



MILITARY VETERANS' GROUP

MARCH LUNCHEON GUEST SPEAKER

FRED SMITH



After a string of high-profile speakers your Committee was looking to get back to down-to-earth speakers like the late Tim Fischer AC, Vietnam Veteran and diplomat. We were looking for someone like a Bill Smith or a Norm Everage (Dame Edna's husband). Someone who had 'been around' and could relate easily to the Military Veterans' Group.

Finally, we found Fred Smith – really.

Fred Smith has spent the last 20 years all over the joint: working on stabilisation missions in Afghanistan and the South Pacific among other things. In 1999, he travelled to work on multinational Peace Monitoring operations in Bougainville, an island province of Papua New Guinea that was emerging from ten years of bitter civil war. Fred became something of a celebrity on Bougainville hosting his own pidgin language radio show. He moved to Washington DC in October 2004 and spent three years touring throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia finally returning to Australia in 2008.

In July 2009, Fred went to Uruzgan province, Afghanistan. His main job was to build relationships with tribal leaders to improve cooperation and understanding between the local community and the Coalition Forces, and to act as a bridge between these two vastly different cultures. This put him in a unique position to understand both. He served most of his 18 month tour of Uruzgan province on the Multinational Base in Tarin Kowt and at a Forward Operating Base in the Chora Valley. Fred put bands together from musically competent soldiers on base and they played regular concerts in Tarin Kowt where his songs were on everybody's iPod.

In 2016, Fred wrote up his experiences in Uruzgan into a remarkable memoir, *The Dust of Uruzgan*, which was published by Allen and Unwin. It was described by Channel 10 political editor Hugh Rimington "as convincing a picture as we will ever have of the tragedy, hope, oddness and courage of Australia's Uruzgan enterprise. To read it is to be sad for the many losses and grateful for his rare clarity before history and other distractions lead us forever away." The book has sold over 6000 copies and for a while there was even on sale in Australia Post!

There is much more to our Fred Smith than there is room to relate here. Among other notable achievements and awards Fred has featured on "Australian Story". Suffice to say – if you do not already know of our Fred Smith you will find our March luncheon unforgettable.

