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AUTHORITY
Chris Perrin
President

TINGIRA
AUSTRALIA
ASSOCIATION

ABN 72 952 167 649

E tsec@tingira.org.au
W tingira.org.au
M 0417 - 223 040

STONEHAVEN MEDAL

SAILOR JACK THURGAR

Soldier & Stalwart Senior



The 2025 Tingira Stonehaven Medal has been awarded to Byron Bay resident Major John 'Jack' Thurgar (Ret.) in recognition of a lifetime of outstanding service, leadership, and contribution extending well beyond the expectations of both military and community life.

The Tingira Stonehaven Medal is presented to a Tingira member who has demonstrated exceptional service either within their local community or through naval duties that go above and beyond the normal call of duty.

On being informed of the award, an understandably delighted Jack said:

“This is just unbelievable — I did not see this coming. I’m very proud of my Tingira shipmates for this and will certainly celebrate with the local veteran lads and my Tingira shipmates at the big Junior Recruit reunion.”

A Proud Tingira Tradition

The origins of the Stonehaven Award date back to 1926, when the Governor-General of Australia, Lord Stonehaven, presented the original Stonehaven Shield to the best divisional intake of 15-year-old naval trainees — the famous “Tingira Boys” — aboard the Royal Australian Navy’s first training ship, HMAS TINGIRA, at Rose Bay, Sydney.

This year marks the ninth occasion on which the Tingira Stonehaven Medal has been presented by the Tingira Australia Association, which again extends its sincere gratitude to the Cumberland RSL Sub-Branch, Sydney, for its continued support in donating and sponsoring this prestigious award.

From Tingira Boy to Distinguished Officer

Before becoming a distinguished officer of the Australian Army and a highly decorated Vietnam veteran, John Thurgar’s military journey began at just 15 years of age. In 1965, he stepped across the gangway at HMAS LEEUWIN to join the Royal Australian Navy Junior Recruit Training Scheme (JRTS) as a proud Tingira Boy.

Raised on the rural outskirts of Scone in north-west New South Wales, John was one of four children in a family deeply connected to service. His father, a Second World War veteran, was active in the local RSL, while his mother played prominent roles in both the RSL Auxiliary and the Country Women’s Association. Growing up in such a strong military and civic environment, service was a natural calling.

A chance conversation in Scone with retired Rear Admiral Doyle CBE — born at Invermein, Scone in 1888, a veteran of both World Wars — proved formative. That meeting left a lasting impression on the young John and helped inspire his decision to pursue a military career.

When the Navy’s Junior Recruit Scheme expanded in the early 1960s, recruiting teams travelled widely across the country. John quickly secured his place upon reaching the qualifying age and joined the ranks at HMAS Leeuwin in East Fremantle, WA.

Sport, Service, and a Turning Point

Like many country boys of his generation, John adapted quickly to military life — fit, capable, and academically strong, with skills in running, swimming, shooting, and horsemanship. His standout talent, however, was rugby union.

A powerful second-rower, John was selected early for HMAS LEEUWIN's rugby team and soon became a formidable presence in inter-service competitions. Regularly facing larger, older, and more experienced Army opponents, his performances marked him as a player of note.

He would go on to represent service teams for many years, including a memorable warm up match against the British Lions during their Australian tour — an extraordinary experience for a young serviceman.

It was through rugby that John's life took its first major turn. Conversations with Army players — many preparing for service with elite units bound for Vietnam — sparked a growing interest in the Australian Army.

Soon after discharging from the Navy, John transferred to the Army, beginning what would become a remarkable and demanding career defined by courage, leadership, and service under pressure.

A Lifetime of Leadership and Service

John Thurgar's military career, and his post-service contributions, reflect an extraordinary commitment to others. Over decades, he earned numerous awards, held significant appointments, led major projects, and made lasting contributions to veterans' organisations and the wider community.

His influence has been felt not only through rank and responsibility, but through mentorship, advocacy, and quiet, personal service.

Now retired on a small rural property near Byron Bay, New South Wales, Major Thurgar's legacy continues through the many lives he has touched.

The award of the 2025 Tingira Stonehaven Medal recognises a life lived in service — marked by courage, integrity, and a consistent commitment to contributing well above and beyond expectations.

Bravo Zulu — that young Sailor, Soldier, and stalwart Senior Citizen.

ENDS RELEASE



STONEHAVEN MEDAL PRESENTATION — Western Australian Minister for Veterans' Affairs Paul Papalia CSC MLA (left) and Tingira Patron Vice Admiral Russ Crane AO (Ret) present the 2025 Stonehaven Medal to Major Jack Thurger (Ret) during the Junior Recruit Reunion at Leeuwin Barracks, East Fremantle, Western Australia.

PROFILE



Major John Duncan "Jack" THURGAR SC MBE OAM RFD (Retired)

John's life is a remarkable testament to service, dedication, and community involvement. Here's a detailed analysis of his journey, broken down into key components:

EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

Birth and Education:

Born in Scone, NSW, in 1950, John's early education set the foundation for his future endeavours.

Naval Service:

Joining the Royal Australian Navy at age 15 in 1965, John began his military career as a Junior Recruit at HMAS LEEUWIN. His swift transition to the Army after just a year highlights his commitment to serving his country.

Army Service (1967-2015):

His long tenure in the Army, spanning nearly five decades, showcases a deep commitment to his nation. His roles in the Special Air Service Regiment and 2nd Commando Company indicate a career marked by elite training and significant responsibilities.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Medal of the Order of Australia:

Awarded in 1995, this honor reflects John's exemplary service and contributions to the military.

Reserve Force Decoration:

The four bars signify his long service, emphasising his dedication and the breadth of his experience.
Investigative Contributions

Unrecovered War Casualties:

As a foundation member, John played a crucial role in identifying MIA servicemen. This work not only honours those who served but also provides closure to their families.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Degree in Public Administration:

His education from the University of Canberra underscores his commitment to personal and professional growth, equipping him with skills beneficial in both military and civilian sectors.

Australian Federal Police (AFP)

Diverse Roles:

John's service in the AFP across various branches, including counter-terrorism and VIP protection, showcases his versatility and dedication to public safety.

International Service:

His tours with the UN in Cyprus, particularly the valorous act that earned him the Star of Courage, highlight his bravery and commitment during critical humanitarian missions.

Community Involvement

Volunteering:

John's extensive volunteer work, especially with the Ryder—Cheshire Foundation and the Cheshire Home in PNG, illustrates his compassion and dedication to improving the lives of others.

Awards from the Queen:

The MBE for services to the disabled and the community indicates the significant impact of his volunteer work.

LEADERSHIP ROLES

Australian Bravery Association:

As founding President, John's initiative to support bravery award recipients showcases his leadership and commitment to those who have served.

Vietnam Forces Welcome Home Parade:

His involvement in this important event reflects a dedication to recognising and honouring veterans, fostering community support, and ensuring their sacrifices are remembered.

Memberships and Associations

Life Memberships:

His life memberships in various organisations, including the RSL, SAS Association, and Commando Association, further emphasise his long-standing commitment to the veteran community.

Personal Life

Current Residence: Living in Byron Bay, NSW, John continues to be a part of the community, a member of the local RSL sub-Branch, influencing and inspiring those around him with his experiences.

CONCLUSION

John's narrative is one of unwavering service, both in military and civilian capacities.

His contributions are multifaceted, spanning military service, law enforcement, community service, and leadership in veteran affairs.

His life exemplifies the values of bravery, community, and dedication to serving others, making him a notable figure deserving of recognition and respect for the 2025 Tingira Stonehaven Medal.