Kevin Rudd, above in the grounds of the Lodge and with wife Therese Rein below, is a micromanager and muster’ man who became known for the complaints of frustration from many who had to work with him.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The opposition did not bring down Kevin Rudd, nor the Labor Party’s factions. The answer lies within the man’s complex personality.

HELEN TRINCA
BRET CLEGG
TOM DUSEVIC
GEOFF ELLIOTT
RICHARD GLUYAS
ANNABEL HEPWORTH
CHRISTIAN KERR
GLENGDA KORPORAAL
GEORGE MEGALOGENIS
MICHAEL McKENNA
WHEN a light aircraft carrying 13 people, including nine Australians, went missing deep in the treacherous Owen Stanley Range on its way to the Kokoda Track last August, our High Commission in Papua New Guinea knew exactly what to do.

Staff, including a large military deployment, swung into action on the ground. An operations room was set up in Canberra to coordinate with the families.

In question time, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said everything was being done to locate the Twin Otter turbo-prop.

But no one had reckoned on Kevin Rudd. As the day wore on, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade began hearing that ships and planes were being redeployed around the region.

Without their knowledge, the prime minister had launched one of the nation’s biggest overseas search-and-rescue efforts.

HMAS Success, with a Sea King helicopter aboard, two Black Hawks, a Caribou short take-off and landing plane and a search and rescue aircraft from the Australian Maritime Authority had been called in, even though the advice from PNG was that there were unlikely to be survivors.

Around midnight, Rudd called senior DFAT and military brass to the Lodge. The Prime Minister was in shirtsleeves, standing over topographical maps of the Owen Stanley Range.

Rudd had famously walked the Kokoda Track a few years before. Now he was planning the routes for the rescuers. It was, says one source, an extraordinary example of his micromanagement.

And of Rudd’s belief that he was the smartest guy in the room.

On the evening of June 2 this year, the Labor Prime Minister was at it again. This time, he was holding court in his Parliament House suite to a handful of the country’s top miners over drinks. It was at the height of the furore over the new mining tax and Rudd had been advised to extend the hand of friendship to guests such as BHP Billiton chief Marius Kloppers, Minerals and Metals Group boss, Andrew Michelmore, Xstrata Coal’s Peter Freyberg.

The cream of business, arguably with the future of the nation’s economy in their hands, they were ripe for some charm from the PM. Instead Rudd began skirting about his international credentials.

“I am,” he announced to this startled group of senior executives of global business “the most globally recognised person here.”

Perhaps he meant it as a joke, but there had been too many cases of inappropriate remarks, too many indications that Rudd’s personality was getting in the way of his — and Labor’s — credibility and success. A few weeks later, he was gone but we will never understand exactly why till we better understand the temperament of the man we called Kevin07.

THIS week, as Kevin Rudd flew back to Brisbane to start the post-Lodge chapter of his life, everyone had a story to tell about our 26th prime minister.

Some were charming, some perplexing, some damning in their portrait of a man who, until a few days ago, wielded the kind of power which silences critics. Now, with Rudd’s departure, there are many people no longer concerned about holding back. The Kokoda incident, for example, was first told to one of our reporters at the time. Only now, however, has permission been given to publish it.

There are many more stories about a man who, despite his television and Twitter celebrity, remains something of a mystery.

For the past few years, he has dominated the national political conversation: swarmed by schoolgirls, the poster boy of social networking, the avuncular visitor to nursing homes, cobber-in-chief on the ground with our troops in Afghanistan, the compassionate leader apologising to indigenous Australians.

Millions of words have been written about him, yet this complex and contradictory Queenslander has confounded us at times, no more so than now, with his rapid departure.

How could a man so bright, so driven, so positioned for achievement and success come undone so badly and, for some, so suddenly?

THE British statesman, David Owen argues in his book, In Sickness and in Power, that many great political leaders have suffered from hubris, something Owen believes should be redefined as a medical condition.

In ancient Greece, he writes, a hubristic act was one in which a “powerful figure, puffed up with overweening pride and self-confidence, treated others with insolence and contempt”. It’s not difficult to see Rudd in these words, easy to charge him with narcissism, defined as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy or other glib labels of human behaviour.

Easy, because Rudd, despite his chirpy Kevin07 image, has always had a pretty bad press from those who have known him up close. In
David Marr’s Quarterly Essay on Rudd he writes that at the Australian National University in the late 1970s, “fellow students remember him as ‘painfully correct, a bit of a sociopath’”.

