



DEBRIEF

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**COVER STORY: KARRAKTTA WAR CEMETERY—
PUBLIC LOCKED OUT!**

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

For me, it always seems odd to commence this edition of Debrief by expressing my best wishes to members and their families, and to all veterans, for the New Year, in this case for 2025, when it has commenced, and with a rush. But, Happy New Year.

Part of the “rush” phenomena this year is, of course, the release in December 2024 of the Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

I think that the Government has done well in this regard, not only in providing its overall Response timely, but in its reasonably clear and detailed responses and commitments to the 122 Recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The significant majority of the Recommendations relate to Defence and the ADF but there are also some of more direct relevance to Vietnam veterans and members of this association. These include Recommendations 72, 73, 75 and 78, which can affect Open Arms, and Recommendations 80, 81 and 87 which propose new roles for DVA and may impact upon Open Arms. We will be paying close attention to these recommendations as they are addressed during the year.

We are pleased with Recommendation 95, a positive response by the RC to our submission for a move to greater recognition of “presumptive liabilities” in the claims process.

Similarly, we support Recommendation 99, which relates to paid advocates being funded by the government. In this case we are also of the view that BEST funding of services provided by ESOs should continue and we will be pursuing both objectives as they are not exclusive, but are complementary.

We have noted Recommendation 89, “Establish a national peak body for ESOs” but doubt if such a “one-size fits all” approach can be practical for such a diverse range of uniformed employees, especially to be able to respond in an equitable, timely and cost-effective manner. We look forward to further discussions with DVA and other ESOs on this matter.

Over the next weeks these Royal Commission recommendations, (and others as deemed necessary), will be considered by your National Executive and Council.

The Minister’s National Advisory Committee (NAC) for Open Arms is meeting in Perth on 4 and 5 March 2025.

Open Arms remains a major focus for your Association and we have been concerned recently over some employment issues related to the government’s decision to cancel labour hire contracts and the effect that this may have on OA employees. Some “smoke” has been generated around these issues but is slowly being blown away as government-wide employment policies are explained. The NAC will consider this matter further, along with other matters related to this vital service.

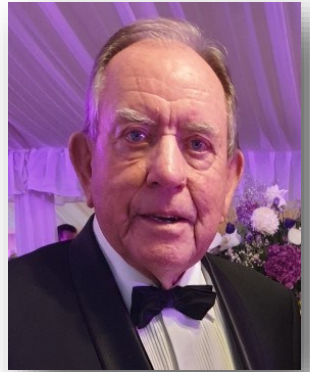
Finally, I wish to note that “the changing of the guard” has occurred in the WA Branch of this Association and Richard Williams OAM has retired as the President of the WA Branch of the VVAA, replaced by David Cockram who has served the Association well in the past as a member of the Open Arms National Advisory Committee.

I understand that Richard was first appointed to the WA Committee in 1998 and was elected State President of the WA Branch in February 2008. Well done Richard!!

Best regards to all

Max Ball

National President



COVER STORY

THE GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE KARRAKATTA WA

Members and readers may be curious about the front cover of this edition of Debrief, or, perhaps, alarmed?

The cover photographs are images of the Garden of Remembrance at Karrakatta, part of the Perth War Cemetery in Western Australia.

The Garden has been in this condition since at least August 2024. Clearly, some of the walls which contain plaques of deceased veterans are in danger of falling over.

Readers may ask why has this situation been like this for so many months without remediation?

