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SPEECH TO THE  
9TH NATIONAL VVAA CONGRESS

BY

SENATOR THE HON. A.T. GIETZELT  
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS

EMBARGO UNTIL DELIVERY  
9.30am SATURDAY 2 MAY 1986

LEGACY HOUSE  
293 SWANSTON ST, MELBOURNE VIC

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT OCCASION FOR ME, AS IT IS THE LAST TIME I WILL ADDRESS YOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE AS MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS. I WILL BE RETIRING FROM PARLIAMENT IN MID-1988 AFTER NEAR ENOUGH TO FIVE YEARS SERVICE AS MINISTER.

I WILL GREATLY MISS THE FRIENDSHIP AND COMRADESHIP WITH THE VIETNAM VETERANS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA.

I AM SURE THAT YOU WILL HAVE AN INTERESTING AND REWARDING CONGRESS THIS YEAR, PARTICULARLY AS AUSTRALIANS ARE AT LAST COMING TO A NEW, MORE MATURE UNDERSTANDING OF THE VIETNAM WAR.

INDICATIONS OF THIS NEW MATURITY INCLUDE THIS WEEK'S CONFERENCE AT MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY ON THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA AND VIETNAM, THE PROMINENT PARTICIPATION OF VIETNAM VETERANS IN THE ANZAC DAY PROCESSION AND OF COURSE YOUR PROPOSED WELCOME HOME MARCH IN OCTOBER.

THE HAWKE GOVERNMENT WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTS THIS MARCH, AND HOPES THAT IT WILL ALSO BE SUPPORTED BY THE COMMUNITY AND THE EX-SERVICE ORGANISATIONS, SO THAT IT CAN HAVE THE INTENDED EFFECT OF REDUCING THE ISOLATION AND ALIENATION FELT BY A NUMBER OF VIETNAM VETERANS.

I AM DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS AGREED TO A GRANT OF \$15,000 TO THE MARCH ORGANISERS TO HELP WITH PLANNING EXPENSES. I REGARD THIS AS THE LEAST WE CAN DO TO ENSURE THAT THE WELCOME HOME MARCH IS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS, AND BRINGS YOU THE COMMUNITY RECOGNITION YOU SO RICHLY DESERVE.

MANY PEOPLE STILL FIND IT INCONGRUOUS THAT IT WAS A LABOR GOVERNMENT THAT FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGED SOCIETY'S OBLIGATIONS

TO OUR VIETNAM VETERANS, THROUGH A SERIES OF LONG-OVERDUE INITIATIVES AND SPENDING COMMITMENTS. THEY POINT OUT THAT IT WAS THE LABOR PARTY WHICH OPPOSED THE VIETNAM WAR, AND INVOLVEMENT IN THAT WAR.

THE IRONY FOR ME IS NOT THAT LABOR SHOULD HAVE TAKEN UP THE CAUSE OF VIETNAM VETERANS. RATHER IT IS THAT THE CONSERVATIVES - THOSE WHO ENGINEERED AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THAT UNWINNABLE WAR - SHOULD HAVE SHOWN SO LITTLE COMPASSION FOR THE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO DID THEIR BIDDING.

IT WAS LEFT TO ME, AND THE LABOR GOVERNMENT OF WHICH I AM A MEMBER, TO REMEDY THE EFFECTS OF CONSERVATIVE INDIFFERENCE TO THE LEGACY OF THE WAR. I AM PROUD THAT, AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF STALLING BY THE PREVIOUS COALITION GOVERNMENT, THE HAWKE LABOR GOVERNMENT INITIATED THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE USE AND EFFECTS OF CHEMICAL AGENTS ON AUSTRALIAN PERSONNEL IN VIETNAM.

AGAIN, IT WAS I WHO WAS REQUIRED TO UNRAVEL THE TANGLE CAUSED BY THE US CLASS ACTION VERDICT. IT WAS I WHO SPONSORED THE VVAA-RSL TRUST, TO ENSURE THAT THE AVAILABLE FUNDS ARE PUT TO THE BEST POSSIBLE USE. THE QUEENSLAND HALFWAY HOUSE PILOT SCHEME, WHICH I FUNDED, IS A FINE EXAMPLE OF HOW THOSE FUNDS COULD BE USED EFFICIENTLY, CONSTRUCTIVELY AND CO-OPERATIVELY. I AM SURE IT WILL BECOME A MODEL FOR SIMILAR SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS ELSEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA.

AS YOU KNOW, THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S FINDINGS HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CONTROVERSY, AND HAVE NOT BROUGHT THE PEACE OF MIND YOUR MEMBERS SO EARNESTLY DESIRED.

I REPEAT TO YOU MY UNDERTAKING THAT I WILL DO ALL I CAN OVER THE NEXT YEAR TO ENSURE THAT YOUR MEMBERS' CONCERNS ARE PROPERLY ADDRESSED.

I CAN INFORM YOU THAT OVER THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS, SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS, AND YOUR EXECUTIVE HAS ALSO MADE FURTHER SUBMISSIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT.

MEANWHILE, INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH IS DEVELOPING NEW TECHNIQUES TO UNRAVEL THE STILL LITTLE UNDERSTOOD EFFECTS OF HERBICIDES AND OTHER CHEMICALS.

IN ORDER TO DRAW THESE MANY THREADS TOGETHER INTO A CONSIDERED GOVERNMENT RESPONSE, I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT I HAVE APPOINTED A SENIOR CONSULTANT, MR BOB HOGG, A FORMER ADVISER TO THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO WILL BE ASSISTING IN THE PREPARATION OF A SUBMISSION FOR ME TO TAKE TO CABINET.

FOLLOWING CABINET APPROVAL, THE GOVERNMENT CAN THEN ANNOUNCE ITS RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION REPORT.

I FEEL I SHOULD CAUTION YOU, AS I DID LAST YEAR, TO BE WARY OF THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE US REOPEN THE ENTIRE CASE AT GREAT COST, INCLUDING SUBSTANTIAL FEES TO LEGAL ADVISERS AND PERHAPS, IN THE END, A NO MORE SATISFACTORY OUTCOME FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW.

SURELY AVAILABLE FUNDS ARE BETTER DIRECTED AT PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THOSE AMONG YOU WHO ARE IN NEED, RATHER THAN FUNDING MORE LEGAL MANOEUVRES.

SINCE I SPOKE TO YOU LAST YEAR, MY DEPARTMENT HAS CONTINUED TO UPGRADE THE LEVEL OF CARE AND INCOME SUPPORT FOR ALL

VETERANS AND WAR WIDOWS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO SUFFER AS A RESULT OF WAR.

YOUR MEMBERS WILL BE WELL AWARE OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS FOR THE EXTENSION OF BENEFITS IN THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT, WHICH WAS PROCLAIMED IN MAY LAST YEAR. TWO VETERANS FROM THE VIETNAM LOGISTICAL SUPPORT ASSOCIATION WERE THE FIRST TO LODGE THEIR APPLICATIONS FOR DEFENCE SERVICE HOME LOANS UNDER THE NEW ACT. BOTH OF THEM ARE NOW FINISHING HOUSES WITH THE HELP OF THOSE LOANS.

