



📷 Ready to go ... Liberty Engler takes part in a raft building activity during a Legacy/ADF training weekend ahead of Kokoda. Photo: Australian Defence Force

National

‘Dad never got to do it’: Liberty Engler’s brave Kokoda tribute to late father ‘Ralphy’

Justin Lees, News Corp Australia

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AS Liberty Engler begins her trek along the Kokoda Track, her mind will be on the extraordinary actions of Australian diggers 75 years ago — and her heart will be with one particular soldier, much closer to home.

Liberty’s father Darryl “Ralphy” Engler always dreamt of conquering Kokoda, with his wife and children; but the RAAF sergeant died before he could achieve that ambition.

Eight years on, 19-year-old student teacher Liberty will be thinking of him as she tackles the iconic jungle challenge, in a stirring project organised by Legacy and the Australian Defence Force.



 In training ... Liberty Engler (right) with fellow Legacy trekker Danielle Smith and army mentor, Sergeant Jonathan Cooper. Photo: Australian Defence Force

“It’s something I have always wanted to do,” she said yesterday. “Because my dad was in the ADF the history of the wars would be passed down to my brother and I.

“He wanted to walk the track but he and my mum were waiting for my brother and I to get a bit older so we could do it as well. Dad never got to do it.”

Liberty, of Yeronga in Brisbane, will be walking the 96km mountain pathway with ADF mentor Sergeant Jonathan Cooper, a mechanic in the Light Horse.

She is among 24 Junior Legatees — young people helped by the charity, most of whom have lost a father who was part of the armed forces — walking the trail during Legacy Week in August/September this year. They will be accompanied by 15 serving ADF veterans.



📷 Loving memories ... Liberty's father Darryl 'Ralph' Engler introduces then-Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson, to the RAAF C-130 detachment mascot, Ted the Blue Roo in 2006. Ted had been central in a unit charity fundraising campaign which has raised more than \$4000 for the Royal Children's Hospital at Randwick, NSW.

Liberty, Jonathan and fellow Legatee Danielle Smith of Cooma are training hard for what will be a serious physical challenge in this 75th anniversary year of the Kokoda Campaign — along with the wider war against Japan around Papua New Guinea, Australia's first real battle for survival.

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Liberty has been doing with hikes in places like Gold Creek Reservoir and around Mt Coot-tha.

"I'm looking forward to actually getting there," says Liberty. "It's so much better than just reading about it — to be over there and experience the terrain and weather conditions, however difficult it is going to be, knowing the soldiers had it much harder.

"The toughest part will be backing it up day after day — but you have to stay positive and push on."

The average trek takes about ten days.



📷 First salute ... Liberty Engler's brother Isaiah and mother Leah Bezuidenhout walked Kokoda after Darryl died. It had been his dream to go as a family.

Liberty's mother and brother Isaiah made the trek after Darryl died, as a tribute with family and friends; and there will be some special points along the track where the QUT student passes to reflect.

Dad-of-two Jonathan, of Northside, knows that supporting the legatees emotionally as well as physically is a key part of the role.

"I am just looking forward to seeing them complete it," the 35-year-old says. "To encourage them — and of course to complete it myself. I have always wanted to do it and of course there is no better way than this."

Major General Stuart Smith AO, DSC — Legacy Australia Ambassador and former Legacy ward — saluted the trekkers.

"This Challenge brings Legacy youth and the current generation of serving veterans together in a life-changing experience. Climbing the Track amid rain, mud and exhaustion will deepen their understanding of the courage, teamwork and initiative demonstrated by those who fought at Kokoda 75 years ago.



 A champion to his family and mates ... RAAF Sergeant Darryl 'Ralphy' Engler

“As someone who has benefited as a child from Legacy’s support, I know this Challenge will shape stronger, more resilient young leaders. As a current serving soldier and veteran, I also know this Challenge will strengthen the enduring relationship between Defence and the wonderful national institution that is Legacy Australia.”

Tony Ralph, Chairman, of Legacy Australia, called the trek “the highlight of the Legacy

calendar this year.”

“The 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Kokoda is a significant milestone in our national history, our military history and Legacy’s history.

“This is a special group of young Australians and members of our Legacy family. Personnel of the Australian Defence Force have recognised that these people are special, that they do need a hand, they do need a big brother and have chosen to join with them on this amazing trek.”

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