

VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

18th NATIONAL CONGRESS

RSL & Services Club, BRIBIE ISLAND QLD

on 23rd, 24th and 25th May 1997

MINUTES

PRESENT:

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

NATIONAL PRESIDENT:	Clive Mitchell-Taylor JP
NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT:	Rob Cox
NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT:	Brian McKenzie
NATIONAL SECRETARY:	Geoff Trevor-Hunt OAM JP
NATIONAL TREASURER:	Peter Liefman
IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT:	John Methven

DELEGATES

QUEENSLAND:	John Smith, Bob Beasley
WESTERN AUSTRALIA:	Rob Cox, Les Crowe
NORTHERN TERRITORY:	Garry Casey, John Sheppard
TASMANIA:	David Moles DFM, Brian McKenzie
SOUTH AUSTRALIA:	"Doc" Russell, Eric Ciracovitch
VICTORIA:	Alan Hughes, Brendan Lynch
NEW SOUTH WALES:	Dutchy Holland JP + Proxy
AUST CAPITAL TERRITORY:	Margaret Wine + Proxy

APOLOGIES: Norm Robertson (AVWVT representative)

OBSERVERS: Kevin Hunter (VIC), Graham Shard (VIC), Dutchy Heaslip (QLD),
Krishna Methven (VIC), Lee McKenzie (TAS)

The President declared the Congress open at 9-05 AM and recited the Ode

1.0. PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Proposed: ACT

Seconded: NSW

That the minutes of the 1996 National Congress be accepted. **CARRIED**

2.0. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

2.1. BANNERETTES:

Victoria reported that these had been produced and were available from Geelong Sub Branch.

2.2. RECRUITING CAMPAIGN:

Brian McKenzie reported that he had received no co-operation from State Branches, except ACT and Tasmania. Sample documentation was given to delegates. These papers were suggestions only and showed avenues available. States were requested to supply Brian McKenzie with information.

John Methven advised that some Sub Branches in Victoria were sending invoices to members and this was successful. This had been tried in some States with mixed success.

2.3. USE of PSYCHOLOGISTS for DIAGNOSIS:

The Secretary advised that the number of psychologists with knowledge of DSM IV was limited but further information was to be forthcoming from the Association. Peter Liefman advised that the diagnosis of PTSD in some cases not accepted by DVA as per Statements of Principle.

2.4. MACOVI:

The National President reported that the Minister had acknowledged our handover method, but the Minister, to date, had not continued with the committee. This matter is to be pursued by the National President in conjunction with the RSL and AVADSC and that the MACOVI committee be reconstituted.

2.5. FUNDRAISING:

Peter Liefman spoke about the Insurance package and the Insurance brokers would make a presentation on Saturday afternoon.

2.6. CONTRACTED CIVILIANS:

John Printz reported that talks had been held with DVA and Department of Defence and it appears that the Government will not, at this stage, recognise contracted civilians for entitlement purposes.

South Australia advised that some of these contracted persons had eaten food etc. as Vietnam veterans had and were suffering from similar symptoms.

A long discussion was held and it was felt by the meeting that these persons did not come within the National Constitution, but that further discussion be deferred to General Business.

At this stage, the President welcomed David Watson and Wes Kilham (DVA Canberra) to the meeting. Observers were also welcomed.

2.7. MIA's:

The President had written to the Minister and that this letter had been passed to the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and a reply that nothing could be done at this stage, had been received. Talks are to be held with the Deputy Prime Minister on or about August.

2.8. START and FINISH DATES of VIETNAM WAR:

The Federal Budget had now issued start and finish dates for the Vietnam War.

Proposed: Tas

Seconded: SA

That the Constitution be amended to read that the end date of the war be 29th April 1975 and to include the crews of HMAS Quickmatch and HMAS Vampire trips in January 1962.

CARRIED

2.9. DSH LOAN INCREASE:

This had been supported by the KOC but no further action by the Government had been taken.

2.10. ACTA:

Mick Scrase had sent the reports and associated papers on the ACTA conference of 1996 to All States in 1996.

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: WA

That the subject of Neuro Toxic stress be discussed with ACTA specifically through Mick Scrase assisted by John Methven. **CARRIED**

John Methven addressed the meeting in regards to Neuro Toxic stress, as some delegates were unaware of the matter. He further explained about Cees Van Teglen who attempted to commence this study.

SA requested of John Methven that a written version of the details of Neuro Toxic stress and that this be forwarded to States.

2.11. APPOINTMENT of STATE SENIOR ADVOCATES

John Printz advised the meeting that some meetings had been held with State Advocates from time to time. More formal lines of communication should be established to enable passage of information.

2.12. NATIONAL POLICY HANDBOOK

Due to illness, John Printz had been unable to complete the update. This would be done as soon as possible and distributed to States when completed.

2.13. STATE MINUTES and CORRESPONDENCE:

The Secretary advised that it appeared that State Branches were not corresponding with State Branches of the DVA or other bodies, as no copies of correspondence had been received. Copies of such correspondence are to be sent to the National Secretary as per the directive of the National Congress of 1996.

He also stated that some States were not forwarding copies of their minutes, this also being part of the directive. It was noted that Queensland were very diligent in sending their copies and the Secretary requested that the Queensland State President congratulate his Townsville Sub Branch on continually sending their copies.

2.14. MEMBERSHIP CARDS:

Some States had supplied copies of their cards but the Secretary had not received all.

QLD objected to the use of a National membership card as they considered as a method of readily identifying members, but suggested that a year clasp is the only way to recognise a member. An annual membership card would be costly. It was also stated that this could also be an administrative nightmare.

A national card was an attempt at uniformity.

2.15. DEBRIEF:

Workshop chaired by Brian McKenzie.

It was resolved that a National magazine/newsletter should be produced.

It was resolved that the magazine be produced at least twice per year and that States must supply mailing labels within the required time frame. An issue is to be made as soon as possible. This matter is deferred to the National Executive. Closing dates for publication are to be adhered to.

2.16. LIFE MEMBERSHIP - JOHN HAINES:

The National President had presented this to John Haines.

3.0. CORRESPONDENCE:

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: NSW

That the correspondence as read, tabled or distributed be received. **CARRIED**

4.0. BUSINESS ARISING FROM CORRESPONDENCE:

Letter from Bob Buick, in relation to changing Vietnam Veterans Day to Long Tan Day.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: WA

That a reply be sent to Mr Buick along with a copy of the reply from Arthur Fittock that we do not support the change of name for the 18th August. **CARRIED.**

These letters will be distributed to all State Branches for distribution down to Sub Branch level.

