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# No soldier of *fortune*

by **Bernard Kellerman**

He's the Vietnam conscript who "forgot to get out". For Charlie Lynn, like generations of country boys before him, the army was his best chance to see the world. Keen to go, he ignored a history of bad childhood asthma, "hoping like hell not to get an attack". Running for fitness led him into the start of the fun running boom in the early '70s.

Charlie ran in a lot of road runs in the United States, spending two years there as an exchange officer doing parachute training, including HALO

(High Altitude Low Opening) jumps. "We used to jump from 20,000 feet and open up at two and a half (thousand feet). At night. So it was pretty scary."

"I wondered how far I could push my fear threshold. When we got to 20,000 feet at night with full equipment, I was at the edge, and I wasn't quite sure how much further I could go."

Then there were the times he could combine business and pleasure.

"At the Petersburg battlefield (near his home base at Fort Lee, Virginia) they had an annual 10k race. I ran the race, and had a really great run,



With some 21 Kokoda Trails behind him, Charlie has been described as the world's meanest tour guide.





On the trail with Angry Anderson

probably finishing in the first 50." Which was just as well. The military helicopter "wop-wop-wopping" near the finish line was waiting to whisk Charlie and his parachute team up to 10,000 feet for a display planned to start before the end of the race.

Only in America.

Graduating from fun runs to marathons, he found himself unable to finish below 2:48, or four minutes per kilometre. "I found the marathon was too stressful. I got down to 2:51, but I used to get a really bad stitch. I think it was just my body at that stress level telling me that was fast enough."

Charlie then decided to run longer and slower, doing a 100 kilometre run - his favourite event - in 8:26. In a 100 km race for the Bathurst Centenary in 1985, Charlie came second ahead of a large field.

His distance of 213 km in a 1985 24-hour race was a NSW state record for two years. "There's a lot of psychology in the 24-hour event, mentally keeping yourself going, and psyching out others. Like the high level (HALO) parachuting, I wondered how far I could push myself. In the 24-hour race, you're at the absolute edge of your endurance."

By 1986, Major Charlie Lynn had 21 years of "fond memories in the field force of the Army". He was posted to Canberra, and left his beloved army, rather than be "a uniformed public servant".

A year earlier Charlie had put together a plan for Anzac Day marathons, which made his next career move smooth and logical. "Cliff Young had really created (the Westfield Sydney to Melbourne run) and they were looking for somebody that could organise logistics, and was a runner."

Charlie finished up organising eight Westfield ultras. He became a professional organiser, especially for running-based events, such as the 20 Army runners who raised \$500,000 in three months for the Cancer Council in an 18,000 km non-stop relay around Australia.

He was also behind Sydney's first George Street Mile, from Sydney Town Hall to Circular Quay, and a 1992 re-enactment of the original 1956 torch run from Cairns to highlight Melbourne's bid for the 1996 Olympics.

It was against this background he discovered the power of







Kokoda brings out the unexpected in many.

the Kokoda Trail, often compared with Gallipoli as a military history icon.

He's now "done the Trail" 21 times, after first going there with a plan to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1942 Kokoda campaign with a race along the track. Unable to interest any sponsors, he started leading historical treks up there, before changing to the present focus on "Australian style" leadership programs.

The underlying philosophy of such treks is to make people take responsibility for their own actions. And he takes no prisoners. "Until people have an experience when they can bare their soul, they can always disguise who they really are. A lot of us go through life, never finding out who we really are because we're not even game to admit it to ourselves. Kokoda prizes the soul open."

"People have met up there and come back and got married, got divorced, resigned from their work because it wasn't what they really wanted to do in their heart. I've had people

come back and take on greater challenges because they know they're capable of greater things."

Media interest has been high and constant. Channel 9 followed the fraught progress of a group of celebrities for its A Current Affair Anzac Day 1997 broadcast, and in 1998 Channel 7's Witness audience watched as Charlie threatened and cajoled a group of teenagers from dysfunctional backgrounds over the same track where soldiers their age had died defending Australia from invasion.

The Sydney Morning Herald headlined him as "The World's Meanest Tour Guide". He says people get more satisfaction if they're made to achieve things by themselves. This combination of humanity with toughness has always served him well, and explains in part why he is drawn to politics.

Charlie says he became outspoken on law and order when one of his daughters was badly attacked at university. After unsuccessfully trying to change the world on his own, Charlie ended up in state politics, as this is where he saw the most could be done for his issues.

He chose the Liberal Party, finding its philosophy matched his views on long distance running.

"Our philosophy in the Liberal Party is based on empowering the individual. It's based on giving the individual the freedom and the opportunity to achieve their potential.

"A lot of people in the Sydney to Melbourne run were reformed drug addicts and alcoholics, people who had gone nowhere. This event gave them an opportunity to achieve their potential in that particular area. The Six Foot Track Marathon (a tough 46 k trail run) is a lot about that."

Charlie sees sport as a way of addressing many social problems. "It's about teamwork, interdependency, self-achievement." He believes long distance running allows people to reconnect with their inner selves, and their environment.

This belief in taking personal responsibility extends to his support for Drug Courts, offering drug addicts rehabilitation courses as alternatives to jail.

He's been a NSW Upper House member since 1995, saying runs around the Harbour get him through times of great stress, topped up with a couple of weekend 20k runs. For his adrenaline hit, he's taken up skydiving again.

The race organiser inside a politician's skin is disappointed that marathons haven't taken off in Australia, observing, "Nobody's ever got the formula right for a Sydney marathon."

He looks to the Honolulu marathon, with its emphasis on fun for everyone as a guide, rather than New York, Boston, London, Berlin where the big money is. "It costs millions - I think \$40 million some years ago - to put on the New York City Marathon. We just can't afford that sort of money."

Charlie favours a two-lap course with a generous cut-off time, incorporating all of Sydney's harbourside icons and famous precincts, and finding talented but unknown African runners to set the pace and add mystique. He thinks it could even be part of a day of sports, including a cycling criterion and a swimming race, all timed to finish at the same time and place.

"I'd do everything I could to help. People from all parties would support something like this. Running is not a political thing, it's a human thing."

And come the Sydney 2000 Olympics, where does this runner's runner hope to be? Minister for Sport, lapping it all up?

"No, mate. I think they've become too politicised. I'll probably be going over Kokoda."