates or naval operations in the Persian Gulf.

State governments have agreed on a national day of commemoration but it will not be a public holiday like Anzac Day.

The Prime Minister wants to ensure there is "appropriate recognition" of the service personnel from Operation Slipper and that a lack of recognition for troops - as was the case for those returning from Vietnam - is not repeated while he is in office.

A month after he became Prime Minister last year, Mr Abbott went to Afghanistan with Bill Shorten for a special ceremony at the Australian base in Tarin Kowt in Oruzgan province to mark Australia's withdrawal.

Mr Abbott told the troops and Afghan leaders that "Australia's longest war is ending". "Not with victory, not with defeat, but with, we hope, an Afghanistan that is better for our presence here," he said.

Two weeks ago, Mr Abbott announced that Australia's 100th Victoria Cross was being awarded posthumously to Australian commando Corporal Cameron Baird, the serviceman most recently killed in Afghanistan, last June.

Over more than a decade, nearly 30,000 Australian men and women have served in and around the conflict in the valleys and mountains of Afghanistan. Apart from those who have died, more than 260 have been wounded. At the height of the war, there were 1550 Australian army, navy and RAAF personnel in Afghanistan.

Australia still has 400 personnel serving in Afghanistan who, defence chief David Hurley says, are still in considerable danger, especially from "insider" attacks by rogue Afghan soldiers.

General Hurley told a Senate estimates committee hearing this week that Australian instructors and mentors, based mainly in or near Kabul and Kandahar, were being guarded by Australian and British troops.

"Despite the ANSF's (Afghan National Security Forces') marked improvement and our change in posture we should not underestimate the threat," General Hurley told senators.

REF1:

Article: THE AUSTRALIAN:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/lest-we-forget-an-afghan-war-day/story-e6frg8yo-1226841342570>

2014-03-01-tfd-0001h