

A dream becomes a reality

One can draw many similarities between doggedly carving out runs on the way to scoring a century and working towards organising an overseas cricket tour; especially when the occasion is the first Australian Defence Force sporting tour of South Africa since 1919. Not since the First Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) team tour of South Africa, under the captaincy of Lance Corporal Herbie Collins, had an Australian Services side played cricket in this country. Whilst the AIF tour came about through a request from the South African Government at the end of World War One, when the team was playing charity matches around the United Kingdom prior to sailing home, the background to this tour was quite different.

The dream had been nurtured for many years by one man; however, it became a driving passion in January 1995 at the Sydney Cricket Ground during the 50th anniversary reunion of the legendary 1945 Australian Services cricket team. Inspired by the deeds of this side, the AIF team, and the more recent tours to New Zealand and England, the then President of the Australian Services Cricket Association (ASCA), Colonel Wal Hall, announced to those present that 1997 would be the year that a tour of South Africa would be undertaken. The rest is now history.

Contact was made with the South African National Defence Force Cricket Association during 1995. A working group was formed involving Service personnel from around the country to start organising the many aspects associated with taking a 20 man squad overseas for three weeks. At the National Carnival held at the Nowra Naval Air Station, NSW, in 1996, a train-on squad was selected and before anyone realised it, the team was assembling in Melbourne on Wednesday March 19, 1997.

Team members arrived at RAAF Base Williams (Laverton) to find their rooms arrayed with numerous sponsors' products and it was then the reality struck that the tour was actually happening. There was no time to rest on the laurels of selection as the next three days involved training sessions, a photo shoot outside the historic Victoria Barracks and a Farewell Dinner in the presence of the Minister for Defence and former first class cricketer, The Honourable I.M. McLachlan, in the Lindsay Hassett Room at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). The following Saturday the team was to depart for Johannesburg.



● *The Minister for Defence surrounded by team members at the Farewell Dinner.*