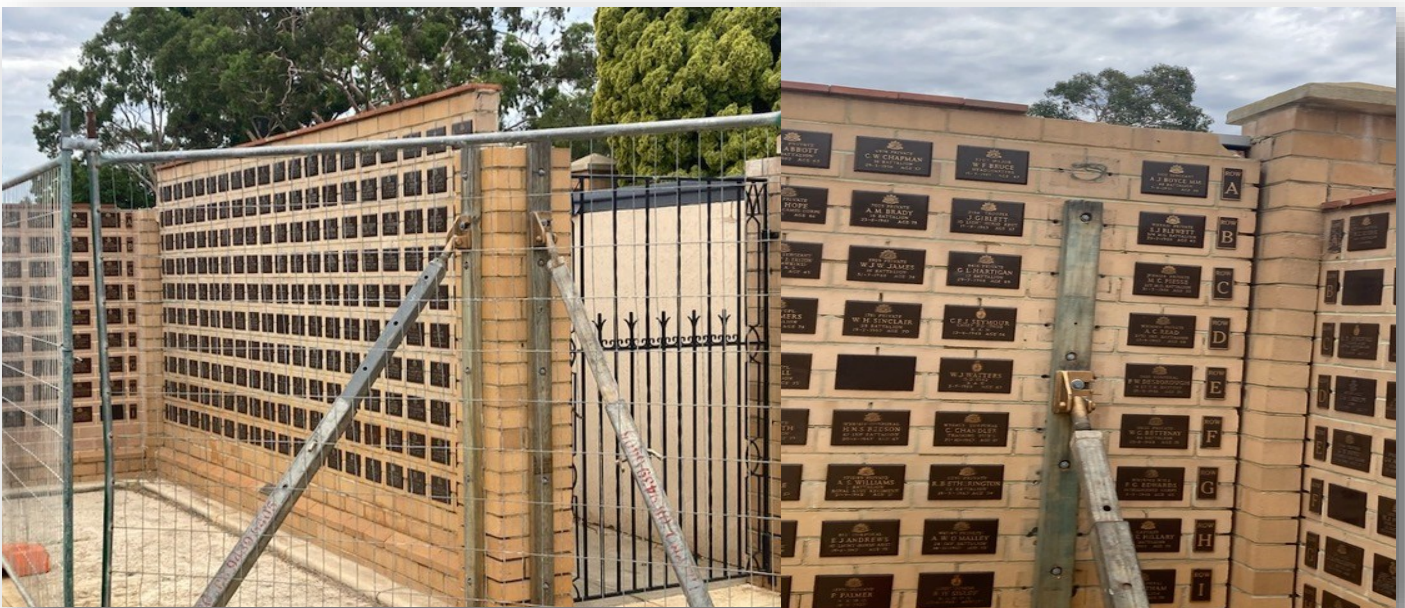
Unofficial advice received is that there are no funds in the budget for the necessary work. That may be so, but we suggest it is only so if there is no will by the appropriate authority to resolve the problem.

The latest advice is that a “Project Director” has been appointed recently. We are hoping that further advice will be forthcoming soon and we will keep members informed.

Response below is attributed to the **Minister for Veterans’ Affairs Matt Keogh** -

Gardens of Remembrance across the country play an important role in commemorating the service and sacrifice of those who have served our nation in uniform, providing a reflective place for families and future generations to remember those who have passed.

I’m deeply concerned about the condition of the walls in the Gardens of Remembrance in Karrakatta and elsewhere in the country and am working with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to establish a fix as quickly as possible.



“We note that due to structural reasons there is also limited access by the public to Gardens in South Australia and Hobart. We look forward to advice when these works may be completed.”

*Photos supplied by: Peter Heeney
Vietnam Veteran*

DVA—LEGISLATIVE REFORM

From: LEGISLATION.REFORM [<mailto:LEGISLATION.REFORM@dva.gov.au>]
Sent: Monday, 24 February 2025 8:21 AM
Subject: Veterans' legislation reform [SEC=OFFICIAL]

I am writing to provide you with an update on veterans' legislation reform, as you or your organisation have previously contributed to the consultation process or requested updates.

Parliament passed the *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* on 13 February 2025. The Act is the result of extensive consultation over the last three years and responds to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Interim report.

What will change?

From 1 July 2026, the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) and *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related claims) Act 1988* (DRCA) will close to new compensation claims and DVA will consider claims after that date under an improved *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA).

The VETS Act also establishes the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission; the independent oversight body recommended by the Royal Commission in its Final Report.

What will not change?

Importantly, the VETS Act does not change the existing arrangements for income support payments such as the Energy Supplement (ES), income Support Supplement (ISS), Service Pension (SP). Veterans with Qualifying Service will also continue to be eligible for the Gold Card at age 70. Existing Disability Compensation Payments will not be affected and will continue uninterrupted under the grandparenting arrangements.

Benefits of the new system

The changes will create a simpler system, making it easier for veterans and families to understand their entitlements and receive the support they need, when they need it. Consolidating the legislation into one Act will also provide greater accessibility to rehabilitation and compensation entitlements and benefit veterans and families over time through claims being processed in a consistent and timely way.