SOME OF YOUR MEMBERS HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT THE RECENTLY INTRODUCED GUIDE TO THE ASSESSMENT OF RATES OF VETERANS' PENSIONS, OR GARP, HAS ALLEGEDLY BEEN USED TO PREVENT VIETNAM VETERANS GETTING A TPI PENSION.

THIS IS NOT THE CASE. GARP IS USED TO ASSESS THE DEGREE OF DISABILITY BETWEEN 0 AND 100%. IF A VETERAN RECEIVES OR IS ENTITLED TO RECEIVE A 100% GENERAL RATE DISABILITY PENSION, AND MEETS THE FURTHER CRITERIA RELATING TO LOSS OF EARNINGS AND PERMANENT INCAPACITY TO WORK, HE OR SHE WILL RECEIVE THE SPECIAL RATE OF PENSION. GARP HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS PROCESS OF DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY.

THE NEW GUIDE IS A LONG-OVERDUE ATTEMPT TO STANDARDISE DISABILITY ASSESSMENT, RATHER THAN LEAVE IT TO THE SUBJECTIVE JUDGEMENTS OF DIFFERENT ASSESSORS IN DIFFERENT STATES.

I CAN ASSURE YOU, AS I HAVE ALREADY ASSURED THE PARLIAMENT, THAT ALL ASPECTS OF THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT ARE BEING CLOSELY MONITORED TO ENSURE THAT THE INTENT OF THE LEGISLATION IS CARRIED OUT.

LATER THIS MONTH I WILL BE ANNOUNCING THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE OF EX-SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES WHO WILL REPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT ON THE IMPACT OF THE NEW ACT.

I CANNOT STRESS THE POINT TOO HEAVILY, THAT VIETNAM VETERANS' CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS ARE NOT BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST.

IN SPITE OF ALLEGATIONS THAT THE REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION WOULD HAMPER VETERANS CLAIMS FOR DISABILITY PENSIONS, THESE CLAIMS ARE SUCCEEDING AT ABOUT THE SAME RATE AS CLAIMS BY VETERANS FROM OTHER WARS.

ON ANOTHER SCORE, I NOTE WITH SATISFACTION THAT THE VIETNAM VETERANS COUNSELLING SERVICES AROUND AUSTRALIA ARE NOW FIVE YEARS OLD, AND HAVE HELPED OVER 5,000 VIETNAM VETERANS. THIS IS AN INITIATIVE OF WHICH WE CAN ALL BE ESPECIALLY PROUD.

AUSTRALIA'S REPATRIATION SYSTEM HAS CHANGED AND EVOLVED GREATLY OVER THE SIX DECADES SINCE ITS FOUNDATION. FOR THE MOST PART IT HAS EVOLVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CHANGING NATURE OF OUR SOCIETY, AND THE DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF ITS CITIZENS FOR THE BENEFITS, HEALTH AND WELFARE SERVICES THEY ARE ENTITLED TO EXPECT IN A MODERN, INDUSTRIALISED NATION. BUT I ALSO BELIEVE ITS EVOLUTION IS LINKED TO CHANGES IN THE CHARACTER OF THE WARS IN WHICH AUSTRALIANS HAVE FOUGHT.

OUR INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD WAR I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AN INTENSE OUTPOURING OF PATRIOTIC FERVOUR. THOUSANDS OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN LEFT FOR DISTANT LANDS EXHILARATED BY THE NOBLE CAUSE OF THE "WAR TO END ALL WARS". ALL ABLE-BODIED MEN WERE EXPECTED TO MAKE THEIR CONTRIBUTION, AND THOSE WHO WERE PERHAPS A LITTLE SLOW TO COME FORWARD WERE QUICKLY REMINDED - WITH A WHITE FEATHER, OR WORSE - OF THE COMMUNITY'S EXPECTATIONS.

ALL AUSTRALIANS NOW KNOW THAT THE WAR WAS ANYTHING BUT THE GRAND ADVENTURE IT WAS PORTRAYED AS AT THE TIME. THE REALITY OF DISEASE, DEPRIVATION AND PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINABLE CARNAGE IS FAMILIAR TO US ALL THROUGH BOOKS, FILMS, TELEVISION AND PERSONAL REMINISCENCES, BUT, THROUGH RUTHLESS CENSORSHIP, WAS KEPT FROM NEARLY EVERYONE BACK HOME. YET EVEN THE LITTLE NEWS THAT FILTERED BACK FROM THE FRONT THROUGH LETTERS, CAREFULLY WORDED PRESS REPORTS AND THE ACCOUNTS OF RETURNING SOLDIERS WAS SUFFICIENT TO SEE THE NARROW DEFEAT OF TWO CONSCRIPTION REFERENDUMS. IT IS NOT HARD TO GUESS WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE RESULT IF, AS HAPPENED WITH VIETNAM, THE WAR HAD BEEN BEAMED INSTANTLY INTO EVERY LIVING ROOM THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF TELEVISION.

TWENTY YEARS LATER, AUSTRALIANS WERE CALLED UPON TO JOIN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BRUTAL MILITARISM OF NAZI GERMANY, IMPERIAL JAPAN AND FASCIST ITALY WHICH THREATENED THE VERY EXISTENCE OF OUR CIVILISATION. MY GENERATION WENT TO WAR WITH THE COUNTRY UNITED BEHIND US. THERE WAS NO JINGOISM, AND VERY LITTLE OF THE PATRIOTIC FERVOUR THAT ACCOMPANIED OUR WORLD WAR I COUNTERPARTS. BUT EVERY AUSTRALIAN KNEW THE STAKES FOR WHICH WE WERE FIGHTING. ALL SHARED OUR GRIM DETERMINATION TO ENSURE THAT TOTALITARIANISM DID NOT TRIUMPH.

THE HORRORS OF WORLD WAR II WERE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE PREVIOUS WAR. THE YEARS OF GRIM AND BLOODY STALEMATE IN THE TRENCHES GAVE WAY TO THE UNSPEAKABLE CRUELTY OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS, THE TERRIBLE SUFFERING OF THE BURMA RAILWAY, THE AWESOME EXPERIENCE OF JUNGLE WARFARE AND THE DESERT AND CRETE BATTLES.

BUT THOSE LIKE ME WHO TOOK PART IN THAT STRUGGLE - INCLUDING MANY THOUSANDS WHO SUFFERED TERRIBLY FROM THE EXPERIENCE - RETURNED TO A GRATEFUL, GENEROUS AND WHOLLY SUPPORTIVE NATION. IT WAS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT THE CURTIN AND CHIFLEY

GOVERNMENTS INTRODUCED SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES TO THE REPATRIATION SYSTEM, PARTICULARLY THE IMPOSITION OF THE ONUS OF PROOF ON THE GOVERNMENT TO DISPROVE ELIGIBILITY FOR BENEFITS, THE GRANTING OF DOMESTIC ALLOWANCE AND FURTHER TREATMENT ENTITLEMENTS TO WAR WIDOWS, AND THE ENTITLEMENT OF EX-SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN TO HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND FREE TERTIARY EDUCATION.

