

Organisation History

AAFCONS, trading as Frontline Defence Services, is proud to be able to trace its history back to 1915 and the creation of the **Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) Canteen Service**. The AIF Canteens were established in 1915 and were operational throughout Australia, The United Kingdom and Egypt. The service wound up in 1919, as per the regulations which required operations to cease at the end of hostilities. The surplus funds were provided to the AIF Canteen Trust which in turn distributed the money to war widows, dependants and seriously injured soldiers. From the AIF Canteen profits, a total of 49,826 grants were provided, £748,331 of which was provided to war widows and dependant and a further £407,819 to seriously injured soldiers¹.

After the war, the Army reverted to its pre-war arrangement; **Garrison Institutes** which worked on a cooperative store principle. When the RAAF was formed in 1920, they adopted a similar system.

With the outbreak of WWII, the **Australian Defence Canteen Service (ADCS)** was formed. It was so named because initially it was thought that all the Service canteens would amalgamate however, the RAAF and RAN retained their own canteens in Australia. So the **Australian Army Canteen Service (AACS)** became the deployed organisation.

In the 5 years to June 1945, sales from the AACS total £ 64,000,000. It later exceeded £70,000,000. This was in part due to the almost £ 1,200,000 of canteen orders, purchased by friends and family members, which were sent to the troops to be used at canteens established throughout Australia, the Middle East, the Asia – Pacific , Japan and Prisoner of War Camps.

At its peak, the AACS operated 700 odd stores, with 4800 staff and was reported to have served over 500,000 troops in the year between 1943 and 1944. The distribution figures for the AACS are truly amazing, with it being reported that in just one month 300,000 lbs of tobacco and 70,000,000 cigarettes were distributed!

Adding to the distribution was the 11 bottle factories that operated throughout the Northern Territory, Queensland, New Guinea and Morotai. In a month, bottled and bulk beer purchases average 775,000 gallons! Because of the sheer scale of operations, the AACS earned the nickname of the biggest retail business of the war².

As still happens today, the policy of the ADCS was to charge universal fixed 'city pricing' which allowed troops to be reassured that they would pay the same for a beer in Sydney, Melbourne or New Guinea and would not be disadvantaged by freight costs due to remote locality postings.

In a statement in 1942, The Minister for Defence, Mr. Forde, reminded troops that the benefits of purchasing from an AACS canteen was that the profits were returned back to the troops through amenities, clubs and welfare trusts. "The frequenting and support of these canteens should be highly encouraged for all troops³," he was quoted as saying in the Sydney Morning Herald, 1942.

At the end of the Second World War, surplus funds from the ADCS equaled £4,680,000, and were returned to service trust funds to benefits troops and family members. School scholarships were established for children of ex-servicemen which funded schooling all the way through to university.

The AACS also included canteens which were established under the **British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF)** throughout Japan from 1949 – 1951, the **AACS BCOF Detachment** in Korea from 1950 and finally the **AACS British Commonwealth Forces Korea (BCFK) Detachment** which served from 1951 – 1953.

Uniquely with the BCOF canteens, the excess funds, which totaled approximately £160,000ⁱⁱⁱ, were returned to the AMF Relief Fund, which unlike the Service Canteen Trust Fund, is administered solely by Army Officers. The AMF Relief fund still exists today under the name of Army Relief Trust Fund and this fund continues to provide support to troops and their families.

The **Interim Canteen Services** between 1949 and 1959 continued to provide funds to the AMF Relief fund.

In 1959, an integration of the Army and RAAF Canteen Services was established in response to a review by LTGEN Sir Leslie Morshead, under the title of the **Australian Service Canteen Organisation (ASCO)**.

The planning had involved many meetings of Services and Canteen representatives at all levels and the final plan was approved by the Services Board, the Services Minister and the Minister for Defence. The ASCO was established to provide a canteens service for servicemen and civilian members of the Defence group and their dependants, through bulk stores, snack bars, newsagency and bank agencies as well as operated canteens. These establishments served troops throughout Australia, through Papua New Guinea from 1959 – 1981 and throughout Vietnam from 1966 - 1968. Boasting 1400 staff and 122 Stores, one of the highlights of benefits provided from surplus funds of the ASCO was the granting of £82,000 worth of funds for the establishment Defence Health.

At the time of ASCO's disbandment on 31 December 1979), responsibility for the canteen services for Army and RAAF static bases was to be provided by the new **Army and Air Force Canteen Service (AAFCANS)** which officially came into being in 1981.

AAFCANS still operates subject to the 1959 regulations and is tasked with supporting the base community through various means one of which is by providing surplus funds back to the ADF through disbursements and sponsorship.

AAFCANS is a prescribed Commonwealth Statutory Authority, meaning that the organization is answerable to the Chief's of the Australian Army and Air Force and to the Minister for Defence Personnel. The Board of management is made up of 5 members, 3 civilian directors appointed by the Minister and 2 military members appointed by the Chief of the Army and the Chief of the Air Force. The current Managing Director of Frontline Defence Services is a Brigadier in the Army Reserve, Mr. Chris Hamilton.

In 1998, AAFCANS adopted the trading name of **Frontline Defence Services** or Frontline for short.

Frontline Defence Services continued with its objective of providing surplus funds to the Defence Force through established Welfare Trusts. In the period between 1996 and 2006, AAFCANS provided \$6.2 million dollars in disbursements to units and welfare trusts, which equated to more than 80 per cent of Frontline's profit.

In an effort to provide more consistent and better quality food offering across the country, Frontline Defence Services partnered in a profit share arrangement with Australian Commercial Catering (ACC) to operate food outlets in various locations. Frontline Defence Services retains control of these outlets, but ACC runs the daily operations.

While disbursements were put on hold in 2006 to allow for significant and essential upgrade to facilities and services, Frontline Defence Services still provided over \$157,000 in sponsorship between 2006 and 2009.

Frontline Defence Services also initiated the Vending Solutions scheme in 2006, which has seen over \$567,000 returned to units from the vending machines provided on bases throughout Australia.

As of June 2009, Frontline or its agents (ACC or License to Trade retailers) operated on 27 Army and Air Force bases and four joint ADF facilities

Further information and a visual history can be seen on our website at www.frontlineds.com.au

For further information contact

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ⁱ Brisbane Courier Mail, 3rd September 1933, accessed from National Library of Australia Newspaper Search (<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/>), Accessed 23rd July 2010

ⁱⁱ Sydney Morning Herald, 12th May 1942 , accessed from National Library of Australia Newspaper Search (<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/>), Accessed 23rd July 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Murphy JE (1955) *History of the Post War Army*, Retrieved from Defence Website (http://www.defence.gov.au/army/ahu/docs/History_of_the_Post_War_Army.pdf) , Accessed 23rd July 2010