5.0. REPORTS:

5.1. KINDRED ORGANISATION COMMITTEE:-

Report Distributed prior to the Congress and further explained by the National President, the KOC Representative.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: VIC

That the payment of the administration fee to the KOC be left to the National executive. **CARRIED**

5.2. MORTALITY STUDY:

The National Secretary prior to the Congress distributed a copy of the Mortality Study report to State Delegates and the National Executive.

The National Executive is to prepare a briefing paper on the Mortality study and that this be distributed to States for distribution down to Sub Branch level. David Watson (DVA) said that a background paper had been produced and that this could be used as a start point.

A further report, for Pension and Welfare officers in relation to the diseases that are higher than normal is to be prepared.

The question of media coverage was discussed and letters had been sent, by the National President, to the relevant TV stations explaining the difference between the Federation and the VVAA.

It was suggested that each State prepare their own media contact list.

It was suggested that Legal advice be sought in regards to obtaining the Mortality list held by Granville, this is to be done and advice obtained from Peter Liefman.

Support systems were a necessity at this time and a follow up to the Mortality study.

Proposed: SA

Seconded: TAS

That the report be received. **CARRIED**

5.3. NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Copy distributed to all States prior to the Congress. John Printz spoke about the committee composition and the role of the committee.

5.4. HEALTH STUDY:

John Methven reported on the current status of the health study. This was launched on 20th May and the questionnaires are currently being posted to Vietnam veterans whose addresses are known. The contents of the questionnaire kit were shown to delegates. Samples were issued to delegates.

Concern was expressed about widows and divorced or separated partners who have had the children, these people could fill out a special questionnaire. The department had stated that there would be advertising to alert these people. David Watson advised that advertisements were being placed in newspapers, this information is to be obtained from Canberra during the period of this Congress. Concern was expressed as to the fact that a number of States had not even started to receive their questionnaires as of Friday 23rd May.

It was stressed that this study in no way affected Disability pensions.

5.5. AVADSC:

Presented in writing to all delegates and spoken to by Dutchy Holland.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: WA

That Dutchy Holland thank Admiral Guy Griffiths for his assistance and support with the Health study. **CARRIED**

5.6. VETERANS INDEMNITY AND TRAINING ASSOCIATION:

Previously sent to all State Branches. The role was explained by the National President. Practitioners who are TIP qualified must have their name listed with John Printz. All States are to ensure that all practitioners are listed with John Printz.

Practitioners who are making direct or indirect profit with their activities were a problem and a method of dealing with this type of activity is to be pursued.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: SA

That practitioners be authorised in writing to represent the State Branches of the VVAA and that, in that letter, they are also advised that the authorisation can be withdrawn at any time without explanation. **CARRIED**

5.7. PTSD STEERING COMMITTEE:

Issued to all Delegates and addressed by John Printz. It was resolved that a letter of thanks be sent to Professor Philip Morris for his efforts with the National Centre for War Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

5.8. NATMOC:

Issued to all delegates and addressed by Rob Cox.

5.9. EDUCATION PACKAGE:

John Methven addressed the meeting in regards to the Education Kit, which had been developed by the Museum Sub Branch and funded by DVA.

John explained about the contents of the kit and the method of accreditation to use the kit. Delegates were advised of the cost of leasing the kit and costing for teaching courses.

6.0. TREASURERS REPORT:

The Treasurer presented his report and spoke to it.

Proposed: NT

Seconded: ACT

That the Treasurer's Report as presented and tabled, be received. **CARRIED**

7.0. NATIONAL SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Attached to these minutes.

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: ACT

That the Secretary's report as presented be received. **CARRIED**

8.0. NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

Attached to these minutes

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: SA

That the Presidents report as presented be received. **CARRIED**

The President declared all Executive positions vacant and invited Dutchy Heaslip (TOWNSVILLE) to chair the meeting for the elections.

9.0. ELECTION of NATIONAL OFFICE BEARERS:

9.1. NATIONAL PRESIDENT:

Clive Mitchell-Taylor (ACT) was the only nomination. Clive Mitchell-Taylor was declared duly elected.

9.2. NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS: (2)

Nominations were; Rob Cox (WA), Brian McKenzie (TAS) and John Methven (VIC)
Nominees were given three minutes each as an opportunity to address the meeting.

As only 2 were required a ballot (using voting papers approved by National Council) was conducted.

The results of the ballot were:

Brian McKenzie

Rob Cox

Brian McKenzie and Rob Cox were declared duly elected.

9.3. NATIONAL SECRETARY:

Geoff Trevor-Hunt (VIC) was the only nomination. Geoff Trevor-Hunt was declared duly elected.

9.4. NATIONAL TREASURER:

One nomination Peter Liefman (VIC). Peter Liefman was declared duly elected.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NT

That the ballot papers be destroyed

10.0. NATIONAL APPOINTMENTS:

10.1. NATIONAL AUDITOR:

Proposed: WA

Seconded: SA

That Courteny Thomas be appointed the National Auditor. **CARRIED**

10.2. NATIONAL SOLICITOR:

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: TAS

That Peter Liefman be appointed National Solicitor. **CARRIED**

10.3. PUBLIC OFFICER:

Currently held by Clive Mitchell-Taylor who was attempting to rectify problems in relation to the incorporation which were not carried out by the previous Public Officer.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NSW

That Clive Mitchell-Taylor be appointed Public Officer. **CARRIED**

10.4. NATIONAL SENIOR ADVOCATE:

Proposed: NSW

Seconded: WA

That John Printz be appointed the National Senior Advocate. **CARRIED**

11.0. GENERAL BUSINESS:

11.1. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION:

David Watson addressed the meeting in regards to the Vocational Rehabilitation program. The main objective is to improve the quality of life and is not linked to the ability to qualify for disability pension.

Target groups are Defence Force members being discharged; veterans whose jobs are in jeopardy and veterans who wish to attempt to rejoin the workforce.

There was no penalty for withdrawal from the program and veterans are reinstated to their previous monetary pension. The pension status of a veteran is not varied and monetary adjustment is not made until income is earned.

It was suggested that this program be the subject of an official launch. This program is effective from 1st July 1997.

11.2. TASMANIA - NOTICE of MOTION:

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NT

That an Associate member has no entitlement to wear and or display the Association badge.

MOTION LOST

The Tasmanian delegates were requested to convey to their members the feelings of the Congress.

11.3. AVADSC REPRESENTATIVE:

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: SA

That Dutchy Holland be the Association representative on AVADSC and that Ken Foster be the reserve representative. **CARRIED**

11.4. PATRON:

The President explained the current medical condition of the Patron, Mr Jim Greenwood who was very ill. The National President is to contact Jim Greenwood as to his feelings.