YOUR EXPERIENCES HAVE OF COURSE BEEN RATHER DIFFERENT. THE YEARS OF CONTROVERSY, THE GRAPHIC TELEVISION IMAGES OF DEATH, DESTRUCTION AND DISSENT, HAVE MEANT THAT UNTIL NOW, THE TASK OF REPATRIATING AND REHABILITATING VIETNAM VETERANS HAS HAD TO BE CONDUCTED IN A LOW-KEY, BEHIND-THE-SCENES ENVIRONMENT. IT HAS TAKEN ALMOST A DECADE, AND THE ELECTION OF A LABOR GOVERNMENT UNDER BOB HAWKE, TO GET THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION FULLY UNDER WAY. IT HAS REQUIRED THE COMMITMENT OF A MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS WHO HAS BEEN HAPPY TO STAY IN THE JOB FOR OVER FOUR YEARS NOW, IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE "MUSICAL CHAIRS" MINISTRY IT BECAME UNDER THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT - FIVE CHANGES IN SEVEN YEARS.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THIS RECONCILIATION WOULD STILL BE YEARS AWAY BUT FOR THE UNTIRING EFFORTS OF A FEW FINE AND SELFLESS INDIVIDUALS. FOREMOST AMONG THEM WAS YOUR LATE PRESIDENT, PHILL THOMPSON, WHOSE SAD AND UNTIMELY DEATH IS A BLOW FROM WHICH WE WILL ALL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RECOVER. THERE ARE THOSE, MYSELF INCLUDED, WHO BELIEVE THAT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS PHILL GAVE HIS LIFE FOR THE CAUSE OF AUSTRALIA'S VIETNAM VETERANS.

THE NETWORK OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VIETNAM VETERANS, ESTABLISHED IN LARGE PART THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF THIS GOVERNMENT WORKING IN CONCERT WITH DEDICATED PEOPLE IN THE VIETNAM VETERAN COMMUNITY, SHOULD BE SEEN AS A TESTIMONY TO PHILL'S SPLENDID WORK. IT IS A LEGACY WE MUST ALL BE PREPARED TO FIGHT FOR.



I WOULD LIKE TO REMIND YOU THAT VIETNAM VETERANS ARE ALL STILL RELATIVELY YOUNG, AND OVER HALF OF THOSE WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM HAVE NOT HAD TO APPROACH MY DEPARTMENT FOR ASSISTANCE.

YOU THEREFORE HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN MAINTAINING A SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND THE BENEFITS IT PROVIDES. YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES ARE THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BE DEPENDING ON IT FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

DELEGATES, WHEN I REPRESENTED THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AT THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GALLIPOLI LANDING IN APRIL 1985 I WAS INVOLVED IN THE ACT OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND TURKEY. THE PRESIDENT OF TURKEY GENERAL EVRAN PUT IT CLEARLY AND SUCCINCTLY WHEN HE SAID AS I RECOLLECT IT "IT IS GOVERNMENTS WHO SEND MEN TO WAR (REFERRING TO THE ALLIED INVASION OF TURKEY 25 APRIL 1915). WE MUST ENSURE THAT GOVERNMENTS DO NOT DO IT AGAIN."

A SENTIMENT I HEARTILY ENDORSE.

NOW IN 1987 - MORE THAN 40 YEARS AFTER WORLD WAR II AND MORE THAN 20 YEARS SINCE OUR FIRST INVOLVMENT IN VIETNAM WE FIND OURSELVES AT PEACE BUT IMMersed IN A DIFFERENT KIND OF WAR.

NOW IT IS A WAR OF WORDS - A WAR OF WORDS THAT SEEKS TO CONDITION PUBLIC OPINION TO NEW CONCEPTS, NEW OBLIGATIONS, NEW ATTITUDES.

THAT WAR OF WORDS IS ABOUT THE SORT OF SOCIETY AUSTRALIA SHOULD BE.

THERE ARE ULTRA-CONSERVATIVES IN OUR COMMUNITY WHO CALL FOR CUTS IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING, AND THE ABOLITION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS OR ITS MERGER WITH THE

DEPARTMENTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, HEALTH, SOCIAL SECURITY AND ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS.

NO WONDER THE OPPOSITION LEADERS, WHEN THEY MET SIR WILLIAM KEYS LATE LAST YEAR, COULD GIVE NO ASSURANCES REGARDING THE PRESERVATION OF VETERANS' BENEFITS OR OF A SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UNDER A COALITION GOVERNMENT.

IN 1982 THE CURRENT TREASURER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, JOHN ELLIOTT, WAS STRONGLY ENDORSING THE RESOURCES BOOM WHICH SAW AUSTRALIAN COMPANIES BEGIN TO INCUR THEIR CURRENT MASSIVE OVERSEAS DEBTS. WITH THE FAILURE OF THAT BOOM, ELLIOTT AND HIS LIBERAL COLLEAGUES NOW HAVE THE HIDE TO BLAME GOVERNMENTS AND THE LIVING STANDARDS OF AVERAGE AUSTRALIANS FOR THE CONTINUING LEGACY OF THEIR STILLBORN SPECULATIVE BINGE.

ELLIOTT'S AND THE NEW RIGHT'S SOLUTION IS TO CUT LIVING STANDARDS AND GOVERNMENT SPENDING. ELLIOTT, FOR EXAMPLE, WANTS TO CUT \$600 MILLION FROM WELFARE, SPECIFICALLY AGE AND SERVICE PENSIONS AND FAMILY ALLOWANCES.

HE HAS ALSO CALLED FOR 20 PER CENT CUTS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE, THAT'S 40,000 JOBS, OR MORE THAN THE ENTIRE AUSTRALIAN ARMY.

APPLIED ACROSS THE BOARD, THAT WOULD MEAN A REDUCTION OF ABOUT 2,600 JOBS IN VETERANS' AFFAIRS, MORE THAN ONE THIRD OF THE ENTIRE STAFF OF ALL OUR REPATRIATION HOSPITALS.

ELLIOTT ALSO TALKS ABOUT REDUCING NOMINAL TAXES FOR COMPANIES AND THE RICH TO 30 PER CENT. I SUPPOSE THIS COULD BE SOMETHING OF A BREAKTHROUGH IF, BY SOME MIRACLE, THEY ACTUALLY PAID TAX AT THAT RATE. ELLIOTT'S COMPANIES HAVE IN RECENT YEARS PAID TAX AT ABOUT ONE SIXTH THAT RATE.

BETWEEN 1981 AND 1985 ELDERS-IXL EARNED \$334 MILLION IN PROFITS, BUT THEIR TAX FOR THAT PERIOD WAS JUST \$18 MILLION - A CORPORATE TAX RATE OF JUST OVER 5 PER CENT. EVEN IN THE MOST RECENT TAX YEAR, THAT RATE BARELY REACHED 10 PER CENT.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE REMEMBERED HERE TODAY IS THAT GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE INCLUDES SUCH OBLIGATIONS AS CARING FOR AUSTRALIA'S VETERANS - A COST WHICH IS SKYROCKETING. IT IS NOW ALMOST FOUR TIMES WHAT IT WAS A DECADE AGO.