Previously determined claims, except those relating to incapacity, will be grand parented under the Act they were approved under, so these changes will have no effect on your current payments. Veterans receiving incapacity payments will automatically transition to MRCA incapacity payments on the date of commencement. Information regarding transfer to MRCA incapacity payments can be found [Here](#).

Most changes will not occur until 1 July 2026. This will allow veterans, families, and advocates time to familiarise themselves with the new system.

Where do I find out more?

A range of resources and scenarios can be found on the [Legislation Reform](#) pages on the DVA website (www.dva.gov.au). You may also wish to seek the advice of a compensation claims advocate.

You can keep updated via our website and social media. If you're not online, our hard-copy (and digital) newspaper [Vetaffairs](#) will keep you informed. You can subscribe to *e-news* or *Vetaffairs* on the [subscriptions page of the DVA website](#) (www.dva.gov.au/vetaffairs-and-eneews-subscriptions).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to the consultation process over the last few years.

Yours sincerely,

Legislative Reform Branch
Policy Division
Department of Veterans' Affairs www.dva.gov.au

MINISTER MATTERS



**THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL**

MEDIA RELEASE

4 March 2025

FUNDING NOW AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT VETERAN ADVOCACY

Ex-service organisations (ESOs) can now apply for a share in over \$4.8 million through the Albanese Government's Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Grants Program.

This funding will help ESOs to advocate for veterans and their families as well as assist with their entitlements and compensation claims.

The Program is part of our commitment to ensuring veterans have easy access to qualified advocates who can work with them to navigate the claims process, and receive the support they need faster.

Funding delivered through the BEST grants program can be used by ESOs for staff salaries as well as administrative costs associated with the delivery of advocacy services, such as purchasing office equipment and domestic travel.

This program follows the passage of the VETS Act to simplify and harmonise Australia's veteran compensation system, making it faster and easier to understand for veterans, families and advocates.

Applications for the 2025-26 BEST Grants round are open now, and will close at 9.00 pm AEDT on 28 April 2025. For more information about the program, including information on how to apply, visit the [Grants website](#).

MEDIA CONTACT: DVA Media: media.team@dva.gov.au

MEDIA NOTE: Learn more about the BEST Grants Program on the DVA [website](#).

**THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL
JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

21 February 2025

VETERANS' MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Ministers responsible for veterans' issues at the Federal, State and Territory levels met today to discuss key priorities and next steps following the Government's response to Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

In December 2024 the Government responded to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's final report. Recommendation 122 of the report recommended the establishment of an independent body that would oversee system reform across the defence ecosystem.

Noting the urgency of this recommendation, the Australian Parliament passed the historic *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2024* (the VETS Act), establishing the Commission on 13 February 2025.

In January the Albanese Government appointed Mr Michael Manthorpe PSM to the role of Interim Head of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission and today Mr Manthorpe briefed Ministers on its work.

Ministers reinforced their commitment to collaborate across the Commonwealth on the implementation of relevant recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Legislation Reform

Following the Parliament's recent passing of the VETS Act, the Council was advised that the Department of Veterans' Affairs is now working towards implementation. It has developed a communication and education plan, including a roadshow commencing next week, to make the veteran community aware of the changes and how they might be impacted when the Act takes effect as follows:

- New unified appeal process using the Veterans' Review Board from 21 April 2025;
- Statutory Defence & Veteran Service Commission from 29 September 2025; and
- All claims being processed through a single enhanced statutory regime from 1 July 2026.

Veterans' Acute Housing Program

Ministers were briefed on the \$30 million in grant funding recently awarded by the Australian Government under the Capital Works Grant and Specialist Services Grant streams of the Veterans' Acute Housing Program. A total of 8 grants were awarded under the \$24 million Capital Works Grant for the construction or purchase of crisis and transitional housing for veterans and families. A further 5 grants were awarded under the \$6 million Specialist Services Grant to assist organisations to deliver wrap-around services to address the risk factors for homelessness. Ministers welcomed the funding to assist those in the veteran community who are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness.

