

Epic road trip ended in parked car at Bondi Beach and a missing army major



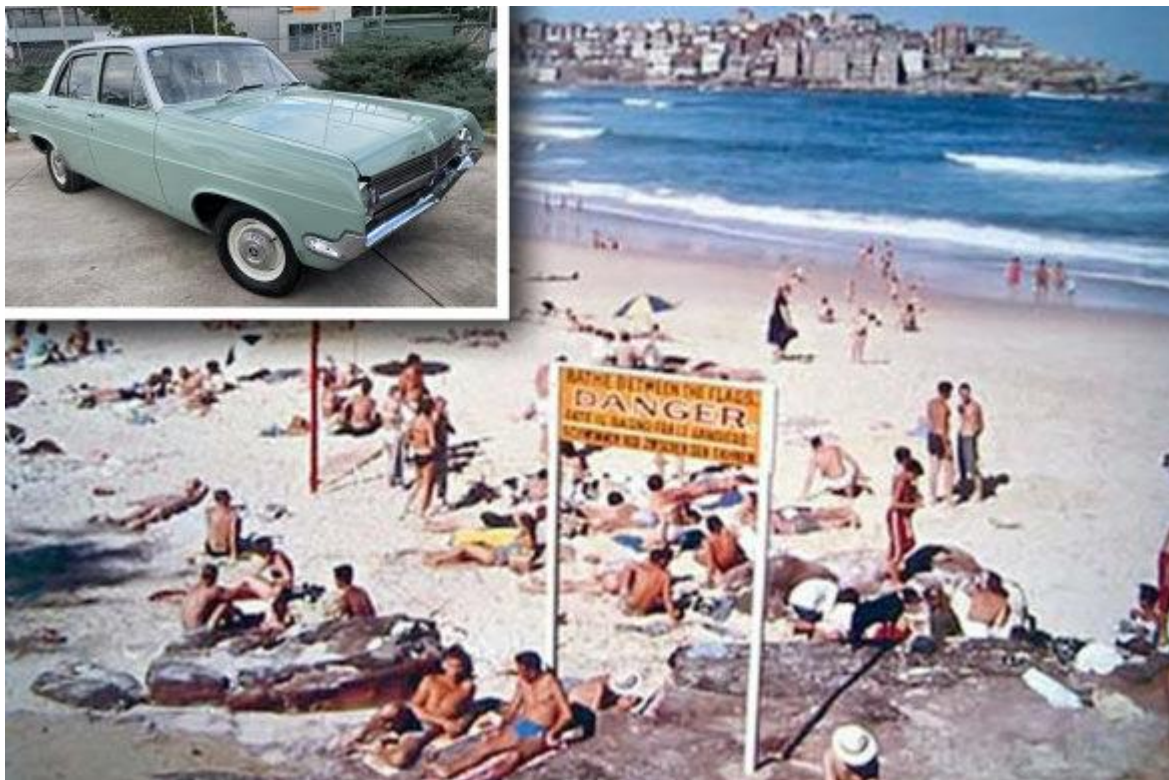
By [Catherine Naylor](#)

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As part of Missing Persons Week 2023, police are appealing for public assistance into the disappearance of a Major in the Australian Army, last seen in Sydney more than 55-years ago.

The year was almost over when Noel Ford packed his bags and jumped into his green-and-white 1965 Holden HD for an epic solo road trip along Australia's east coast in December 1967.

The Vietnam War was in full swing and Ford had seen the conflict firsthand. But now the father of three young children was back on home soil, with a 3100-kilometre journey ahead of him across almost the entire length of the country, to take up a new army posting in Townsville.



Bondi Beach in the 1960s and, inset, a green-and-white Holden similar to Ford's.

As he set off, Ford had already mapped out the route he would take from his home at Queenscliff, on the tip of Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula, to Townsville in Queensland.

He intended to see in the New Year in Sydney with a five-night stay at the Rushcutters Bay Travel Lodge, before making his way back to his parents and brother in Mount Morgan, a gold-mining town near Rockhampton where Ford had excelled at the local high school and set records in athletics that stood unbroken for years.

But Ford never reached his final destination. In January, police found his car still parked at Bondi Beach, with his clothes neatly folded inside. Fifty-five years later, his wallet and keys remain missing.

Now detectives are picking up the trail and trying to work out what happened to the 34-year-old, whose disappearance was reported to police, but never to the coroner.

Police know that Ford caught up with at least one fellow soldier while he was in Sydney, sharing a few beers on New Year's Eve with a fellow army major at the Rex Hotel at Potts Point before the two parted. But they don't know what happened next and are calling on other veterans who may have seen Ford on his road trip to come forward.

The experienced army officer did not make it to his planned stops at Tamworth, Brisbane or Mount Morgan, where his parents and brothers were eager to see him. When, three days later, he had still not arrived at his childhood home, his family reported him missing, prompting police in Sydney to find Ford's Holden parked at Bondi with his clothes inside.

"The theory is that Noel entered the surf at Bondi Beach and potentially drowned. In his case, there are no human remains," Detective Inspector Ritchie Sim, from NSW Police, said.

"It is possible he went for a swim. [But] he could have been walking on the rocks. He could have caught a taxi and gone and met with someone else.