SINCE THE NATION'S COMMITMENT IDEAL OF COMPENSATION FOR SERVICE WAS FIRST ENSHRINED IN 1920, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE SCRUPULOUSLY HONOURED THEIR OBLIGATIONS.

IN THE WAR YEARS 1939-45, AUSTRALIA SPENT \$50 BILLION DOLLARS IN TODAY'S TERMS TO WIN THE WAR. BUT SINCE 1945 IT HAS COST NEARLY \$80 BILLION FOR THE REPATRIATION AND REHABILITATION OF AUSTRALIA'S FIGHTING MEN AND WOMEN AND THEIR DEPENDANTS.

YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES WILL BE THE FUTURE BENEFICIARIES OF AUSTRALIA'S GENEROUS REPATRIATION SYSTEM. I HOPE YOU WILL FIGHT FOR ITS PRESERVATION AGAINST THE HAYS, THE ELLIOTTS AND THE BJELKE-PETERSENS OF THIS WORLD WHO NEVER EXEMPT VETERANS AFFAIRS FROM THEIR DEMANDS FOR STRINGENT CUTS IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE.

THEY WOULD HAVE YOU TIGHTEN YOUR BELTS WHILE THEY MERELY TIGHTEN THE GOLD SEATBELT BUCKLES IN THEIR PRIVATE JETS.

MY MESSAGE TO VIETNAM VETERANS - INDEED, TO ALL VETERANS - IS THAT THE FIGHT IS NO LONGER FOR ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FOR YOUR MEMBERS, BUT FOR THE PRESERVATION OF WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE.

THE CALL GOES OUT TO YOU YET AGAIN TO FIGHT TO PROTECT

THE AUSTRALIAN WAY OF LIFE - THE CARING SOCIETY WE HAVE  
WORKED SO HARD TO DEVELOP.



# VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

## NATIONAL OFFICE

CNR. BLAXCELL & WILLIAM STREETS, GRANVILLE 2142 (P.O. BOX 369, PARRAMATTA 2150) PHONE: (02) 682 1788

National Patron:  
Mr. J.H. Greenwood OBE

April 29, 1987

Mr. Alan Bone,  
Secretary,  
Geelong & District Branch of VVA,  
2 Kiewa Street,  
CORIO. VIC. 3214

Dear Alan,

Enclosed is the September 1983 edition of our Association's journal DEBRIEF. It includes an article entitled 'A LETTER FROM LAUNCESTON', the contents of which has been affirmed at National Congress as Association policy.

Whilst the article deals more with political view points than with criminal behaviour, it makes the important point that a veteran is a veteran no matter what. That is, whether he be a derilict, a prisoner, a communist, a fascist, a christian or a budist; if he is a veteran, we help him.

To take any other view is to begin a debate on who to exclude from our compassion, and that is an argument which could only ever be resolved at the expense of the unity of our Association.

I believe we must stand ready to help any veteran and avoid the temptation to stand in judgement.

Yours faithfully,

*Tim McCombe*

TIM McCOMBE  
SECRETARY/TREASURER

22nd September, 1983

Mr Ray Minns,  
President,  
Launceston Sub-Branch,  
Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia,  
P.O. Box 635G,  
LAUNCESTON. TASMANIA. 7250

Dear Ray,

Thank you for your letter of the 2nd September, 1983, which raises issues of fundamental importance to our Association. Because of this, I have decided, even at the risk of my reply not arriving much before your next meeting, to compose a carefully considered and comprehensive answer to your questions.

Our Association was formed to help alleviate the dreadful despair and hopelessness afflicting so many veterans and their families; to enlighten the public to the dreadful plight of these ex-Servicemen; and to bring pressure on the bureaucracy and governments to take care of those suffering and to reveal details of the possible cause of some of that suffering — the use of toxic chemicals in Vietnam.

When receiving requests for help and advice from confused, sick and dying veterans we did not ask their views on the morality of Australia's participation in the Vietnam war nor refuse help to those with a certain opinion. Neither did we ask them to declare their political beliefs and shun those whose beliefs differed from ours. However, we know that amongst those helped there were those who considered our participation in the war to have been morally untenable as well as those who saw it as a legitimate and necessary crusade. We know, too, that amongst those helped and their families are supporters of the whole spectrum of political colours.

We have never considered the suffering veteran's views on the war or his political leanings to be of the slightest relevance; we have been concerned only that he is a veteran of the Vietnam war and is possibly suffering because of his war service.

To allow us to more effectively help veterans in trouble we have actively recruited members for our Association. As our numbers have increased, a network of informed veterans has grown across Australia so that more and more desperate veterans have been identified and directed to agencies which can help. This network was described and discussed in the May issue of DEBRIEF. We needed increased numbers, too, so that our requests for information and understanding from the bureaucracy and governments could not be ignored so easily; so that, in other words, we could become a more powerful lobby group.

When receiving applications for membership we have never considered refusing this category of veteran or that category of veteran. Bank managers, Long Bay prisoners, Generals and alcoholic inhabitants of Skid Row, some condemning Australia's participation in the Vietnam war, others applauding it, some from the far left of

politics, some from the far right have all been accepted as members. We have always held the view that a veteran remains a veteran no matter how his view of the world may differ from ours and that the sole criterion for membership of the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia should be that an applicant be a veteran (or his close kin). In view of the purpose for which our Association was formed, any other criteria for membership, particularly any concerning political beliefs, would make no sense. Also, unity and consensus amongst as large a membership as possible is vital if our lobbying to improve sick veterans' lot is to succeed. Nothing would more quickly destroy the remarkable unity and consensus which now exists nor be more certain to reduce our membership, than to raise the spectre of political partisanship.

To effectively inform the public and to successfully pressure governments to reveal information of our exposure to chemicals and to generally address the severe problems facing many veterans and their families, we have needed and sought outside support. We have found that needed support in a diversity of groups and individuals. Our criteria for accepting support has been simply that those offering support do so with some understanding and genuine sympathy for the plight of veterans, their wives and children, and that they will receive nothing in return except our gratitude. We make these stipulations because we realise that there may have been some potential supporters lacking genuine sympathy for suffering veterans and simply wishing to use our cause for their own purposes.

Recently, strong support has come for our demands on the chemical issue from nearly all sections of the ex-Service community (the R.S.L. National Executive being the exception) (see the September, 1982 edition of DEBRIEF). Many of these ex-Service organisations would have been in favour of Australia's participation in the Vietnam war and some of them are seen as having conservative, if not ultra-conservative political views. We are grateful to those organisations for their support but we do not, in accepting their support, endorse their views on the war or their political outlook, and they do not expect us to.