Ministerial attendees

- *Australian Government (Chair): The Hon Matt Keogh MP*
- *Australian Capital Territory: Suzanne Orr MLA*
- *New South Wales: The Hon David Harris MP*
- *Northern Territory: The Hon Jinson Charls MLA*
- *Queensland: Janelle Poole MP*
- *South Australia: The Hon Joe Szakacs MP*
- *Tasmania: The Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP*
- *Victoria: The Hon Natalie Suleyman MP*
- *Western Australia: Due to the WA State election, WA was represented by officials.*

Media contacts: media.team@dva.gov.au

MINISTER MATTERS



THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

21 FEBRUARY 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

WORKS COMMENCE AT GREENSLOPES, PAVING THE WAY FOR NEW LEGACY HOUSE

A brand new Legacy House in Brisbane's south is one step closer, with construction now underway at the former Australian Red Cross Centre site in Greenslopes.

Legacy House, right next door to Greenslopes Private Hospital, will be home to Legacy Queensland and will feature a Hub for both veterans and families, as they continue their mission of supporting the whole family unit.

The Albanese Government's \$1.5 million investment in Legacy House demonstrates how seriously we take supporting the whole family unit in order to better connect veterans to the assistance they need, when they need it.

It's fantastic to see this project kick off following significant remediation of the site over the last few years.

Legacy House will complement our Veterans' and Families' Hub network, with a more holistic approach to veteran and family care, connecting medical and mental health services with advocacy and community supports in a coordinated way.

The Greenslopes site is of great military significance, previously home to the Australian Red Cross Centre as they provided critical support to countless veterans' and their families after the Second World War.

This important history will be celebrated by preserving some architectural features into the design of Legacy House.

I'm so glad we've been able to ensure the significance of this historic site continues, working with the Queensland State Government, Brisbane City council and many generous businesses and individuals from across Queensland.

MEDIA CONTACT:

DVA Media: media.team@dva.gov.au

MINISTER MATTERS



THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

MEDIA RELEASE

19 FEBRUARY 2025

RECOGNITION AND RESPECT AT THEIR FINAL RESTING PLACE

For more than a century Australians have worked tirelessly to commemorate the stories of those who have served our nation, and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Around 270,000 Australians returned home after serving in the First World War. Many were later laid to rest without a grave marker that declared their service.

The Albanese Government can today announce almost \$107,000 in funding has been allocated to nine organisations to mark the graves of 182 First World War veterans under the 2024-25 round of the Marking (First World War) Private Graves Grants Program.

The program was developed to ensure First World War veterans who lie in 'unmarked' graves receive the respect and recognition that they deserve.

Successful applicants will receive a one-off funding contribution of up to \$620 per grave to install a commemoration, such as a new plaque or grave marker, to recognise First World War service personnel who returned home and passed away of causes unrelated to their war service.

These commemorations honour the service and sacrifice of First World War veterans in their final resting place.

It is an honour to support the work of groups and individuals across Australia who are committed to ensuring the bravery and sacrifice of our nation's First World War veterans is remembered—and that their legacy endures.

Through this round of the Marking (First World War) Private Graves Grants Program, an additional 143 veterans were deemed eligible for official War Grave status and commemoration by the Repatriation Commission. Their service will be recognised with a Commonwealth War Grave commemoration installed at the site of interment, paid for and maintained in perpetuity by the Australian Government.

MEDIA CONTACT: DVA Media: media.team@dva.gov.au

See next page for the full list of grant recipients:

Continued page 9

MINISTER MATTERS

Continued from page x

Grantee	State	Cemetery	Number of private grave markers	Funding approved
Forgotten Diggers Inc	NSW	Goulburn General Cemetery	1	\$620
		Macquarie Park Cemetery	1	\$620
		Sandgate Cemetery	18	\$11,160
		Woronora Memorial Park	1	\$620
Individual grantee	NSW	Casino Lawn Cemetery	1	\$620
Australian Remembrance Army	QLD	Lutwyche Cemetery	84	\$46,864
Individual grantee	QLD	Gympie Cemetery	1	\$620
Longreach Archival & Historical Research Group Inc	QLD	Longreach Cemetery	2	\$594.90
Friends of Toowong Cemetery	QLD	Toowong Cemetery	42	\$26,040
The Headstone Project (SA) Inc	SA	Kadina Cemetery	2	\$1,240
		Wallaroo Cemetery	1	\$620
		Peterborough Cemetery	6	\$3,720
		Balaklava Cemetery	1	\$620
		Kersbrook Cemetery	1	\$620
		Tailem Bend Cemetery	1	\$620
		Macclesfield Cemetery	1	\$620
		Hawker Cemetery	1	\$620
		Coromandel Valley Cemetery	1	\$620
		Caltowie Cemetery	1	\$620
		Currency Creek Cemetery	1	\$620
		Terowie Cemetery	1	\$620
		Clare Cemetery	2	\$1,240
		Quorn Cemetery	1	\$620
The Headstone Project (TAS) Inc	TAS	Queenstown Lyell	7	\$4,340
The Headstone Project Victoria Inc	VIC	Queenscliff Cemetery	2	\$1,240
		Warringal Cemetery	1	\$620
		Total	182	\$106,978.90