Years ago, even former Queensland premier Wayne Goss, who was a supporter of his former Cabinet Office chief said: “Kevin has worked hard at becoming normal. He’s come close but I don’t think he’ll ever quite get there.” Many who worked with him in Queensland openly loathe him.

Voters, seeing Rudd through the prism of television and social media, have known for a longtime that he has a temper (over his dinner on a RAAF flight); that he is a control freak (keeping public servants at their desk 24/7); that he was inaccessible (one cabinet minister could not get a meeting with him for two years); and that he is chaotic (his office was so disorganised, people held back the business of state until he went overseas so they could deal instead with Julia Gillard as acting PM). Bad boy Kevin.

Yet these details of his behaviour miss the personality flaws that may in the end better explain why Rudd lost support across the key constituencies of his party, the public service, the electorate and business.

For these, look to Rudd’s awkwardness in public situations: his robotic hand gestures, his clumsy friendliness, his shameless resort to slang.

Rudd is an emotional man; he showed that the day he was defeated for the Labor leadership by Gillard.

He is emotionally resilient. Biographers and profile writers cite his capacity to absorb disappointment throughout his life.

But there is evidence to suggest that while he is good at macro-empathy — such as the apology — he lacks the emotional intelligence, the interpersonal skills that help us connect with others. Rudd has IQ in spades, but he has had to work hard on his EQ, his emotional intelligence. Many would suggest that is still a work in progress.

Does it matter? Personality and warmth are no substitutes for good policy and astute politics, but there is strong evidence that personality is at the centre of the story of Rudd’s ousting from the Labor leadership, that there is indeed something in Tony Abbott’s implied comment that Rudd lost his job because he is not as “together” as Gillard.

For a while, the electorate brushed aside “Ruddisms” as endearing rather than eccentric. But in Canberra, the PM’s personality became an issue over his ability to manage staff, manage his time and negotiate with interest groups.

The former prime minister is not the first politician to work on his identity and polish his image, but his makeover has been deep and long-lasting.

The bookish boy who grew up in hard circumstances in Queensland, on the outer at times with his peers and missing a father who died when he was 11, has always worked to construct himself. Knitting Kevin became his life’s work. A colleague from the Queensland years told Marr that...
Rudd undone by the enemy within

Continued from Page 1

Rudd “taught himself to be a formidable bureaucrat” even though he lacked the feel for public policy and politics. A Canberra insider says: “[Rudd] sat down and asked people: ‘What do I have to do to become prime minister?’

“He approached the whole prime ministership and the getting of it like a graduate of the Department of Foreign Affairs planned it all, mud-mapped it, workshoped it.”

By the time he was fighting the 2007 election, he was Kevin07. Until now, that identity was seen as a clever marketing persona for the election. A professional construct. Almost three years on, the question is whether Kevin07 was part of an extended coping mechanism for a boy who found life hard to navigate?

ONE of the paradoxes of Rudd is that he could look so democratic on the net or on Rove, even when miming a sports nut at the cricket or football, yet his reputation in Canberra these past couple of years has been as a little Napoleon. Indeed, it is hard to escape the feeling that he saw the machinery of state being there to serve him, whether it was his security detail or the RAAF.

Many of those around him were prepared to sleep in their suits in an emergency but they began to wonder if the dramas and late nights and short notice were based on whim or necessity. A busy prime minister must fit in his physical exercise when he can. But did that really justify Rudd calling a security detail back to the Lodge at 2am?

Rudd’s alleged poor behaviour on VIP jets has been documented. There was a temper meltdown about the lack of a special meal and two-day old newspapers on a flight from Port Moresby in January last year. The PM apologised to an RAAF flight attendant for his behaviour. But sources say it was not an isolated incident.

On other occasions, Rudd’s whims and wishes could cause havoc with flight plans and staffing schedules. Last December, on a once in his physical exercise when he could manage to make a video for the build-up of paperwork but they did not even know the name of a young adviser. They were “delusional” about the impact they thought they were having on policy.

PUBLIC servants faced similar frustrations. They didn’t mind working hard and long; they had done that under John Howard. What was depressing was that they were so often asked to work to no end, pumping out material under pressure which would never be read. His office was renowned for the build-up of paperwork but so often Rudd was the problem; his short attention span meant that he could manage to make a video for the internet but could not manage his intray.

