

NAVY DIVERS

GREGOR SALMON

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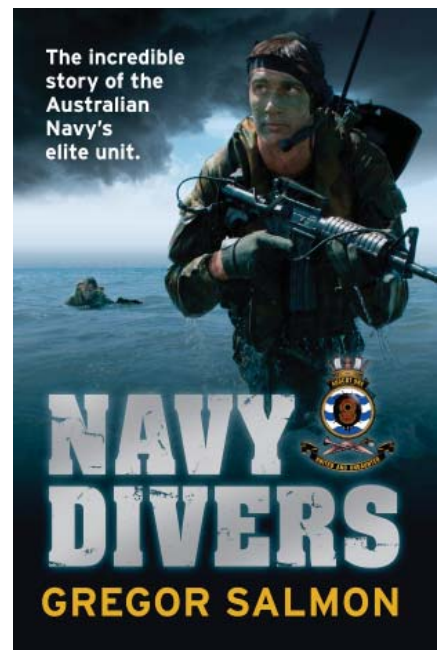
Rising out of the Second World War, the Australian clearance diver has become one of the most respected and versatile operators in the military world. Time and again they have excelled under the most dire pressure, yet we know very little of their heroic deeds. Until now.

Hollywood has familiarised us with the basics of bomb disposal. From *Goldfinger* to *The Hurt Locker*, we've come to know that neutralising a device designed to cause massive destruction is a job best left to a specialist, a particularly courageous, skilled, and perhaps mad, individual. Let *them* start cutting wires. What Hollywood hasn't enlightened us on, however, is bomb disposal as a navy diver sees it.

In cold, murky water, working by touch alone, they can defuse a mine powerful enough to sink a battleship. Under the burning Afghan sun, they can dismantle a Taliban roadside bomb. But bomb and mine disposal is only one of their roles. As covert swimmers they can infiltrate enemy waters. As boarding parties they are on the anti-piracy frontline. As counterterrorist special forces they are on call 24/7. They are simply one of the best diving units in the military world.

Their origin goes back to the Second World War, when Hitler's secret weapon – the magnetic mine – had Britain on her knees. Four extraordinary Aussies were among the brave naval volunteers who tackled Nazi mines on land and under water. The men who followed their path share the same brand of courage, having passed a selection test every bit as arduous as that set for the army's Special Air Service. Many aspire to join their ranks, but most fail. From war-ravaged Europe to the rivers of Vietnam and the deserts of Afghanistan, *Navy Divers* tracks the fascinating evolution of this heroic branch.

Gregor Salmon is a Sydney-based writer. He is the author of *Poppy*, an account of his first-hand investigation into Afghanistan's opium trade, and *Heart Soul Fire*, which he wrote with boxer Paul Briggs. Over the years he has written, edited and produced his way through a host of magazines, television shows and internet sites.



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