MINISTER MATTERS

OFFICIAL



THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

MEDIA RELEASE

14 February 2025

A NATION'S APPRECIATION

Today, on National Servicemen's Day, Australia honours the thousands of men who served as National Servicemen, or "Nashos".

Whether stationed at home or deployed overseas to locations including Borneo, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam and Korea, Nashos played a vital role in protecting the nation.

They put their lives on hold, and on the line, to bolster Australia's defence.

Between 1951 and 1972, more than 280,000 Australians participated in two National Service Schemes. In the 1950s Scheme, some 33,000 men were called up for annual training at 18 years old. In the 1964-1972 Scheme, more than 804,000 men registered and more than 63,000 were called up to serve through a birthday ballot.

More than 15,000 Nashos served in the Vietnam War, where some 200 lost their lives and more than 1,200 were wounded.

All national servicemen, even if they weren't deployed, are entitled to a White Card from the Department of Veterans' Affairs that includes mental health support.

The passage of the Veterans Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Harmonisation and Simplification) Bill 2024 through Parliament on 13 February means that all claims lodged by National Servicemen on or after 1 July 2026 would be investigated and determined under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*. This could result in up to 45,000 National Servicemen becoming eligible for benefits such as Gold Cards, Special Rate Disability Pension, and access the Veterans' Review Board, which has not been available to them under previous legislation.

Today we honour all Nashos and pay tribute to those who lost their lives. We owe them all a debt of gratitude for their service to the nation.

MEDIA CONTACT:

DVA Media: media.team@dva.gov.au

INVITATION TO MAKE SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO COMPENSATION AND INCOME SUP- PORT FOR VETERANS

THE SENATE Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References committee

By email: president@vvaa.org.au

Cc: office@vvaavic.org.au

27 February 2025

I am writing to invite you to make a submission to this inquiry. The committee is seeking submissions from interested individuals and organisations by **16 May 2025**.

On 13 February 2025 the Senate referred an inquiry into Compensation and income support for veterans to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by 5 August 2025.

The terms of reference for this inquiry can be found at: [Terms of Reference – Parliament of Australia](#)

How to make a submission

If this is your first time submitting online to an inquiry, you will need to create a [My Parliament](#) account. Once you have created an account or logged into your existing account, please read the [How to make a submission](#) page ensuring you have addressed either some or all of the terms of reference under consideration. Once you have drafted your submission, please use the 'Upload Submission' button on the [inquiry website](#) and follow the prompts to upload your submission. Alternatively, submissions can be emailed to fadt.sen@aph.gov.au or mailed to PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

It is important to note that submissions are accepted and made public only after a decision by the committee. The committee is not obliged to accept every document it receives as a submission. You must not release your submission until the committee advises that it has been accepted and published. Submissions that are accepted are protected by parliamentary privilege, but the unauthorised release of them is not.

The committee will normally make submissions public unless there is a request for confidentiality. If you would like a submission or part of it to be kept confidential, please say so clearly in the submission, along with your reason/s for preferring the submission to be kept confidential. You can also request that your submission be published with your name withheld.

The committee will sympathetically consider requests for confidentiality but cannot make promises in advance. If you have concerns about confidentiality, I encourage you to call the secretariat before lodging a submission.

Advice on making a submission is available from the [Parliament of Australia website](#), and the committee secretariat can also provide further guidance.

More information about this committee is available at: www.aph.gov.au/senate_fadt.

We look forward to receiving your views on this important matter.

Yours sincerely
Ms Pothida Youhorn
Committee Secretary

Continued page 12

INVITATION TO MAKE SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO COMPENSATION AND INCOME SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

Continued from page 11

president@vvaa.org.au

Fri Feb 28 2025 4:33PM

Dear All,

This call for submissions is very relevant to those Branches who receive BEST funding for their advocates but is also v important for all branches.