Staff used to schedule him to be out of the office as much as possible so that others could attack the paper mountain. Scott Prasser, former senior Queensland public servant, says that Rudd “doesn’t know what it is like to form a project team, get it together, get the resources, go out there and talk to interest groups like the rest of us have to do when you’re running a policy”. He says Rudd’s people were “delusional” about the impact they thought they were having on policy.

One senior bureaucrat said public servants would hold on to briefs that needed the PM’s signature until Rudd was overseas: “Rudd was so determined to handle everything himself that his office became a giant black hole, nothing ever seemed to emerge from it. We’d wait weeks for answers without getting them. It was completely different when Gillard was running the country. Despite her additional workload we would get very quick and well-considered answers.”

Over the term, many senior bureaucrats had been personally humiliated by Rudd but instead of blaming him, they often questioned their own competence. Others were simply kept at a distance. Rudd could be aloof to junior staff seconded to his office.

According to one senior government figure, he did not even know the name of a young adviser with whom he often dealt on policy matters. To many of these people, Marr’s Quarterly Essay was a circuit-breaker. It gave them permission to share their stories with others, and they did.

In its own way, the story told by Marr of an angry, controlling leader proved cathartic to Canberra’s administering class and in time could be seen as a shapeshifter when it came to national perceptions of the PM.

Rudd often put his colleagues and the party offside. Colleagues were dismayed with the treatment...
of Kim Beazley when he was appointed ambassador to the US last September. Rudd announced the appointment of Beazley on the same day he announced the appointment of Brendan Nelson as Australia’s next ambassador to the European Communities, as Australia’s representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, as Australia’s special representative to the World Health Organisation and as Australia’s ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg.

Labor insiders believe Rudd deliberately denied Beazley, the Labor leader he vanquished, a day in the spotlight as he realised one of his lifelong ambitions.

The prime minister was a loner, far from consultative and keen to centralise power in his office. He appeared to have no mates in politics.

One veteran who has known Rudd since his days in Foreign Affairs says: “There are only two sources he goes to for advice: God and the cat.” Cabinet was often out of the loop, on big issues and small. When Rudd announced the appointment of former National Party leader and deputy prime minister Tim Fischer as the ambassador to the Vatican, cabinet greeted the decision with stony silence. Only Foreign Minister Stephen Smith knew in advance about the appointment.

A well-placed Canberra insider said ministerial calls to the PM’s mobile phone were always diverted to staffers, generally a gofer. From the time he became opposition leader in 2006, virtually none of his senior colleagues had a direct line.

They got in touch by sending a text. The story has often been told how Communications Minister Stephen Conroy was forced to get on the same plane as Rudd to give him a detailed briefing on the national broadband network.

Now we learn that booking a flight with the PM to get face-time was almost standard operating procedure. One Rudd staffer joined the boss on a flight to the Middle East, en route to Afghanistan, to brief the PM. The staffer then flew straight back to Sydney.

Some of those who had worked with him in Queensland were not surprised.

They paint a picture of a man who, in his dealings with the press, for example, sometimes lacked the gravitas needed for the role. One person who came in for a tongue lashing remembers Rudd as fragile, shrill and brittle.

Another senior business person says: “Rudd was basically a smart person in policy terms, very high opinion of himself, tough when dealing with people, not good at dealing nicely with people.”

And lots of people thought when he became leader he had a glass jaw.

“He wouldn’t take kindly to criticism because he had this very strong self-image. I don’t think he’s actually changed. People that knew him thought that Kevin07 was the aberration rather than the reality. The reality was the PM who turned up and wanted to be a control freak, who thought he knew everything.”

Rudd’s skewed understanding of process meant he could shut out someone who was trying to get his ear about significant policy while being immensely accessible to others. The editor of the Mackay Daily Mercury, David Fisher, has run a critical line on the emissions trading scheme and the mining tax. As the only paper in the crucial marginal seat of Dawson, Rudd needed to win him over.

The two met several times when the Prime Minister visited the region and Fisher found Rudd “interested and wanting to know what was wanted in the region…. I liked that you could speak directly to him, not through a paper exchange or reports or bureaucrats, but actually to the PM”.

Early in his term, Rudd exploited this notion of the direct line, bypassing the bureaucracy when he set up the 20/20 ideas summit in Canberra in early 2008.

As hundreds of Australians great and small invaded Parliament House for a weekend talk fest, Rudd was relaxed: luvvies such as Cate Blanchett and Hugh Jackman couldn’t get enough of him back then.