States were requested to give thought to a replacement Patron and advise the National office of any recommendations. National will advise if a replacement is necessary.

The National Executive were requested to compile a list of possible candidates for the position, if required.

MEETING ADJOURNED 4-00 PM FRIDAY

OFFICIAL OPENING 9-00 AM SATURDAY

- The Hon Rob Borbidge MP, Premier of Queensland, officially declared the Congress open.
- Maj Gen James, R&SL National President addressed the Congress.
- The Hon Bruce Scott, Minister for Veterans Affairs, addressed the Congress.
- Dr Neil Johnstone, President of the Repatriation Commission addressed the Congress.

MEETING RECONVENED SATURDAY 1-30 PM

Wes Kilham addressed the meeting in regards to Lifestyle courses and the improvements to veteran's lifestyles after attendance at the course.

Wes spoke about the cooperation between the VVAA, VVCS and DVA in the development of this course and that the end result, in most cases, was a great improvement in a veteran's lifestyle.

He also stated that the VVCS had evolved over the years of its existence and had improved as the years progressed. The co-location with the VAN offices, in the main had been quite successful. About 40 per cent of activities recorded at VVCS centres had related to country veterans. Demand for VVCS services continues to increase.

Professor Donald addressed the meeting in relation to the review of the RMA, which commenced on this day.

11.5. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION:

Chaired by Rob Cox.

A discussion paper had been previously issued to State Branches from the National President. This was further explained to the meeting and any proposal must ensure that power does not lie with one State because of its membership size.

It was resolved that the delegate system remains as it is.

11.6. AVWVT REPRESENTATIVE:

Proposed: NSW

Seconded: QLD

That Jim Talbert be the Association's representative on the AVWVT. **CARRIED**

11.7. VVCS STAFFING:

It was resolved that a letter be written to the President of the Repatriation Commission advising that this Association supports the increase of funding for staffing of the VVCS.

11.8. PRIVATISATION of VVCS:

Wes Kilham was questioned as to the privatisation of the VVCS and replied that the VVCS had a relationship with the private sector.

This question was then addressed to Dr Neil Johnstone who replied that the Government had released guidelines as to how departments should be run and all government departments were required to address this matter. The VVCS had been requested to review their business arrangements and report back. Dr Johnstone's personal view was that the VVCS should not be privatised and that, maybe, it could be established as a statutory authority but that this could separate the DVA and VVCS and this would be appropriate.

All attempts would be made to assure the Minister that the VVCS would continue to operate on a business like basis.

11.9. VVCS NAME CHANGE:

John Printz addressed the meeting in regards any proposed change of name of the VVCS. David Watson advised the meeting that DVA were facing closer links to the Defence Forces and would be dealing with these people. The only alteration this Association will agree with is the addition of the word "and" making the name Vietnam and Veterans Counselling Service.

John Printz advised the meeting that this matter had been addressed at the NAC meetings and had been suggested that any attempt of changing the name of the VVCS should come from the VVAA and it would then appear that the VVAA was making a gift to other veterans.

11.10. REHABILITATION and VVCS RESOURCES:

David Watson addressed the meeting and stated that the VVCS is to be quarantined from the cutbacks taking place within DVA. Members were advised that DVA funds all activities of VVCS, but links were to be made with the Department. The VVCS is to be asked to play a role a vital role in the Vocational Rehabilitation scheme.

NT raised the problem of only one staff member in the NT VVCS office. This had now been rectified and David Watson was requested to pass the thanks back to the persons responsible.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: WA

That the VVAA monitor the VVCS to ensure that resources are not diverted to rehabilitation and peripheral programs. **CARRIED**

11.11. STATE BRANCHES INVOLVEMENT with LIFESTYLE COURSES:

John Printz addressed the meeting on this matter and stated that at the commencement of these lifestyle courses it was agreed that the VVAA would be a visible presence at all courses both as Pension/Welfare officers and co-ordinators.

State Branches were advised to seek out members to fulfil these roles on the lifestyle courses and to liase closely with the VVCS.

John Methven advised the meeting that, at the outset of the programs, a VVAA presence was required to prevent power plays between organisations and appears to be the same situation today.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NT

That a letter be written to DVA National Office requesting that States be advised of when and where lifestyle courses are being run. **CARRIED**

11.12. PHILIP MORRIS LETTER:

This letter had been distributed to delegates.

This matter is being handled nationwide by DVA but the National Executive should keep a watching brief.

11.13. CONCERNS WITH VVCS IN ADELAIDE:

Discussions had been held in Adelaide and it was hopeful that there would be a turnaround in attitudes in Adelaide.

SA advised that the National Executive had assisted as had John Printz on the NAC.

11.14. MERCHANDISING (Use of Logo)

The meeting was advised that there was a great difference between logos used within States. All delegates were advised that control of the use of the logo is vested in National and all Sub Branches, through their State Branches, and State Branches were to request the permission to use the logo from the National Secretary **prior** to use.

This is to be enforced by State bodies.

11.15. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION:

Modems were issued to all States and States were requested to be connected to the Internet as soon as possible and advise the National Secretary of their e-mail address.

The National President spoke to the meeting about the VVAA National Home Page.

11.16. COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES (Supply of Minutes)

Members representing the Association on National Committees are required to ensure that the National Secretary receives copies of the minutes of minutes of these meetings to distribute to State Branches. The minutes of the NAC are excluded from this as confidential information is contained in them.

11.17. CONGRESS/COUNCIL TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS:

State Branches are to ensure that the National Secretary is advised of State Delegates for Congress and accommodation requirements, at least two months prior to a National Council meeting or National Congress. This is to ensure that the best air fare rate is obtained and accommodation can be arranged.

11.18. 1998 CONGRESS:

NT to hold the 1998 National Congress.

National Council meeting to be held in Adelaide on 18/19 October 1997

11.19. SA BADGE DAY:

SA reported on the results of their selling of the "Agent Orange Tear Drop" on their Badge day.

A written report on the day was handed out delegates. Delegates were shown the selling kit.

Proposed: WA

Seconded: NT

That SA are authorised to produce the Agent Orange droplets for and on behalf of National.

CARRIED

11.20. LEGACY:

John Printz advised the meeting that some concerns had arisen in regards to smoking.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NSW

That this matter is to be investigated by John Printz, Peter Liefman and Geoff Trevor-Hunt.

CARRIED

11.21. PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE POLICY:

Proposed: QLD

Seconded: NT

That the Insurance policy State levy be worked out on capitations for the previous year.