The current situation in the politics of advocacy is that, as you know, and based on our submissions to the department through ESORT, there has been a trial held now for some time in WA where DVA delegates and advocates sit down with a veteran and help the latter complete a claim form. The trial has been held with SASRA advocates and has been very successful.

Titled the Claims Lodgement Assistance Program, the department has now decided to extend this program to the other states. The proposal we put forward did NOT include the cessation of BEST funding and the role of volunteer advocates (some of whom are paid) via BEST funds, as we saw their need continuing. What we sought was a more co-operative effort between advocates and the department, with resources that include an ability by the department to extend Claims Assistance to remote or less populated areas.

My advice from DVA is that the acceptance rate of claims made with assistance from DVA delegates has been higher, hence the extension of the trial.

At ESORT some ESOs did not support this concept and argued against the proposal and trial on the basis that the current situation should continue because it was “good for the veteran advocates”. Our aim is to provide the best system for advocacy with the aim of having a higher rate of successful claims processed in a shorter time frame.

Some ESOs also want the use of professional services to assist making claims, such as lawyers, banned. That is a notion that is not supportable.

Recommendation 99 of the Royal Commission Final Report is that the government should replace BEST funding with an ongoing, demand driven funding program for professional, paid, veteran compensation advocates.

The government response to the Commission is to “agree in principle” with that recommendation and to note the current Claims Lodgement Program, which, as noted above, is now being extended. As BEST funding does more than fund advocates we will need to respond to that recommendation in another forum.

It is proposed that the VVAA make a submission to the FADT References Committee. An issue is that submissions are due with the Committee by Friday 16 May, the week of Congress/Council.

So, my proposal is that;

Firstly, this matter will be addressed at the Executive meeting to be held in Canberra on 12 March and,

Secondly, a final draft submission will be available for discussion and agreement at National Council on 14/15 May so as to meet the submission deadline.

Meanwhile your comments are sought, especially from Sam and Bob.

Best regards,

Max

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – **The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:** **Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation**

“One of the most important aspects of the study of history is to understand the context in which a given set of events occurred.”

Jeffrey Grey, in Zombie Myths of Australian Military History

Previous articles surveyed the extraordinary range of pointers in the late 1970s and early 1980 to wartime chemical exposure as the cause of existent or anticipated health issues for Vietnam veterans and their families. In a period in which there was no reputable public science directly connecting such exposure to those health problems, these pointers had the potential to motivate veterans to act in various ways, including to call for investigations and compensation. The pointers don't, though, explain why veterans felt the need to establish and support an organisation of their own.

That Vietnam veterans would organise in some manner to press the Federal Government to respond to their health concerns was, in a sense, no surprise. It was the Federal Government which had sent them to war, and organising was the longstanding way in which veterans (and community elements at large) pursued their goals. It's what Australian veterans had traditionally done for purposes ranging from the conduct of social and commemorative gatherings to the influencing of Government policy on repatriation, defence and social issues; it was what they had done between the World Wars to oppose Australian communism. The surprising number of Australian Ex-Service Organisation (ESOs) above the unit level which existed by the early 1980s speaks to the organising effort of veterans and the preparedness of individuals to join and support multiple organisations.

It makes sense that war veterans, in particular, thought it appropriate to organise, bearing in mind their training and deployment in groups, and their shared wartime and post-war experiences. The tendency for retired senior officers to fill the executive positions in ESOs said much about the comfort of generations of veterans with service-replicating groups (and, perhaps, about the altruism and relevance-deprivation of those senior officers).

Organising also facilitated the delivery of welfare assistance to struggling veterans, war widows and war orphans; there was a long history of organising for charitable and self-help purposes in Anglo-centric cultures. Organising for these purposes met with strong societal approval, as demonstrated by the number of citizens traditionally recognised in honours lists for service to charitable and community organisations, including veterans' bodies.