Yet Rudd’s famous visit to Blanchett in hospital after the birth of her third child rather than attend the funeral of Labor stalwart John Button got him into trouble, revealing he could not read the situation or prioritise his responsibilities.

At the same time he showed enormous compassion to the family of The Australian’s columnist Matt Price after his death in 2007, dropping in to see how they were whenever he was in Perth, but without publicity.
IT'S November 2009 and Rudd has taken a quick detour to Afghanistan on his way to India. On the flight, Rudd was so determined to handle everything himself that his office became a giant black hole.

The PM delivered a bureaucratic tutorial on policy. It was as if he could not help himself as he did an "information dump" on the hundreds of people in the Star City ballroom.

They had to listen, right? And he was the smartest person in the room, right? The nation’s elite has come to be dazzled. They left disappointed at the discovery that Kevin07 was turning out to be an apparatchik with mediocre delivery.

It was a similar story on October 30, 2008, when the prime minister addressed the 25th anniversary dinner of the Business Council of Australia.

Labor had had a patchy history with the BCA, which had been established in the Hawke era as a moderate business voice designed to help the structural reforms of the 1980s.

By the time Labor had won back power from John Howard, its relationship with the BCA had been seriously poisoned by the dismissive approach taken by Mark Latham when leader.

Expectations were high that Rudd would heal the wounds that night in 2008. Instead he gave the country’s top company chief executives an Economics 101 lecture about the global financial crisis which was then unfolding.

The murmurs of disappointment mounted steadily as the PM droned on. Some chief executives were not so surprised.

As Opposition Leader in 2007, Rudd had courted the big end of town, and had been hosted at several boardroom lunches at investment banks such as UBS, Macquarie and Deutsche Bank. There was interest and curiosity on both sides, and Rudd was well received during what amounted to a roadshow across Sydney and Melbourne.

But the moment Labor was elected, business found itself on the outer, cold shouldered by a prime minister who had once pursued them. Says one senior executive: “I think it was almost like he was simply acting. You’d go down to the Lodge and he’d do the big introductions but you never really thought that it was really him. That it was the real Kevin. I remember hosting lunches for him with our major corporate clients before he became PM and he was far more engaging and importantly he seemed to listen. “As soon as he was elected it was like he shed that diplomatic persona and agenda. His arrogance in dealing with the financial and business community then became extreme.”

One big-four bank chairman says: “He was always quite dismissive in our discussions. “The language was peppered with glib, off-the-cuff remarks. There was no sense of engagement and deep consideration for our perspectives.”

Others say that while Rudd never yelled or became visibly angry in encounters, his displeasure was pretty obvious. Often business people found themselves being lectured by the PM who had a tendency to suck all the oxygen out of the room, ruining any real exchange of views. One chief executive goes as far as saying: “I think he suffered a complete lack of empathy. It was almost like he had a form of Aspergers or autism.”

On the night of Tuesday June 22, just 24 hours before Rudd conceded defeat and agreed to a leadership spill, the prime minister and several of his senior cabinet attended a dinner organised by business people with about 40 guests in one of the senate dining rooms in Parliament House. It was an extraordinary night. Rudd “blew his stack”, according to one guest, telling the audience that he had “gone out on a limb for you guys”. Another recalls: “The address was awful. It was kind of, you don’t love me any more, I did all these things for you, and I’m angry about it. It was typical Kevin. It was a reiteration of all the things he’d done. It was tinged with a tone of, you don’t appreciate what I’ve done.”

Australia’s most senior business people were appalled. Embarrassed for a prime minister under such obvious stress, they switched...
off. One of those present wondered if this was indeed his "last supper". Two days later, Rudd was gone.

Kevin Rudd, like many people, has many faces and it was calm Kevin who was able to so successfully navigate shows like Sunrise and Rove even courageously appearing alongside unpredictable satirist Sacha Baron Cohen.

He was far from obvious TV talent yet tapped into a cultural swing to drunks and nerds to great effect. But it was panicked Kevin who fronted the young and the restless on ABC TV's Q & A at a special youth forum in Old Parliament House in February. As he chewed out a young woman who had challenged him you could almost hear the wave of disappointment among the under-25s across the country. Not cool, dude.

It was the moment when the tide seemed to turn against Rudd and the prime minister became increasingly strained and tetchy in public. Some of those who saw him up close during his years on Sunrise, where he debated now opposition Treasurer spokesman Joe Hockey each week, saw similar poor behaviour.