LOST

11.22. DIAGNOSIS of PTSD and RELATED ISSUES:

The Budget Papers had put in place the ability of DVA to put a diagnosis before a selected medical panel because of some misdiagnosing. This method may, in some way, disadvantage the veterans.

This method was being put in place due, possibly, to the “shonky” claims being submitted. John Printz advised that all TIP qualified Pension Officers, who were VVAA members, were to be advised that dealing with claims in a shoddy manner can result in the loss of TIP accreditation.

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: WA

That a liaison be made with the Investigation unit of DVA. **CARRIED**

11.23. RESPITE CARE:

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: WA

That John Methven be allowed to address the Congress. **CARRIED**

John advised the meeting that respite care for Vietnam veterans was a slightly different matter to older veterans.

States were advised to find suitable locations for respite care for Vietnam veterans within their State.

11.24. NAME TAGS and MEMBERSHIP FORMS:

The President advised there were many different name tags around and asked if these should be standardised.

The general feeling was that as long as the Badge used was the Association’s badge the name tag, itself, may be different.

The President requested that States send a copy of their membership application forms to the Secretary who will attempt to standardise the form.

12.0. GENERAL BUSINESS FROM STATE DELEGATES:

12.1. TASMANIA - GOLD CARDS:

Proposed: TAS

Seconded: NSW

That Gold Cards be issued to TPI partners by DVA. **CARRIED**

A long discussion ensued on this matter and matters dealing with widows. The National Executive will take up all other issues.

12.2. VICTORIA - AWARDS:

Victoria requested that an award be made available to come between Life membership and any Government Award. Victoria is to present ideas to the National Council meeting in October.

12.3. VICTORIA - BADGE WEEK

Victoria asked if problems would arise with the RSL if badges were sold during the Anzac day period. It was suggested that this could occur and it was a State issue.

12.4. SUCCESSION PLANNING:

The President requested that all delegates think about succession planning for committee members in the future.

12.5. REPUBLIC COMMITTEE:

The President advised that he had been asked to be a member of the committee but must be invited, in writing, to participate.

12.6. THANK YOU:

Proposed: WA

Seconded: NSW

That thanks be given to the Queensland Branch and the Bribie Island Sub Branch for the work in running the Congress. **CARRIED WITH ACCLAMATION**

The President declared the Congress closed at 11-40 AM Sunday.

**Report by National President to
National Congress of the
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
May 1997**

General

When I put my hand up for this position in 1996, I'm not sure that I really knew what I was letting myself in for. One thing I do know, and that is the value of the hand-over which John Methven was able to give me. John also advised me to record everything I said and did in my diary. I haven't always been a good diarist, but I'm learning, and I have to say that this advice has saved my bacon on a number of occasions.

I'll now touch on briefly on some of the events of the last twelve months, and try not to pre-empt our other reports.

Spina Bifida

One and a half days after the election, President Clinton made a press release in relation to Spina Bifida. The upshot was that the US acknowledged a causal link between Vietnam service and this disease, and set about establishing a program of treatment and recompense.

The DVA later launched an enquiry, under the auspices of the RMA, and by September the unequivocal finding of this Board was that there was no *causal* link, and that there would be no program of treatment and recompense for Australian children.

Some money was set aside for further investigation, but this was seen by many as a cheap trade-off. We resolved to put our effort into the Health Study.

Blackhawk disaster

The crash of two Army Blackhawk helicopters brought the issue of compensation for peacetime accidents into the public focus, and kept it firmly there. Many of our pensions officers and advocates are heavily involved in this area and it an issue which is still largely unresolved.

Continued on next page

Nominal roll

The nominal roll was launched in June, with great fan-fare but containing a large number of inherited errors. I hope by now that many of these will have been resolved. As you are aware, the value of this study is not in the nominal roll itself, but in the use to which it can be put. The Mortality and Health Studies could not have gone ahead without it.

The Launceston Reunion and Vietnam Veterans' Day

The 18th of August - Vietnam Veterans' Day - was a triumph through Australia and certainly in the ACT and Launceston. It was marred only by the continuing complaints of a few about the choice of the day itself and by the subsequent knowledge that the Reunion at Launceston was not a fiscal success.

A select group of veterans also toured through Malaysia and Vietnam at Departmental expense, culminating in a memorial service at Long Tan.

Legal aid funding

The Liberal Government dramatically changed the basis for legal aid funding throughout the States, creating a furore among the legal fraternity, and impacting on the quality of service able to be provided by VVAA Advocates. While some Federal/State agreements have been established this is not a complete answer, and Peter Liefman can and will give you the details of this.

NSW

NSW now has three strong Sub-Branches with Eurobodalla, the later inclusion of the St Marys Outpost of the VVAA and the creation of the South-Western Districts Sub-Branch. This gives us a very strong foothold in NSW and a platform to build on.

Internet

The VVAA has received a \$3,900 grant from DVA to get the Association on the Internet, for the purposes of communicating with one another, research and publicity through a home page. The home page will be linked with DVA and later with any other Ex-service Organisations who have a comparable set-up. I am currently assisting both the RSL and the Naval Association in doing this.

Through the year we have provided about 300 pages of current research on chemicals to the RMA, and this has assisted in launching a limited study into the genetic effects of chemicals.

Continued on next page

Memorials

I have been pleased to see that Vietnam veterans are now being more open about their involvement in the war, and there are a number of solid examples of community involvement in establishing memorials.

I was delighted to be requested to dedicate a memorial to Vietnam veterans in Rutherglen in November, and assist in dedicating another in Maryborough in February. The Vietnam section of the VC Garden in Brisbane will be dedicated on Sunday.

Vocational rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation Legislation has been presented to Parliament, although I don't think it has had its second reading yet. This provides a very real safety net for TPI's who wish to launch themselves back into the work-force, and incorporates all of the requirements of the VVAA. We have been working closely with the Department throughout this entire process.

It's a shame that the economic environment is such that it is extremely difficult for a 50-year old with skills and experience to get a position, and virtually impossible for someone without modern skills who has been out of the work-force for some time.

Insurance

The Lowndes Lambert insurance proposal is just about ready to go. I was somewhat bemused to be flown to Melbourne to do a full day's filming for a promotional video. Avoid it if you can, it can hardly be recommended viewing!

Review of the RMA

This is still in the planning stage. After some initial posturing on the selection of a medical administrator as the principal, it was decided that a legal professional should chair the study, with a medico assisting. My understanding is that Digger James had some personal problems with the medico first named.

The Terms of Reference are very broad, and I have every confidence that we will have an opportunity to contribute in a large way to this study. I will be relying heavily on John Printz and Peter Liefman for this.