Four and a half years ago, during the embryonic stage of our Association's development, The Hon. Clyde Holding, now Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, a vocal opponent of Australia's participation in the Vietnam war, and prominent member of the centre faction of the Labor Party, attended a meeting of distressed and angry veterans and their families one cold Melbourne night. He was so shocked and moved by what he saw and heard, that he took our cause into the chambers of the Australian Parliament. At the time there was no political capital to be gained by supporting us, so we accepted his advocacy as being borne of genuine sympathy. Over the years we came to realise that our initial assessment was correct. Clyde Holding's hard work and tenacity on our behalf was the result of the compassion of a fine human being. We are grateful to Clyde Holding for his priceless

support but we do not endorse his view of the Vietnam war or his political views. Nor, because of his support for us do we support the political party to which he belongs (see the article Political Actions in the January, 1983 edition of DEBRIEF). He does not expect us to.

Senator, The Hon. Tony Messner was the last Minister for Veterans' Affairs in the previous government. He had probably been in favour of Australia's participation in the war and is a member of the Liberal Party. It was Senator Messner's lot to have to administer that government's policy of reluctance and obstruction on the issue of our exposure to toxic chemicals, so it was inevitable that our Association would often be in conflict with him. On other matters affecting our veterans however, the Senator showed sympathy and understanding. Indeed, it was he who responded to our submissions showing the need for Counselling Centres. We are grateful to Senator Messner for this important contribution to our welfare, but we do not, because of that, endorse his view of the war, his political beliefs or his political party. He did not expect us to.

The present Minister for Veterans' Affairs is Senator, The Hon. Arthur Gietzelt. He was a vocal anti-Vietnam war protestor and is now a leader in the Peace and Nuclear Disarmament Movement. He is a member of the left wing of the Labor Party. When the Senator came to office earlier this year, he fought hard on our behalf for wide ranging terms of reference for our Royal Commission to be accepted by the government. His task was not easy, for ranged against him were powerful interest groups including the U.S. government and elements of the bureaucracy. His fight was successful, and we are grateful. We have come to know the new minister as a humane man with genuine sympathy for veterans' plights. We are grateful for that too. But despite the service the Minister has done us and despite his genuine sympathy, we do not endorse his view of the Vietnam war, his advocacy of nuclear disarmament or his political leanings. Nor do we support his political party. He does not expect us to.

A similar story could be told about a number of other Labor politicians, the Democrat Senator Michael Macklin, some retired Generals and Admirals, some unions, several newspapers, radio and television reporters and a Roman Catholic priest.

In summary, then, our Association does not see itself as the arm of one group of colours in the political spectrum engaged in a fight against some of the other colours. It sees itself as an arm of the ex-Service community fighting for recognition of and compensation for disabilities of veterans and their children which may have been caused by their war service. Neither does our Association see its role as a defender or condemner of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. Rather we see ourselves as a defender of the veteran's reputation; a proclaimer of the effort he expended, the professionalism he showed and the bravery he displayed at the behest of the Australian government.

To do otherwise, we believe, would be folly. The R.S.L. National



Executive, for instance, is an example of leaders of the ex-Service community who have been diverted from their proper path. They are much better known for their role as watchdogs for a particular set of community moral principles and as representatives of a particular, sometimes extreme, set of political beliefs, than for their work in improving the lot of veterans. In consequence, the R.S.L. is undergoing a crisis because of falling veteran membership while tens of thousands of veterans with impeccable war records, but offended by the moral and political views expressed by the R.S.L. leadership, shun any contact with the organisation. A still greater number of veterans, not offended by the R.S.L. leadership's pronouncements, but believing political and moral advocacy to be outside the function of ex-Service associations, also stay away.

But it is not only R.S.L. membership numbers which are suffering as a result of this distraction from the task of improving veterans' welfare. The R.S.L. National Executive from its inception, has tolerated repatriation entitlement legislation, which discriminated against veterans of W.W.I and later those of Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. (On pages 41 and 42 of the October, 1982 edition of DEBRIEF and in a letter to the editor in the June, 1981 edition, this matter is discussed). Additionally, in the five most important recently determined Repatriation and court cases which have secured more favourable grounds for veterans' entitlements and assessments, (1) NONE have been initiated by the R.S.L.

Further, as a result of the members of the R.S.L. National Executive parading their political and moral hobbyhorses unconnected with the welfare of veterans across the public stage, many good Australians see the R.S.L. simply as a political pressure group. This can do the veterans' cause no good at all, particularly as many of those who have come to see the R.S.L. in that light are now influential members of the Australian government.

Our Association, on the other hand, has avoided being distracted from its concentration on veterans' welfare. As a result, its achievements have been remarkable and the membership has never ceased increasing. Amongst its achievements have been the establishment of the excellent Counselling Centres, changes to the Repatriation Act to redress the disadvantage suffered by W.W.I and post W.W.II veterans, the establishment of a Royal Commission to examine the issue of our exposure to toxic chemicals, the winning of the Simpson Case, the first case in which a veteran's cancer was attributed to his exposure to toxic chemicals whilst on war service in Vietnam, and considerable public enlightenment. We have even had some success at storming the bureaucrats barricades forcing them to reluctantly make changes to accommodate our different needs.

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Note 1: Law Case (Legacy), Foulger Case (Legal Aid), Simpson Case (Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia), Bowman Case (Private Solicitor) and the Groves Case (R.D.F.W.A.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Veteran Mick Storan had bottled up his war experience and feelings about Vietnam for ten years. It was not until early 1982 that his sister's friend John Schumann convinced him to bare his soul. It is certain Mick would not have agreed had he not had full confidence in John's integrity and genuine sympathy. Mick's story was told in sessions late into the night with the aid of slides, photos and painfully released descriptions of his experiences. Mick, in his story described how his mate Franky Hunt had "kicked a mine the day mankind kicked the moon".

Franky Hunt is our Association's Bega representative and President of that town's R.S.L. John prevailed on Franky, too, to relate his story. Franky, like Mick, had not opened up since his homecoming but agreed to suffer the pain of releasing his own imprisoned emotions, so that John could understand. There is no doubt that Franky would not have endured that traumatic release had he not been sure of John Schumann's ability to comprehend and sympathise with his experience.

As a result of those meetings, John wrote the song "I Was Only Nineteen" or "A Walk in the Light Green". In September, 1982, with the song completed, John approached the National Office of our Association. He was happy with the song but wished to ensure that it would cause no offence to veterans and that it expressed accurately veterans' feelings. John told us that he had been opposed to Australia's commitment in Vietnam but had the greatest respect for the war's veterans and the deepest sympathy for those suffering because of their service. He shared with us a feeling of anger and frustration at the obscurity and inaction of the then government and the bureaucracy. Being convinced that his sympathy was genuine, we did not enquire about his political preference but on hearing some of the songs he performs as part of the group REDGUM, it was clear that the members of that group took a stand on the left of the political continuum.