The appearances turned him from a Queensland nonentity to a national figure able to bid for the public. Some of those who saw him up close during his years on Sunrise, where he debated now opposition Treasurer spokesman Joe Hockey each week, saw similar poor behaviour.

The irony of Rudd's term is not that he was a ditherer with a short attention span. Now that message was getting through to voters.

Like all prime ministers, Rudd needed to find the centre ground. He tried very hard but the same lack of intuition for personal exchanges tripped him up in policy and political terms. He railed against people-smugglers as the "absolute scum of the earth" while arguing he was "compassionate" toward refugees; but splitting the difference in his public rhetoric just confused the electorate. In the end the issues that undermined his authority did not take money off the kitchen table.

It was asylum-seekers, climate change and the taxation of mining profits which, in deadly political sequence from last October to this June that outfoxed him.

At first, the polls held as the government negotiated with the asylum-seekers rescued by the Oceanic Viking last October. Voters looked to Kevin to solve the problem. Kevin looked to the polls to tell him whether to move to the Right, or keep Labor's policy where it was, a little to the Left of where the former Howard government had it.

It didn't work. Not for the first time, Labor's private polling would tell Rudd that doing nothing was the worst option. On April 9, the government suspended processing of asylum-seeker claims from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. It was another non-decision.

At this point he was still relatively well-liked by the public, and had reassured his colleagues by his performance in the health debate with Abbott.

But the doubts in the public mind returned on April 27, when the Sydney Morning Herald revealed that Labor would shelve its plans for an emissions trading scheme. Rudd blithely confirmed the report, then ducked off to another media stunt. Labor's vote went into freefall.

Now voters were telling Labor pollsters they no longer knew what Rudd stood for. His colleagues had realised early on that he was a ditherer with a short attention span. Now that message was getting through to voters.

The public hyperbole over his climate change plan jarred with the concessions he had allowed. At times the prime minister seemed to be negotiating against himself, dreaming up concessions that hadn't been sought, to appease lobby groups that hadn't gone to war with the government.

The war would come much later, after the poll slide, when the proposal for a resource super profits tax pitted Rudd against the nation's global mining giants.

The RSPT was toxic for Rudd, not because voters were worried about another tax, but because of the prime minister's shrill tone.

The irony of Rudd's term is that the polls turned against him when he made decisions. The government applied means tests to bantam outs such as the baby bonus in its first budget and to the private health insurance rebate in its second budget but Labor remained outrageously popular. Voters soared when Rudd sat on his hands. By the time the fight broke out with the miners, the private Rudd, the ditherer and the bully, has meshed with the public.
WAS Kevin Rudd simply out of his depth? Leading the country is a tough job and not everyone is up to it. Even Paul Keating, a man of great talent who was a brilliant treasurer, seemed to curl up in a ball and retreat to Mahler when he found himself under pressure as prime minister, according to aide Don Watson’s memoirs.

Rudd was a formidable campaigner in 2007 yet the man who could learn Mandarin and who had an extraordinary memory for detail could not seem to master the procedural skills needed to keep his government on track. That, after all, is what lies at the core of last week’s coup. The perception in the electorate the government was no longer functioning smoothly encouraged his colleagues to move against him.

When Rudd became Opposition Leader in December 2006, it was with the promise of being a different sort of politician, a non-politician who was above the dirty deals and cynicism, indeed the very opposite of the professionals. Yet he leaves with the labels of amateur, the apprentice prime minister who in the end could not survive. His policy problems arose not from ideology but from chaotic process, a lack of intuition and an inflexibility which, in turn, were a reflection of Rudd’s personality.

Similarly, his demise was not caused by external circumstances: the only significant external shock, the global financial crisis, strengthened his incumbency. He was not brought down by a battle over ideology within the party, even if he tried to apply that spin at his press conference the night before he stepped down. Despite Howard congratulating Abbott for Rudd’s scalp, the leader was not destroyed by the opposition. Abbott cracked Rudd but it is hard to escape the feeling it was Rudd’s personality that prevented him withstanding the assault.

In February, as things were falling apart for the PM, David Koch told him on Sunrise “We get lots of viewers saying ‘we preferred the Sunrise Kevin Rudd than the prime minister Kevin Rudd’.” “I am who I am,” Rudd replied. “And people will like it, they will loathe it, that’s part of the political process. But I can always lift my game.” Too late, for now.
A pensive-seeming Kevin Rudd prepares to attend a press conference at the Lodge last April.