Continued on next page

Mortality Study

The Mortality Study was launched by the Minister in a flurry of media hype. The outrageous media claims of thousands of suicides were revealed for the nonsense they were, to be replaced by the all-too-sobering real statistics that Vietnam veterans are nearly 25% more likely to kill themselves than members of the general public. Alarming statistics on cancers were also disclosed.

I think you will all agree that we have to pursue this to ensure that action is taken to try to address these findings. Rolling out the research findings of the National Centre for PTSD to General Practitioners and medical people throughout Australia and increasing the resources of the VVCS are positive steps which can and should be taken. I've also put the Minister on notice that we want funds allocated to properly research the chemical/herbicide/pesticide issue.

Morbidity Study

On the way to this conference I attended the launch of the Vietnam Veterans' Health Study in Sydney. This represents a major victory for Vietnam veterans, the Association and for John Methven. It has been extremely difficult over the last 12 months to ensure that the study was not diverted or hijacked, and I'm happy to say that at this stage we have achieved what this forum last year agreed as the way ahead.

I want you all to get out there on your return, and make sure that the veterans complete the questionnaires and return them. Make sure that you have something in place so that veterans who don't receive a questionnaire report to the VVAA in the first instance. We can assist them to get on the mailing list, but we might as well recruit them on the way.

The second part of the health study, the detailed interviews, is still very fuzzy, but there is time to resolve this, and you can rest assured that this is the very highest priority for all who are involved.

There is one thing which has been firmly in my mind over the last year. I wrote it into my diary on the 30th of May 1996.
*IS THERE ANY ISSUE CONCERNING THE HEALTH OF VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WHICH, IF IDENTIFIED AND ADDRESSED, WILL SAVE LIVES AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE NEXT YEAR? **

Continued on next page

Publicity

I have lost count of the number of radio, newspaper and television interviews which I've given over the past year. I think just about every one of you has also taken part in these interviews. We've been able to coordinate media releases throughout Australia, which has given us a unified front.

Some have resulted in good publicity. Some have been cut so that they are almost unrecognisable. Some have been dropped because they weren't confrontational or sensational enough.

The bottom line is that the media will do what they want, and will pursue what they think to be the agenda. We have to get smarter at using them to achieve what we want, and I think we are well down that track.

Federation

No review of the past year would be complete without some discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia.

It is clear that they have failed to achieve any of their stated goals this year. There has been no recognition by government, or through the Department - with the exception of a couple of individuals. They have been unable to conduct an AGM without being impeached and called to account. They have lost ground in their heartland, losing branches and committee members to the VVAA.

The niggling attacks and outrageous claims continue, but we really need to put these in perspective. They wouldn't be doing it unless they were hurting.

They managed to squeeze some publicity out of the Mortality Study, and that's a shame. The problem is that for Vietnam veterans there was not one positive outcome from that publicity. No word of hope, no hint of encouragement. The message was - *It's all right to feel sorry for yourself!* We can't dictate to the media what they will present, so this was beyond our control, but we do have to make sure the media know who we are, what we think and contact details.

I've briefed some members separately on current issues regarding Granville. I wish I could share those thoughts with you, but this is not possible. Let me just say that the next 12 months may well present the possibility of putting much of the Association back under the one banner. We'll take that opportunity with both hands, if it arises.

Continued on next page

Achievement of goals

The things I wanted to achieve this year included becoming better at communicating between ourselves and becoming more professional at what we do.

I think we've achieved the goal of getting better, but there is still a long way to go before we get to where we should be. I've been as guilty as any of not living up to these goals, and I promise to improve. Will you give me that same promise?

The glaring omission has been the Debrief. Initially constrained by funds, it was the one thing that I was never able to get enough time to come to grips with. I hope during this congress we can work out a better and more cost effective way to get Debrief on the streets.

Status of the VVAA

The VVAA is one of the three most important Ex-Service Organisations in Australia, together with the R&SL and AVADSC. That's not a hope, or a wish or a goal. It's a fact.

Many other organisations are amazed at how much input we get, how much influence we have. That doesn't happen because we're nice people (although we are), it happens because we work hard, because we truly represent our members and because we contribute so much to the debate on every subject. That's what a national organisation does.

Our policy of honesty and integrity - ethics, if you like, may sound silly, but it has really paid off. It's all about the quality of what we do, and the way we do it.

Let's keep that in mind as we face the next 12 months and the few short years until the millenium.

NATIONAL SECRETARYS REPORT
to
THE 1997 NATIONAL CONGRESS
of the
VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION of AUSTRALIA

The past 6 or 7 months have been busy for me, particularly with the Mortality study. You have received the final report but that, to me, is about the sixth, all of which I had to read and comment on. The delay in the release of the report was caused, in part, by the ESO representatives on the Steering Committee as we wished the report to be as correct as possible, in particular, the 13% lost to follow up at one stage. The final report has reduced this significantly.

I wish on your behalf, at this venue, to thank all those who contributed to the Save the Badge Fund. Many Sub Branches and individuals contributed to this fund with one Sub Branch, Southport being the only contributor from Queensland along with several Sub Branches from Victoria. It is with their help that we were able to relieve the burden on members funds at the National Level. To all those contributors, THANK YOU.


I thank Doc Russell for his continued phone calls in keeping me up to date with events in South Australia and Mick Scrase for his efforts on the Association's behalf with the chemical issue, even if he did monopolise my fax machine at times with his lengthy faxes.

During the coming year, I would like to see more correspondence from the State Branches as it is easier to act on something in writing. A telephone call is OK prior to writing but no action can be taken on a phone call. Lets get with it and act in a professional manner.

Most other matters which could be in this report have already been covered or listed on the Agenda for discussion.

I would also like to thank my wife for her patience and putting up with me visiting home now and then.

Finally, in addition to those already mentioned, I thank all of you for your co-operation, where it was given, during the past twelve months.



.....
(GEOFF TREVOR-HUNT AOM JP)
NATIONAL SECRETARY

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS COMMITTEE (KOC)

Introduction

The Kindred Organisations Committee of the R&SL is a capping organisation in the style of the Australian Veterans and Defence Service Committee but frankly, with far less influence. It comprises about thirty National level organisations generally represented by their National Presidents, and it deals with National level issues. There is no escalation of State issues to this Committee.

The current VVAA representative on this committee is Clive Mitchell-Taylor. The committee meets twice a year.

Revival

After a period of decreasing activity, the KOC has refocused, and is starting to deal with issues which by definition fall within its province. The new chairman, Commodore Toz Dadswell RAN of the Fleet Air Arm Association and his deputy Garth Hughes of the ATTV Association have brought an air of professionalism which has not existed in the past.

