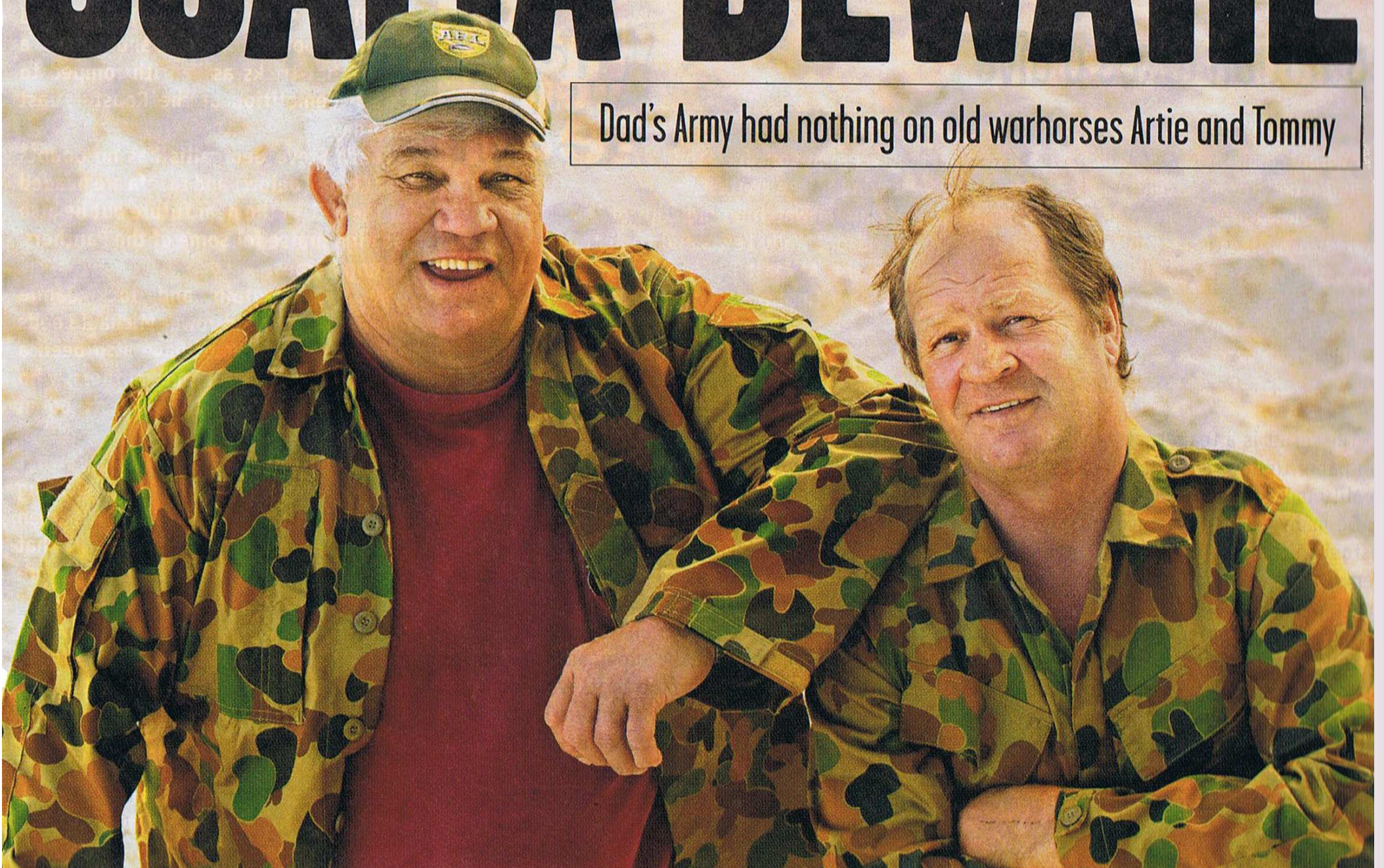


# OSAMA BEWARE

Dad's Army had nothing on old warhorses Artie and Tommy



BY JOEL GOULD

**L**OOK out Osama bin Laden because two weapons of mass destruction could be on their way to Afghanistan and Iraq to spread the gospel about the greatest game of all . . . if they can get themselves fit.

*RLW* Immortal Arthur Beetson and Blues legend Tommy Raudonikis hope to tour the war-torn countries and entertain Australian troops as part of a FACE (Forces Advisory Council on Entertainment) project.

Raudonikis has entertained civilians on speaking tours of Australia and New Zealand, New Guinea and Thailand but can't wait to storm the desert countries of the Middle East with Big Artie.

"Arthur and I are both very keen to go to the war zones," Raudonikis says.

"People don't give enough credit to our forces for what they do. When troops go away they get lonely and morale goes down a little bit so they need entertainers.

"The army will be looking after us so there will be no danger . . . except if a stray rocket hits you on the head. But I'll be lucky. The good thing about taking Arthur is that he's bigger than me and he'll take the shrapnel before I do."

Raudonikis' manager Justin Karcher has contacts at the highest level of the Australian

armed forces and has coordinated the trips. *RLW* can reveal that Karcher, Beetson and Raudonikis recently met with a lieutenant colonel in the Army to rubber-stamp the tour.

"The first trip is to the troops in the Solomon Islands and we are taking Miss Indy with us. Then we go to East Timor, then Iraq and the big one is Afghanistan at the end of the year," Karcher says.

"The Solomons will be a big test first-up. You've got to wear 20 kilos of flak jacket and body armour when you go away so I want to see if Tommy and Arthur can handle it. But they look after you like the prime minister and take you everywhere with the utmost care. They make sure you are not at risk but, being a war zone, of course you are.

"It will be a bit like the old Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe tours so we'll be over there geeing the boys up and it will be real hands-on.

"I think I might leave them there. They'd sort the war out a lot quicker."

Karcher says the tour will only go ahead for Beetson and Raudonikis if they can pass a physical test. Raudonikis says he's a shoo-in.

"I have no doubt that I'll get passed to go,"

the former Blues coach says. "I used to get gout and have high cholesterol and high blood pressure but I've got all of those under control now. I went to the specialist last week and had all of my tests done and I am A1.

"As everyone knows, a few years ago I had four bypasses but since then I've got everything under control and I have lost a lot of weight and I'm in pretty damn good condition. Arthur will be fine too because I'll carry him."

Beetson is also confident of making the trip . . . bar one concern. "If there is a weight criteria then I'm going to be in all sorts of trouble," he laughs.

"It is a little bit different but something I am looking forward to. And it will be a lot of fun going over with Tommy. It is for a good cause so I think it is going to be great."

Raudonikis knows how to relate to the armed forces.

"I was in the air force for six years. I was an air frame fitter," he says. "I joined as an apprentice in 1967 and got out in 1973. I was based at Richmond but I never went out of Australia with the air force."

The good thing about taking Arthur is that he's bigger than me and he'll take the shrapnel before I do — **TOMMY RAUDONIKIS**