We, and the veteran audiences we arranged to hear REDGUM sing "I Was Only Nineteen", loved the song. The National Office, in conjunction with REDGUM then arranged a concert at the Sydney Town Hall to launch the song. In the weeks leading up to the concert John Schumann, often in company with Franky Hunt, gave scores of newspaper, radio and television interviews publicising the song and our Association's work and objectives. In March, 1983 the song was launched at the Town Hall concert, the proceeds from the evening coming to our Association. REDGUM then offered all artists royalties from the sale of the 'single' made of the song to us for our welfare work and our fight for recognition of the war caused distress being suffered by many veterans and their families. Having by this stage got to know John Schumann and the other members of REDGUM, Michael Atkinson, Verity Truman and Hugh McDonald, and being certain that they had a genuine sympathy for veterans' plight, we unhesitatingly accepted their offer. We did not, in return, offer to endorse REDGUM's political

the 60 Minutes segment. To date there has been none, but your letter and this reply will be published in the September issue of DEBRIEF, perhaps provoking some branches, sub-branches and members to express their views.

\*\*\*\*\*

Your letter implies that our Association should change the principles on which it has based the help it has offered, the applications for membership it has accepted and the outside support it has received, and officially join the battle of certain colours of the political spectrum against other colours. I firmly believe that nothing would be more certain to transform our dynamic, growing and successful organisation into a faction-ridden, impotent, non-entity.

Yours sincerely,

PHILL THOMPSON  
President

\*\*\*\*\*

**President's Note:** The Launceston Sub-Branch met on 26th September and considered the reply to their letter. There was a consensus of satisfaction with the answers to their questions.

PHILL THOMPSON

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

**N.S.W. BRANCH  
2ND ANNUAL GALA FETE  
on 22ND OCTOBER  
from 9 A.M. TO 5 P.M.  
in the grounds of  
GRANVILLE R.S.L. YOUTH CLUB HALL  
CNR BLAXCELL AND WILLIAM STREETS  
GRANVILLE**

\*\*\*

Jimbo the Clown, Blown-up Castle, Merry-Go-Round, Chocolate-Wheel with valuable prizes, hot dogs, sausage sizzles, cakes, vegetable stall, plants stall, white elephant stall, handcrafts, secondhand books, books, lucky numbers

and for the elegant — DEVONSHIRE TEAS

views or the political views of any of its members. Nor did we endorse John's attitude to the war. They did not expect us to.

But REDGUM have done much more for us than forego their royalties for our benefit. The song, which reached number one on the Australian sales charts was bought and listened to by something approaching 100,000 Australians, whilst hundreds of thousands more, perhaps millions, heard it played constantly on radio and television for a two or three month period. Combined with the scores of interviews given by John Schumann and Franky Hunt, the song has contributed to a public awareness that all is not well with their veterans, a contribution reaching the magnitude of that of our long time supporter, Clyde Holding.

There is another element in REDGUM's contribution. Hearing the song has been for many veterans like hearing the emotions trapped inside them for so long. The experience has allowed them to more easily live with those emotions and even to release them.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are grateful to all those who, with genuine sympathy, have supported us, regardless of their views on the war or their political leanings. We thank them all but offer no political or moral endorsements in exchange. Our friends and benefactors, the members of REDGUM are no exception.

\* \* \* \* \*

You ask whether we feel that the REDGUM segment of the television programme 60 Minutes has done any harm to our Association. The question presumably refers to a fear that viewers, seeing us closely associating with REDGUM, might assume that we endorsed their stated political views.

The same fear, of course, might be felt any time one of our officials has his photo taken with a government minister or other parliamentarian or when we produce a speech or article complimenting another organisation or person.

Those who know the principles by which our Association offers assistance, accepts requests for membership and receives support from outside organisations and people, would not, of course, assume our endorsement of the political views of anyone with whom we are seen to associate. Those who are unaware would be enlightened by simple enquiry.

Certainly we have advertised our adherence to these principles in the media at every opportunity and enunciated them in our magazine (see the article Political Action in the January, 1983 edition of DEBRIEF). I suggest that if members come across people who have drawn the wrong conclusion from our publicised association with any organisation or individual, they should gently advise them of the principles we follow.

You ask, too, if there has been a reaction from other branches to

National Patron:



# VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

GEELONG & DISTRICT BRANCH Telephone 052 75 2449  
78 5113

2 Kiewa st. Corio 3214

82 2291

Mr J.H. Greenwood OBE

Mr T. McCOMBE

SECRETARY/TREASURER

V.V.A.A.

15 APR. '87.

REF: D. BEANE EX USMC.

Dear Tim,

In reply to your answer regarding D. BEANE I have been instructed by the members, at our April meeting, who feel strongly on this matter, the fact that BEANE is a deserter.

We feel that the association should reconsider the support given this man and that the charter, regarding desertion, should be discussed at the May '87 National congress.

Yours Sincerely

Alan Bone (SEC)

March 31, 1987


Mr. Alan Bone,  
Secretary,  
Geelong & District Branch of VVA,  
2 Kiewa Street,  
CORIO. VIC. 3214

Dear Alan,

Thank you for your letter of February 1987. Please accept my apology for not answering sooner. Your letter expresses concern of the alleged offences of Douglas Beane ex USMC. Mr. Beane and his wife approached this Association with a request that we, on his behalf, arrange legal representation for them. This was done.

The charter of this Association is to help veterans and their families with any welfare problems. Since I have been involved with this Association, this office has been approached by many veterans requesting help with their legal problems. These problems have varied from driving under the influence of liquor, to assault with a deadly weapon. I do not think this Association has a right to make moral judgements on any allegations made against these veterans until they are heard by the Courts. Even then, when veterans have been sentenced to gaol terms, this Association has extended our help to these veterans and families and in the future, as in the past, this Association will extend help to any veteran requesting us do so in regards to welfare matters.

Yours faithfully,

  
TIM MCCOMBE  
SECRETARY/TREASURER

National Patron:



# VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

GEELONG & DISTRICT BRANCH Telephone 052 75 2449

78 5113

82 2291

Mr J.H. Greenwood OBE

2 Kiewa st. Corio 3214

Secretary  
National Office

V.V.A.A.

17 FEB '87

REF. DOUGLAS BEANE EX USMC

Dear Sir,

I have been instructed by the members to write and express their disapproval of the alleged offences attributed to Beane.

It is feared that the alleged offences are so serious that any assistance given by the association, regardless of the High Court decision, could bring the V.V.A.A. into disrepute.

Could you please advise, at your earliest, any action anticipated by the National Body on this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Alan Bone (Sec)

SPEECH BY  
TIM FISCHER, M.P.  
NATIONAL PARTY SPOKESMAN FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
AND NATIONAL PARTY MEMBER FOR FARRER

EIGHTH NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

10.00 A.M., SATURDAY, 2ND MAY, 1987

LEGACY HOUSE, 393 SWANSTON STREET, MELBOURNE

"..... VIETNAM VETERANS CAN BE RIGHTLY PROUD  
OF THEIR TURNOUT ON ANZAC DAY ....."

"..... THROUGH THE SAD PROCESS OF NATURAL  
ATTRITION THERE WILL BE A MASSIVE REDUCTION  
IN VETERANS' AFFAIRS EXPENDITURE DURING THE  
NEXT DECADE ....."

(FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, TIM FISCHER, M.P. IS AT  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE - (062) 72 7571  
WEEKEND - (069) 27 1456)



MR PRESIDENT, DELEGATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

AT THE OUTSET, I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND MY CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL VIETNAM VETERANS WHO TOOK PART IN ANZAC DAY PARADES ACROSS AUSTRALIA AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN THE COMMEMORATION SERVICES HELD. UNDOUBTEDLY THE VIETNAM VETERANS CAN BE RIGHTLY PROUD OF THEIR TURNOUT ON ANZAC DAY 1987 AND THIS AUGURS WELL FOR A VERY SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL WELCOME HOME PARADE ON SATURDAY 3 OCTOBER IN SYDNEY. EARLIER THIS YEAR, I MET WITH THE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL WELCOME HOME PARADE AND MADE VARIOUS SUGGESTIONS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN ADOPTED, AND I AM SURE THERE SHOULD - AND WILL - BE GENUINE BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR THIS KEY PARADE LATER THIS YEAR.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN THAT, FOLLOWING ON EVENTS OF EARLIER THIS WEEK, WHILST I AM NO LONGER SHADOW MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS, I AM THE NATIONAL PARTY SPOKESMAN ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND MY INTEREST AND ACTIVITY IN THIS VERY IMPORTANT PORTFOLIO AREA WILL CONTINUE UNABATED.

THE POLITICAL REALITIES ARE SUCH THAT THERE WILL BE A COALITION IN GOVERNMENT AFTER THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTIONS, GIVEN THE RIGHT RESULT, AND THIS COALITION WILL INVOLVE THE LIBERAL AND NATIONAL PARTIES IN THE TIME-HONOURED WAY.

IN THE MEANTIME, AS NATIONAL PARTY SPOKESMAN ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS I ANNOUNCE HERE AT YOUR CONFERENCE THAT IT IS FEDERAL NATIONAL PARTY POLICY FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS TO RETAIN A SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS. THIS IS IN ACCORD WITH THE POLICY OBJECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL NATIONAL PARTY TABLED BY IAN SINCLAIR AT THE CANBERRA COUNCIL OF THE NATIONAL PARTY LAST MONTH.

I AM SURE YOU WELCOME THIS ASSURANCE AND I WOULD SAY TO THOSE WHO WOULD ARGUE FOR THE CREATION OF MEGA-DEPARTMENTS, THAT THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE EMERGING FROM BRITAIN AND ELSEWHERE THAT BASICALLY THEY DO NOT WORK. NATURALLY, THERE WILL COME A TIME IN THE FUTURE WHEN DEPARTMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS WILL NEED TO BE FURTHER REVIEWED -- NO-ONE ARGUES AGAINST THIS. BUT VETERANS' EXPENDITURE HAS NOT YET PEAKED AND MANY THOUSANDS OF WORLD WAR II VETERANS ARE ENTERING VERY CRITICAL AGES WHERE A GREAT DEAL OF HOSPITAL AND NURSING CARE WILL BE REQUIRED.

I WILL HAVE MORE TO SAY ABOUT FUTURE EXPENDITURE PROJECTIONS IN RELATIONS TO VETERANS' AFFAIRS DIRECTLY, BUT I REITERATE THE NATIONAL PARTY SUPPORTS THE RETENTION OF A SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS.

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO TURN TO DISCUSS SOME IMPORTANT OVERALL ASPECTS IN RELATION TO VETERANS' AFFAIRS.

IN THESE VOLATILE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TIMES IT IS NECESSARY TO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES RELATING TO VETERANS AND RELATING TO OUR NATION.

IT SHOULD BE SAID THAT THE COMMITMENT TO THE VETERAN, AND TO THE DISABLED VETERAN IN PARTICULAR, IS A DEBT OWED BY THE NATION AS A WHOLE TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS I HAVE REFERRED TO THE DEFINITION OF THAT COMMITMENT, ENSHRINED IN THE HANSARD RECORDS OF PARLIAMENT BY TWO FORMER PRIME MINISTERS, BEN CHIFLEY AND ARTHUR FADDEN.

FORMER PRIME MINISTER, BEN CHIFLEY, SAID, AND I QUOTE:

"THE CAREERS OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YOUNG MEN HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED AND, IN SOME INSTANCES, PARTIALLY RUINED. THERE IS A BREAK OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITY WHICH CANNOT BE REPAIRED. IT IS PERFECTLY TRUE THAT EXPERIENCE IS GAINED, BUT THAT IS NOT MATERIAL TO AN ORDINARY CIVIL VOCATION. ON THIS PARLIAMENT RESTS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SEEING THAT THE RIGHT THING SHALL BE DONE."

I ALSO QUOTE FROM FORMER PRIME MINISTER, ARTHUR FADDEN, WHO SAID:

"A GRATEFUL NATION MUST SEE THAT THOSE WHO ARE PRIVILEGED TO RETURN FROM BATTLE AREAS SHALL BE PROPERLY CARED FOR, AND THAT THEIR REINSTATEMENT IN CIVIL LIFE SHALL BE WISELY AND EXPEDITIOUSLY CARRIED OUT."

AUSTRALIA, WITH ITS HUGE OVERSEAS DEBT, IS VERY MUCH AT THE CROSSROADS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT AUSTRALIA'S FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS, OF ALL PERSUASIONS, TOOK FROM 1900 UNTIL 1983 TO BUILD UP A \$14BILLION COMPONENT OF GROSS NATIONAL OVERSEAS DEBT.

IN JUST FOUR YEARS THAT TIME, THROUGH A COMBINATION OF FACTORS, THE GOVERNMENT COMPONENT HAS RISEN FROM \$14BILLION TO \$41BILLION, ALBEIT SOME OF IT STATE GOVERNMENT BUT THE MAJORITY REPRESENTING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY.

IT IS A CHILLING FACT THAT WHAT TOOK OVER EIGHT DECADES TO BUILD UP HAS BEEN MORE THAN DOUBLED IN FOUR YEARS UNDER THE CURRENT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

THUS IT CAN BE SEEN THAT WE ARE IN AN ECONOMIC STRAIGHT-JACKET AND, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SECTIONS OF THE ECONOMY PRIMARILY RELATING TO CAPITAL CITIES WHICH ARE ENJOYING GOOD TIMES, SO MUCH OF THE RURAL ECONOMY IS UNDERGOING GREAT DIFFICULTY THROUGH THE DOUBLE WHAMMY OF HIGH INTEREST RATES AND HIGH TAXES AND CHARGES ON THE ONE HAND, AND LOW COMMODITY PRICES ON THE OTHER.

IT IS IN THIS CLIMATE THAT MOVES WILL BE FORTHCOMING, PERHAPS EVEN IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC STATEMENT DUE ON 13TH MAY, TO CUT FURTHER INTO VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS AND PROGRAMMES.

I WANT TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR THAT I AND MY COLLEAGUES DISTINGUISH SHARPLY BETWEEN WHAT MAY BE DENOTED AS SOCIAL SECURITY GENERAL WELFARE EXPENDITURE AND THE QUITE DIFFERENT CATEGORY OF EXPENDITURE ON VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS, INCLUDING DISABILITY PENSIONS AND T.P.I. PENSIONS.

THERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SAVINGS WHICH CAN BE MADE IN VETERANS' AFFAIRS, AND THROUGH NATURAL ATTRITION THERE WILL BE A REDUCTION OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE REQUIRED FOR MANY OF THE PROGRAMMES UNDER VETERANS' AFFAIRS FROM NEXT FINANCIAL YEAR ONWARDS.

THE LARGEST ITEM OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS EXPENDITURE IS THE SERVICE PENSION SCHEME, INVOLVING OVER \$1.6 BILLION, BUT THAT SCHEME WILL NOW BEGIN TO CONTRACT WITH REDUCED LEVELS OF EXPENDITURE DUE TO THE SAD PROCESS OF NATURAL ATTRITION (CONTRACTING FROM 1987 ONWARDS ACCORDING TO THE REPATRIATION COMMISSION).

IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS JUSTIFIABLE TO ARGUE THAT, BECAUSE OF THE OBLIGATION OF THE NATION TO THE VETERAN, THERE SHOULD BE NO ADDITIONAL DIRECT CUTBACKS IN VETERANS' DISABILITY PENSIONS AND, INDEED, IN VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS: ESPECIALLY AS THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT SETTLES DOWN.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE SAVINGS, AND THE SAVINGS WHICH WILL ACCRUE MORE AND MORE THROUGH NATURAL ATTRITION, SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE EXPENDITURE REVIEW COMMITTEE WHICHEVER GOVERNMENT IS IN POWER, PARTICULARLY GIVEN THE FULL RANGE OF CUTBACKS AND CHANGES IMPOSED ON VETERANS IN THE MINI-BUDGET OF MAY 1985, IN CERTAIN PROVISIONS RELATING TO THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT, AND IN THE BUDGET OF 1986 IN PARTICULAR.

INDEED, THROUGH THE SAD PROCESS OF NATURAL ATTRITION ALONE THERE WILL BE A REAL REDUCTION IN VETERANS' AFFAIRS EXPENDITURE DURING THE NEXT DECADE.

TURNING TO FUTURE POLICY DEVELOPMENTS, THERE REMAINS A PARTICULAR ANOMALY SO FAR AS T.P.I. PENSIONERS ARE CONCERNED.

I HAVE REFERRED TO THIS PREVIOUSLY AND IT ARISES FROM THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT, WHERE A VETERAN IN THE RETIREMENT PHASE OF LIFE CAN ONLY RECEIVE UP TO A MAXIMUM 100% DISABILITY PENSION.

SUCH A VETERAN IS NOT ENTITLED TO MOVE UP TO AN INTERMEDIATE OR SPECIAL RATE OF T.P.I. PENSION, EVEN IF HE SUFFERS A SHARP DETERIORATION IN WAR-RELATED DISABILITY.

THERE ARE SEVERAL SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AS TO HOW THIS MIGHT BE ADDRESSED, GIVEN THE TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES AND THE STRINGENT GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL POSITION.

FIRSTLY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD ARGUE FOR TOTAL ABOLITION OF ANY RESTRICTION OF T.P.I. WITH REGARD TO AGE OR RETIREMENT FROM THE WORKFORCE.

SECONDLY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD ARGUE FOR THE CREATION OF A NEW EXCEPTIONAL DISABILITY ALLOWANCE, AT AROUND THE INTERMEDIATE RATE OF T.P.I., TO CATER ESPECIALLY FOR THE RETIRED VETERAN WHO SUFFERS FROM IMPAIRMENT OR DETERIORATION IN DISABILITY.

THIRDLY, AND RELATED TO THIS, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD ARGUE FOR ALTERATION TO THE CRITERIA FOR THE INTERMEDIATE RATE OF T.P.I. TO SPECIALLY CATER FOR THE RETIRED VETERAN, AND I SAY THIS IS NOW THE COURSE I FAVOUR AND AM EXAMINING IN DETAIL.

FINALLY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD ARGUE THAT THE 100% DISABILITY PENSION RATE SHOULD BE INCREASED TO JUST UNDER THE INTERMEDIATE RATE.

YOU MAY BE ASSURED THIS MATTER IS BEING CONSIDERED IN PREPARING THE NATIONAL PARTY VETERAN'S AFFAIRS POLICY FOR THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION AND I HAVE HELD WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSIONS WITH VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF VETERANS' ORGANISATIONS INCLUDING THE R.S.L.

IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE, I DO NOT AND CANNOT GIVE ANY SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS. HOWEVER, THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING COMMITTEE TO BE SET UP THIS YEAR TO EXAMINE THE VETERANS' ENTITLEMENTS ACT, SHOULD LOOK AT THIS WHOLE MATTER IN DETAIL.

IN RELATION TO THE T.P.I. ISSUE, IT IS RELEVANT TO DISCUSS THE AGENT ORANGE SITUATION AND THE FACT THAT, A YEAR AFTER THE MINISTER CAME TO THIS CONFERENCE AND PROMISED PROMPT ACTION, LITTLE HAS OCCURRED. INDEED, WE WERE ADVISED THAT EVERYTHING HINGED ON LEGAL ADVICE WHICH WAS BEING SOUGHT FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL LIONEL BOWEN. THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL TOLD ME THAT THIS ADVICE WAS PROMPTLY GIVEN TO THE MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND ALL THIS HAS LED TO IS A PROPOSAL TO APPOINT A CONSULTANT TO EXAMINE THE ISSUE FURTHER. CAN I SAY THIS REPRESENTS A CLASSIC STALLING ACTION BY GOVERNMENT, BUT TO BE FAIR, I FREELY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE WERE DELAYS IN DEALING WITH THE AGENT ORANGE ISSUE INVOLVING NOT ONLY THIS GOVERNMENT BUT ALSO THE PREVIOUS COALITION GOVERNMENT.

I AM WELL AWARE THAT MANY VIETNAM VETERANS HAVE RUN OUT OF PATIENCE IN RELATION TO THESE DELAYS AND ARE WANTING MORE FINITE ACTION FROM THE GOVERNMENT. FOR MY PART, I REITERATE MY COMMITMENT TO FOCUS AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY ON ALL ASPECTS OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (OR PTSD) AND RELATED MATTERS IN DEALING FURTHER WITH THE AGENT ORANGE ISSUE.

IN CLOSING, I WISH THE VIETNAM VETERANS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA EVERY ONWARD SUCCESS IN THEIR DELIBERATIONS AT THIS 8TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND BEYOND AND I EMPHASISE THAT I AM DELIGHTED WITH THE GROWING COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE AND RECOGNITION THAT VIETNAM VETERANS WERE VERY DETERMINED AND DEDICATED FIGHTERS IN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT CONDITIONS DURING THE HORRIFIC VIETNAM WAR.

LAST WEDNESDAY NIGHT I PAID A PARLIAMENTARY TRIBUTE TO VIETNAM VETERANS, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO THEIR TURN OUT ON ANZAC DAY THIS YEAR AND I AM PROUD TO DECLARE THAT AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS SENT TO VIETNAM GAVE THEIR VERY BEST IN THE VERY BEST OF ANZAC TRADITIONS.

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