Army major Noel Ford, who went missing after spending New Year's Eve in Sydney. *CREDIT: NSW POLICE*

“If you have relatives who were in the Bondi area at the time, it might be a long shot, but any little piece of information in any investigation may provide answers to the family.

“Someone could have been walking along Bondi Beach back on the second of January 1968, and found a wallet, and that wallet's been handed down to a son or a daughter and sat in the back of a cupboard for the last X number of years,” he said. “If you know anything, tell us.”

Jeff Ford said on Tuesday that he had idolised his older brother and his parents had been heartbroken when he failed to turn up at their home in January 1968.

“His disappearance with no answers has eaten away at me,” he said.



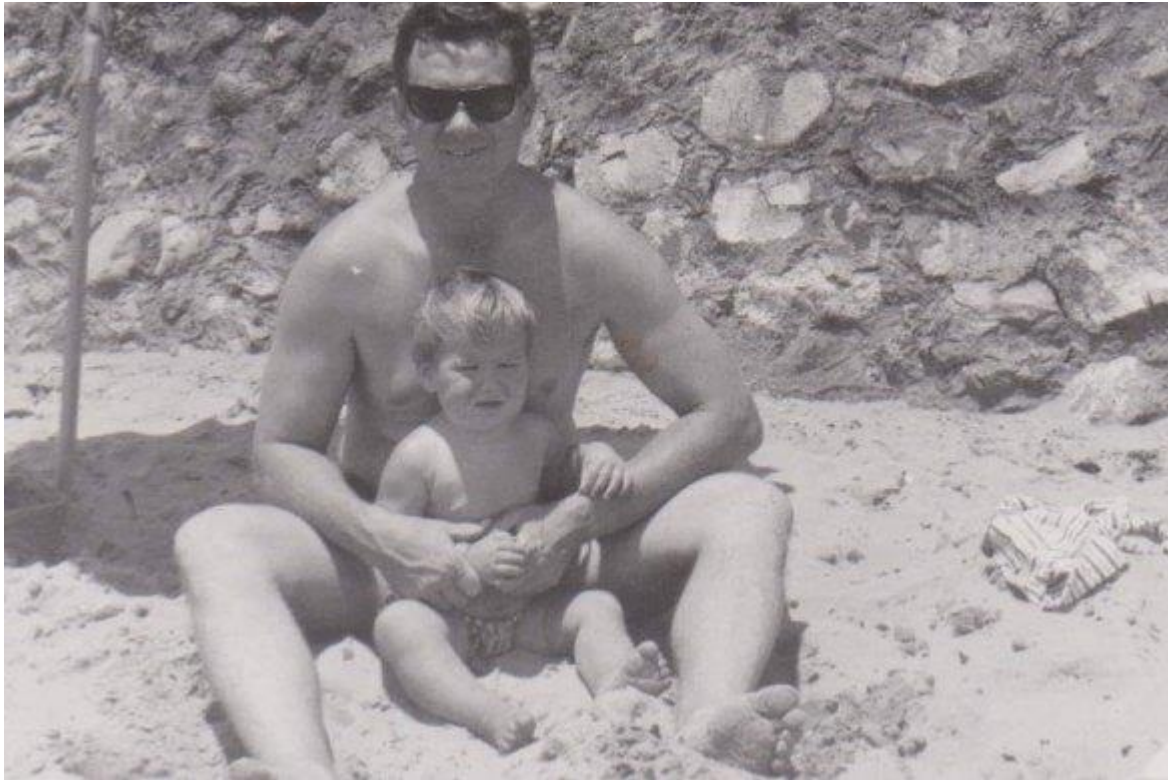
Jeff Ford and Duncan Ford at Tuesday's press conference. *CREDIT: NINE*

“One of the hardest things for my family to bear is [how] a brilliant young army officer, who had a beautiful young family and a magnificent future ahead of him, how he just vanished. That’s something that’s hard to comprehend, it’s something that’s hard to get over.”

After his older brother disappeared, soldiers had reached out to him to tell him how courageous Ford had been in Vietnam, and how much comfort he had provided junior soldiers when under fire.

“One chap said to me ... that if ever you wanted any inspiration to get through 12 months service in Vietnam, [you just had] to see my brother sitting there combing his hair against a tree when they were under attack. Mortar bombs were coming, and the bullets were whizzing everywhere, and Noel just kept his calm. He showed the young blokes there was nothing much really to worry about.”

Jeff Ford has given police a sample of his DNA in the hope it may identify any remains that are found as belonging to his brother. Noel Ford’s son Duncan, who was three when his father disappeared, has also provided a sample.



Noel Ford, pictured with his son, before he disappeared. *CREDIT: NSW POLICE*

“The circumstances of his disappearance has been a hole in the fabric of our family,” Duncan Ford said. “You have a family story [and] there’s this part that’s been missing.

“I’ve got a brother and sister and they were more aware of his disappearance at the time. I certainly think it has impacted on them quite significantly ... I get a sense [my mother] was a completely different person.

“We have always spoken [of him] in a passive tense – that he wasn’t past or wasn’t present. Only just recently, we’ve assumed he’s of an age that even if he was alive post-incident – whatever happened in Bondi – he’s probably passed on anyway.”