There is still a considerable way to go, as many motions have lapsed for want of preliminary discussion or the absence of movers from the forum.

Issues

Issues which have arisen over the last year, and their resolution, are listed overleaf.

Future directions

The VVAA should make greater use of the leverage provided by the KOC and the AVADSC. Those issues which are identified as being significant to the Association should be pursued through both these forums as well as through our own direct avenues to the Minister and the Department. This will lend both weight and credibility to our arguments.

Issue	Resolution
The appropriate authority grant those Australian mariners who volunteered and served in the Vietnam prescribed are of conflict, the same conditions under the VEA as those who served in the RAN under similar conditions	Remains tabled due to the mover not being present for the last two meetings
Anzac Parade Parking - concerns that the memorials were being degraded through current parking arrangements for nearby public servants	Letter forwarded to National Capital Planning Authority. No response after six months.
Membership - 2/12 Bn Association	Approved.
Membership - 39ers Association	Approved
AATTVA presented for discussion a proposal by the Unity Action Group for Retirees that their Social Service entitlements be administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.	Supported for the purposes of discussion by the VVAA. Rejected by the forum, main opponent the R&SL.
That all Australian ex-Servicemen from WWII be entitled to receive a Gold Card	Amendment by VVAA, seconded by AATTVA that this be amended to be based on age was not supported and the motion was passed in its original form (but see later developments)
That all military personnel who served in arduous or hazardous service above and beyond normal peace-time duties in mustard gas experiments, nuclear detonations, asbestos and chemical risks, receive recognition as veterans and be given all benefits under the VEA.	Motion passed. Letter sent to DVA. Response from Repatriation Commission indicates that there is a definition of hazardous service, and this does not fall into that definition (!)
That the atomic testing areas, Montebello, Maralinga and Emu Field be gazetted as special areas of service for the purposes of the VEA.	Carried unanimously.
That all returned veterans shall, on reaching 60 years of age, become lifetime holders of a DVA Gold Card.	Moved AATTVA, seconded VVAA. Carried after dissension from R&SL.

VETERANS' INDEMNITY AND TRAINING ASSOCIATION (VITA)

Introduction

VITA was formed in September 1995 to administer an indemnity scheme to cover the advocates and pensions officers of ex-service organisations providing bona fide non-profit to veterans.

The insurance policy premium is paid by DVA with a contribution from the ESOs. Current membership fee is \$250 pa, but this may increase in the future, as there is a requirement for the ESOs to increase their equity in the scheme.

There are twelve members, including the R&SL, AVADSC, the VVAA and VFA. Clive Mitchell-Taylor is a member of the Committee, which meets twice a year.

Rejection of application for membership

An application for membership by one organisation which was deemed to be operated for profit was rejected.

Listing of practitioners

There is no longer a requirement for organisations to provide a list of practitioners, however the maintenance of such a list within the organisation may be of benefit.

Support for TIP

VITA strongly supports the TIP programme, and mandates commitment to TIP for members. There has been no move to follow this up. While VITA is seen in some circles to be an advisory body for TIP, there is no hands-on involvement. Future development can be anticipated.

VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA NATIONAL COUNCIL INC (NSW)

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National Advisory Committee (NAC), to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs on the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service

REPORT TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS 1997

Preamble

1. When the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service was formed, after considerable discussion, resolutions and lobbying, from the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, the then Minister for Veterans Affairs put in place a National Advisory Committee (NAC), whose members were given Ministerial appointments, and instructions to meet quarterly and receive reports from the National, Director of Counselling, The National office of the DVA and the Repatriation Commission and to provide advice to the Minister on all aspects of the VVCS.

The National Advisory Committee

2. The NAC consists of :-

a. Chairman	Dr N.J. O'Conner	(Vietnam veteran)
b. Member	Dr R.T. Anderson	(Vietnam Veteran)
c. Member	Dr B.J. O'Toole	
d. Member	Mr J. Printz, OAM	(Vietnam Veteran)
e. Member	Mr E. Snelling	(Vietnam Veteran)
f. VVCS	Mr W.J. Kilham	Principal Director of Counselling
g. VVCS	Mr R. Moloney	Committee secretary
h. DVA	Mr D. Watson	Branch Head, Rehabilitation and Special Services Branch.

Committee task

3. The committee at its meetings are provided up to date reports on the operations of the VVCS at both National and State levels of which it has input to and reports its opinion to the Minister.
4. The committee is also provided with reports on future programs, financial reports and staffing information of the VVCS which the NAC has input to and reports its opinion to the Minister.
5. The committee has ESO input from Mr E Snelling (National RSL) and Mr J Printz OAM. (National VVAA)

Committee responsibility

- 6. As much of the information reported and discussed is of a confidential nature the members who hold Ministerial Appointment are responsible to the minister on appropriate use of that information.**
- 7. It has been my policy to keep the National President of the VVAA fully informed of ALL information and through consultation release that information with due care to the privacy act and my appointment requirements.**
- 8. I have ensured that the policy of the VVAA is tabled on all issues**

NAC Items for 1996/97

9. Listed are the issues for the above period :-

- a. Change of name for Vetline**
- b. Activities of the National Centre for War Related PTSD.**
- c. Children's programs**
- d. Community based PTSD treatment**
- e. Introduction of vocational rehabilitation**
- f. Community Health Accreditation and Standards Program (CHASP)**
- g. Computerised Case Management Information System (CCMIS)**
- h. Work place review of staffing**
- i. Vietnam Veteran health study**
- j. Counselling Policy and procedures**
- k. Implementation of the Younger Veterans' program**
- l. National office staffing**
- m. Vetline evaluation**
- n. Educational programs on PTSD**
- o. PTSD training in the Defence forces**
- p. VVCS Mission statement**
- q. VVCS role in assessment for PTSD clinics**
- r. Lifestyle courses**
- s. Development of trauma course with ADF.**
- t. National centre annual conference**

Discussion

- 10. I am available for discussion and exchange of views at any time.**

Conclusion

- 11. As can be seen above the NAC has a wide list of reports and discussion on a wide range of items that effect veterans input to the minister (Direct), it is important that the NAC continues to have an influence over the Repatriation Commission, DVA and the VVCS at the National level.**



**VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
WESTERN AUSTRALIA BRANCH INC**

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State Report Congress 1997

Following is a brief overview of 1996-97

National Congress May 1996

After the rigours of organising the National congress and the incredible high one gets from an intense weekend, once over, dropped us into a hole, what with settling in of a new committee and trying to get back on track, we had to set our goals for the coming year.

