

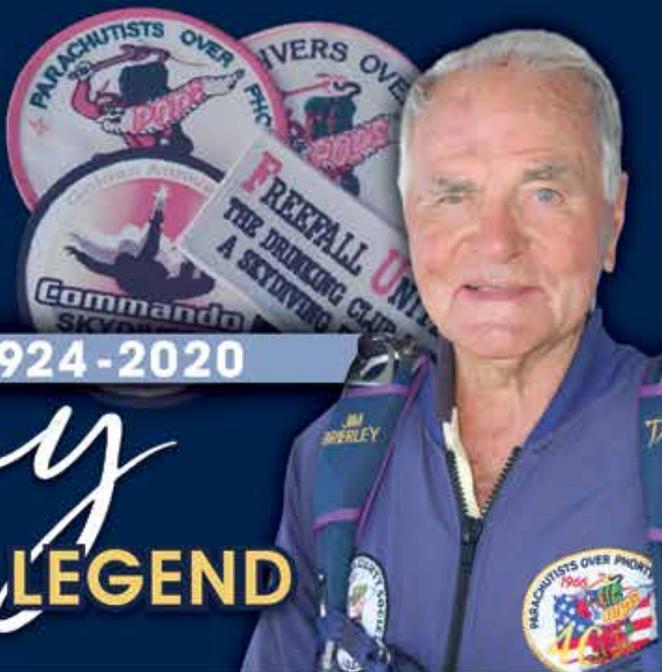
RIP JIM

Brierley

A LARGER THAN LIFE LEGEND

1924 - 2020

By Kelly Brennan



Many of Australia's best-known skydivers called Jim Brierley *'an inspiration'*. But there was another description that cropped up often as friends posted their memories. Jim was *'a gentleman'*.

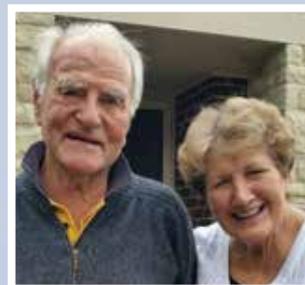
"You are amazing, Jim," wrote the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard in 2012, as Jim's 70 years in skydiving drew to a close. *"In military service and civilian roles you certainly have led a very interesting life."*

Jim was quite humble about his revered status. *"I have been interviewed many times by the media,"* he said. *"But only on the basis of my age and certainly not my skill as a skydiver."*

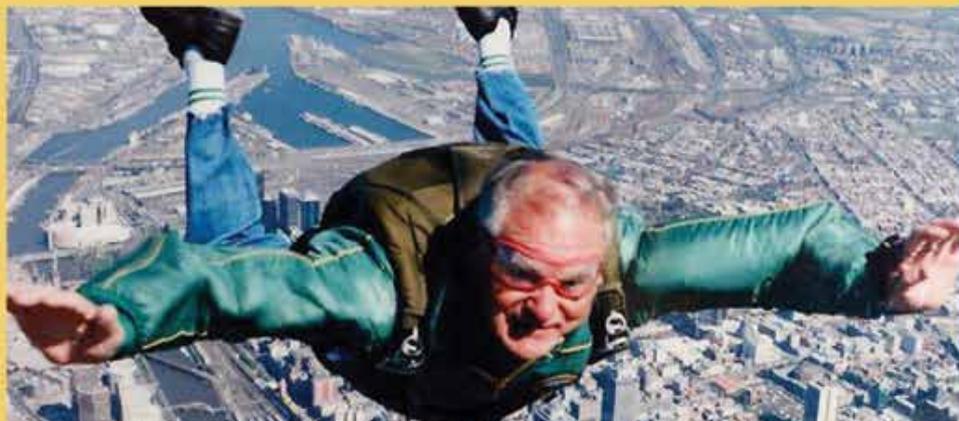
SAYING GOODBYE

Jim did everything with a quiet, calm style. So too with his passing. After a year in nursing care, a year without complaining, he died peacefully in late June with wife Barb sitting beside him. Jim was 95.

It's just as well Jim received a fitting send-off when he retired from jumping, because Covid-19 prevented the huge skydiver turnout that he truly deserved for a final salute. The memorial service for the much-loved husband, father and grandfather was small and private. There were just three skydivers among the 30 mourners who were celebrating a remarkable life in the military, broadcasting, business and jumping. There were fond reflections on Jim's hearty laugh and clever wit, a man who was dignified, brave and strong, who always had time to spare for others.



CLICK TO WATCH A TRIBUTE TO JIM





MEDIA MOMENTS

For a quiet person, 'Gentleman Jim' made a LOT of media appearances. After all, he had a compelling story and plenty of clever one-liners for every milestone.

He'd started as a British 'boy soldier' and then a paratrooper, doing some operational jumps in the second world war. He took up skydiving again as a retirement sport in his late 50s, while living in Melbourne.

Jim's 3,000th jump at age 83 was covered by all the TV networks, and they were back again for his retirement jump five years later, at the age of 88. All up, he did more than 3,600 jumps.

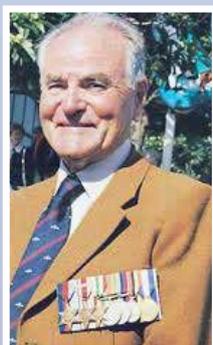
He was an entertaining advocate for skydiving, happy to list his many injuries, and making light of his (many) transgressions.

BADGES OF PRIDE

Jim's war medals symbolised his entry into skydiving, but he wore his skydiving badges with immense pride too.

He was a treasured member of Commando Skydivers, where the club named a competition after him. He was also part of Freefall United, a club which enjoyed weekends away with friends and plenty of red wine. He was a popular participant in events for POPS (Parachutists over Phorty Society).

Jim listed his jumping highlights as a perfect 8-Person Star formation at night, a high altitude jump from 25,500 feet, and a landing in the MCG. He leapt from planes, helicopters, gliders and balloons. And 80 friends joined him in Queensland for his 80th birthday jump at Toogoolawah.



In his mid-eighties, Jim drove from Melbourne to Darwin for a POPS gathering at Batchelor, then took the long road home, via north-western WA.

There were lowlights as well. Like a broken back, a scary low cutaway and a downwind landing at a demo. Plus there was the freezing cold day when he was part of a badly spotted load, and landed in the mangroves and water at Tooradin. He was turning a shade of pale blue, but he got himself out and drove himself home, totally drenched, for a warm bath and a very strong drink.

Former Top Pop, Ian 'Robbo' Robertson, once interviewed Jim for an ASM article, and asked what he'd do differently if he could have his time again. "Not a damn thing, actually," he replied.

RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

Commandos' members made t-shirts for Jim's retirement in 2012, with the words "I Jumped with Jim."

At that event, Dave Smith, who was APF President, summed up Jim's importance in our sport. "You've shown us all that the wonderful experience of skydiving, and the friendship of skydivers, is something we can all aspire to enjoy for decades," said Dave.

As we all suspected, this retirement celebration was NOT the end of Jim's life in the sky. He allegedly snuck in a few quiet jumps in the next few months. And he did a tandem for his 89th birthday. For his 90th, even though his health had declined, he marked that birthday at the drop zone as well. He was in his happy place there, surrounded by his jumping family and looking up into the sky, where he had played for so long.

Blue skies forever, Jim