Our first priority was the completion of the restoration of ANZAC COTTAGE, Australia's first memorial built to honour those who served, suffered and died in the First World War. The target was to achieve this task prior to Anzac Day 97, this proved to be the most difficult and arduous project we as an association have undertaken in our states history.

A successful grant for \$53,000 from the WA Lotteries Commission enabled the completion of stage one. A conservation plan had to be completed prior to any work commencing. This was achieved with enormous help from Mrs Laura Gray a conservation professional, the plan was submitted to the WA Heritage Council for there approval, once granted, it was all systems go. To cut a very long story short, we achieved our goal, the Cottage was officially opened by His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC MC, Governor of Western Australia on the 20th April 97 before a crowd of approx 400, include; Dignitaries, Veterans, Residents and Workers.

ANZAC COTTAGE will become the State Headquarters of the VVAA, we should be moved in by or just after National Congress.

We have maintained representation on various committees' with DVA these include, WATMOC, Joint Ventures, Age Care Task Force, Children's Education, DVA Radio Talk Back on 6PR as well as ESO representation Unit and Kindred Assoc, AVADSC, TIP etc.

WATMOC has proved to be a very important tool in monitoring the Hospital system. It was interesting to note at the last meeting, statistics showed that Hollywood was operating at full strength unlike our state system. This can be directly attributed to the high usage by the Veteran community, statistics showing 92%. This has meant that Hollywood does not have to canvas for private patients outside the DVA client base.

HONOUR THE DEAD BUT FIGHT LIKE HELL FOR THE LIVING

Opening of Hollywood Clinic. Hollywood Private Hospital officially opened the new 30 bed psychiatric ward (Hollywood Clinic) on 22nd April 97. His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC MC Governor of Western Australia unveiled the plaque and addressed all present, explaining the importance of the clinic and the need for Vietnam Veterans to have such a highly professional facility. Following the opening, all were taken on tour of the wards, my only concern is that once admitted, getting the vets out may be difficult. All rooms are single bed with Ensuite and access to the garden area via a personal glass door. The surrounds are first class and an indication of the excellence the Ramsay Health Care Group have been delivering, it compares to 5 star accommodation. The new extension cost approx \$2M. The PTSD program run at Hollywood has received high praise from all who have attended the in-patient course. DVA and the National PTSD Centre has praised the Hollywood Clinic for their outstanding achievement with the program.

ANZAC DAY an extremely long day up at 3.30am, dawn service at the State War Memorial 5.15am, concluding at 6.45. Approx 8,000 present, the majority being young families which is pleasing to see. A quick trip through the pleasant surroundings of Kings Park to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial our own Dawn service at 7.30, with approx 100 in attendance. A simple solemn service and wreath laying was held, followed by a bar b que breakfast then down to the march assembly area in the city, approx attendance 600 behind the VVAA banner,. After the march we were invited by Peter Northwood [proprietor, VVAA member] to the Forrest Centre Tavern the afternoon was topped off by live bands one playing bush ballads the other 60's music which kept everyone entertained. The highlight of the afternoon was a Sunset Service at ANZAC COTTAGE. This is the final Service held in Australia on Anzac Day, it has been a tradition to hold a service at the Cottage since its inception. We continued this tradition from take over in 1991 at first in the morning, however, we found that the schedule did not allow sufficient time with an already busy morning, therefore, last year we decided to hold the service at sunset, attendances by the local community and Veterans increased from 30 at the dawn service 1995 to 250 at the sunset service. To finish off an action packed day, was to attend as special guests, the inaugural Len Hall Football Game between The Dockers and St Kilda (Dockers won) it was a special treat arriving home at 11.00pm. The day was long but an enjoyable one.

Although our membership has tended to stagnate, we are trying to rectify the problem. This year we mailed over 900 reminder letters to prompt our members of the importance of this Association and the excellent work performed by both State and National, and to try to entice some of our past members back into the fold.

With the AGM just around the corner we are scouring the country side for new committce members. We have been very light on the ground this past year, which has placed a burden on the remaining committee. Recently our secretary resigned due to ill health, this is a common problem we all face as our membership is getting older and unfortunately their health is failing. One problem we are witnessing, is the amount of apathy within the veteran community, "someone else will do the work". We understand this is a problem faced by all states, all we can do is hang in and work together.

Rob Cox State President

QUEENSLAND REPORT

We have had a very harmonious year with the end result that the complete State Executive were returned unopposed for a further 12 months.

MEMBERSHIP. Our membership is still increasing however very slowly at this time. On the down side one of our sub branches, Fraser Coast has closed their doors but we are still working on that problem. All our meetings have been reasonably well attended with more than 50% of sub branches being represented at the meetings. We are still continuing to conduct our meetings in sub branch locations. Simple recruiting campaign: Every member recruit one new member per year: Membership doubles every year.

PENSIONS. Our Pension Officer/ Advocate team is still increasing as is the number of Vets seeking help. We have been very fortunate in that we now have a Brisbane CBD address. We were asked by the RSL if we would like to share their new office with them. We gladly accepted. Our pension team across the state has increased by about 25% in the last 12 months. Some areas are still not well serviced but we are working on that. The majority of our Claims still appear to be for Cancers, PTSD and Alcohol Abuse, and related disabilities. Our Brisbane Office address is 14th Floor, 295 Ann Street directly opposite Central Railway Station and next door to Anzac Square. Our Telephone number is (07) 3221 0622.

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY. Vietnam Veterans Day was very successful right across Qld with record numbers attending parades in all centres. In Brisbane we had approx. 500 to 600 attend. It is obvious to me that with this number attending, Vietnam Veterans Day is here to stay. It is very obvious that the acceptance of the Vietnam Veteran is increasing here in Qld.

ACCEPTANCE. Over the last couple of years we have had the Pine Rivers, Redcliffe and Caboolture Shires come to the party with assistance in developing memorials within their shires. Pine Rivers Shire Council, in conjunction with our Brisbane North Sub branch, is still working on developing a Pension Officer and Advocates centre within the shire (Black Duck Creek)

AWARDS. In the last year we have had one of our Pension team, Mr Peter Henssler from the Sunshine Coast recognised by DVA for excellent work in relation to welfare for Veterans and their families over the last 11 years and also Mr Ray De Vere and Mr Bill Atherton granted State Life Membership for their involvement with the Association over many years.

CONGRESS 1997. We would like to take this opportunity to thank National for allowing us to conduct this year's National Congress. I would also like to thank one of my Vice Presidents, Mrs Glenn Arentz for the work that she has done in ensuring that the congress runs smoothly. I am sure that from what I have seen, the congress should be a successful one and trust that you enjoy what Qld has to offer.

CHEMICAL. We have appointed Frank Benfield as our assistant Welfare Officer and our State Chemical Representative. He has had quite a lot of dealings in this area and is currently involved in finding out more about the Dapsone Problem, which seems to have been conveniently swept under the carpet. This is a new appointment as from March this year.

COMMITTEES. During the last year we have been represented on the following committees:

- a. QMOC,
- b. Joint Venture,
- c. DVA State Health Planning committee,
- d. TIP, our representative is also on the Training Sub committee and also a TIP Presenter with another of our members joining this year, and
- e. Emergency Accommodation Centres (EAC) Committee for Angus House in Brisbane and Zac's Place in Townsville.

We also have two Hospital Liaison Officers, one at Greenslopes Private and the other at Buderim Private Hospitals.

FUNDRAISING. At State level we have conducted only one fundraising activity over the last year and that was a charity bowls day (lawn bowls). This was conducted at Deception Bay Bowls

Club with approx. 80 bowlers and non bowlers taking part. Everyone commented on the success of the day with about \$567.00 being raised for State Welfare. This will almost certainly become an annual event. Both Brisbane North and Redcliffe Peninsula Sub branches are also holding charity bowls days for their Sub branches. Other fundraising activities held by sub branches have been raffles, sausage sizzle, flea markets, memorabilia displays, merchandising and art unions.

O GROUP. After an absence of about three years we have been successful in producing our State Newsletter once again. The first edition was published in March this year with the next one being published in June so as to include a report from the National Congress. So far, these editions have not cost the state or sub branches a cent as they have been paid for by advertising. The first edition was a bit rough, however, I am sure that the next one will be a lot better.

VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Tasmania Branch Incorporated

1997 National Congress

Tasmania State Report

The last year has been bedlam for the branch with the reunion and attendance at meetings with DVA and representations to DVA by Pension officers and Advocates on behalf of members of our veteran community.

It was disappointing to see that the Family Reunion left such a shortfall after a lot of hard work by members of the Association. Quite frankly the whole show was taken over by commercial interests at the finish with little effort directed towards the interest of the Vietnam Veteran Community. One thing I can say is that the reports emanating from the Seminar and Workshop areas were all positive and I believe well worth doing. Quite frankly the whole show was taken over by commercial interests at the finish with little effort directed towards the interests of the Vietnam Veteran community. One thing I can say is that reports emanating from Seminar and Workshop areas were all positive and I believe well worth the exercise. As you have probably heard the Reunion Association has been refused additional funding to cover the shortfall by the Minister and an application has been made to the courts to wind the organisation up.

Pension and Advocacy work has been our main focus this year. There were a lot of "First Timers" and unfortunately some veterans are suffering from extreme poor health and nearly left it to late .

It is pleasing to me to see the further development of the Younger Veterans Consultative Group and the Veteran Support Groups. The formation and fostering of these groups has seen many doors open for the benefit of our community. We encourage those who are not involved to do so. The involvement our wives and/or partners in these groups has made the department conscious of the fact we are a family/community and not just veterans. An statewide needs analysis is being put together to identify potential problems. Thank to all those families who have participated.

There have been many changes within the DVA for the betterment of our community. The barriers no longer exist. The interaction with Senior Executive of the DVA and our Association has never been better.

A grant of \$9,000 via Joint Ventures Scheme has seen extensive renovations being carried out at the Memorial Bush retreat. The work involved upgrading to allow the facility to be used by those of community who are severely disabled.

Anzac day services were well represented by all Sub-branches in their respective areas marching with their banners.

Cheers,

David Moles DFM
State President



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HONOUR THE DEAD AND FIGHT LIKE HELL FOR THE LIVING

Annual Report - VVAA ACT Branch

General

A quiet year, with the emphasis on consolidation and building. Focus on increasing capacity to provide welfare, advocacy and pensions assistance. Maintenance of our high profile which combines with a high level of acceptance within the general community.

Pensions and advocacy

Bert Hagel has continued to build on the base of ethics and professionalism which he established very early on. Further pensions officers are being trained, with another volunteer to come on line soon.

Bert operates out of the VVCS at present, but we are hoping to be able to establish our own premises soon.

Clients include Vietnam veterans, WWII and all the intervening conflicts, and an increasing number are claiming dissatisfaction with the level of service and attitude of R&SL pensions officers in the ACT. There has been a very high initial success rate.

Claims Assistance Grants Scheme

We seem to have made some fundamental errors here, and are still trying to determine exactly what the lessons are. The R&SL which is providing an increasingly lower level of assistance were granted \$30K in the first round, and the VVAA claim for \$9.5K was slipped to the second round and its real fate is still unknown at the timing of writing this report.

This is a particularly bitter pill to swallow, given the number of veterans who claim not to have been helped by the R&SL.

continued next page

Annual Report - VVAA ACT Branch, continued

Membership

Membership remains relatively stable, with the number of new members roughly balancing the number who have left Canberra this year. A more concerted recruitment drive will take place later this year, focussed on Vietnam Veterans' Day.

In comparison with other States, the ACT seems to have more members who are still in full time employment. They are also generally less likely to be receiving a DVA pension. Unfortunately this seems to be the profile of the member that doesn't have a great deal of time to devote to the Association.

Having said that, the stalwarts who have been the greatest support to the ACT Branch this year and in years past represent both extremes. It would be good to have a few more of them.

Vietnam veterans day

Vietnam Veterans' Day remains the highlight of the year. In the absence of the President at Launceston, Stuart Weller took charge of the ceremony this year. It included a reading of the names of all the fallen by veterans, relatives, friends and school children. As well as the Principal Army Chaplain, there was a short prayer by the Venerable Thich Quang Ba, Abbot of the Sakyamuni Vietnamese Buddhist Temple.

National Service Association

The VVAA has supported the establishment of a branch of the National Service Association in the ACT, providing both information and administrative support for the new Branch.

This has paid off in a number of ways, including new members and access to a new group of younger members of the ex-Service community.

Fund-raising

A major raffle conducted during the last part of 1996 and the early part of 1997 raised some \$8,000 for the Branch, most of which will be used to offset the outstanding debt in relation to the legal issues from two years ago. Again, it was due to the work of a few that the result was as good as it turned out.

Table Tennis Association

The ACT Table Tennis Association of the ACT has received funding for activities focussed on the Vietnam veterans, and the first round should be complete by the time of the National Congress.

Continued on next page

Annual Report - VVAA ACT Branch, continued

Partner's Support Group

The Partner's Support Group is now firmly established in the ACT. It meets once a month and provides a forum for partners to exchange experiences, introduce ideas for coping and learn what facilities and support are available. There is still scope for expansion here.