More importantly, though, organising was consistent with the message peddled by umbrella ESOs that any assistance provided by Governments to veterans was 'hard won' and needed to be protected from grasping bureaucrats, forgetful politicians and ungrateful fellow citizens. Governments. According to this argument – one reminiscent of the 'protecting working conditions' *raison d'être* advanced by Australian trade unions – it was only through strength of numbers and the application of collective pressure that Government assistance to deserving war veterans would be maintained, let alone expanded. The reporting by ESOs on the (alleged) success of their various activities – and particularly reporting by the RSL on the reputed success of its lobbying of the Federal Government – seemed to confirm to Australian veterans the link between organising and the continuance of repatriation benefits. This was so, even if scrutiny of Federal Government responses to RSL representations in the 1970s shows that the League enjoyed only modest influencing success in that period and consequently had little reason to claim a “special relationship” with the Federal Government. (The League would not have been the first public organisation In Aus-

Continued page 14

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:

Continued from page 13

tralian history to have mistaken consultation and social contact for the exercising of influence.)

Organising, too, had historically provided many ex-servicemen – whether incapable of full-time employment or retired from the services/work – with a sense of purpose. The administrative talent and capacity existent in the ex-service community – and especially in ex-regulars who'd done their time and were thereafter under-employed or unemployed – was of huge benefit to community organisations. ESOs were also important outlets for this pent-up capacity; veterans at large benefited enormously from the efforts of a sub-set of their colleagues.

In addition, the way in which repatriation benefits were historically administered in Australia – through a Federal Government agency juggling the demands of veterans' support, appropriate use of public funds and budget constraints – necessitated various sorts of advocacy and lobbying activities; the existence of organisations able to perform those functions was consequently encouraged. The inclusion of ex-servicemen in the senior management of the repatriation agency (as Commissioners or Deputy Commissioners) and the presence of ex-service representatives on appeal bodies – in both cases to allay fears that the repatriation system was operated by individuals without experience of military service – might also be said to have justified the existence of ESOs; veterans organisations were to varying degrees consulted about Commission senior appointments and were invited to nominate tribunal members.

Moreover, the larger ESOs were also means by which the Government could conveniently disseminate information and receive feedback on proposed initiatives (even if, as the founding of the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service was to prove, the Government often enough considered private discussion with the RSL National President or sounding of the League's National Executive to be a convenient substitute for consultation with the broader ex-service community).

Most of these impetuses or rationales for organising were to some extent applicable to Vietnam veterans in very late 1979 and early 1980 when most State branches of the Vietnam Veterans Action Association were established. Most will be revisited later in this article.

For Vietnam veterans, though, there were additional cohort-specific rationales for coming together.

They included a not unreasonable view that the Coalition Government would need to be pressured into investigating chemical harms and compensating victims. Veterans came to this view having concluded that the Coalition, despite early placatory comments and undertakings, would be reluctant to acknowledge harms while ever it:

- (a) contained members who were representatives of agriculture-reliant electorates (highly dependent on defoliants and other chemicals);
- (b) included members who had been in office at the time of the 1978 and 1979 Federal inquiries clearing the key defoliants for domestic use;
- (c) identified itself as the party of business (including the manufacturers and retailers of chemicals);
- (d) included (and was headed by) Ministers from the war years; and
- (e) was intent on reducing Government expenditure (the publicly avowed budgetary goal of the Fraser Government) and was thus reluctant to provide support to chemical affected veterans and family members.

Continued page 15

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – **The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:** **Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation**

Continued from page 14

Vietnam veterans soon speculated, too, that the Government was unlikely to undermine its US counterpart's 'no liability' position on Vietnam chemical exposure.

The perceived need to apply pressure to the Federal Government appeared to be borne out by the initial refusal of Veterans' Affairs Minister, Evan Adermann, to conduct an external enquiry into chemical harms and then – after urging from veterans and the media – his reluctant agreement to a scientific investigation by a Government-funded arm of Sydney University ... but still not the judicial inquiry sought by the Association. The lesson thereby learnt, early in the establishment period, was that it was organisational pressure, backed up by the media, that pushed the Federal Government to take actions it wasn't keen to initiate.

Organising was justified also by a view that the Federal Government was not beyond covering up its negligence on the chemical exposure issue, bearing in mind the high potential cost of compensation for veterans and the implications of chemical bans for Australian agriculture/export income. This was a view encouraged again in the establishment period by the Government's initial refusal to set up an external inquiry etc

Various cover up or 'conspiracy of silence' accusations were made in the establishment period about Vietnam War exposure to chemicals. These were supported by allegations in the same period that the Australian Army (a) had been complicit in chemical cover-ups during the war (by telling servicemen that defoliant sprays were mere insecticide); and (b) had disguised the true death circumstances of a South Australian servicemen (who'd allegedly died from dehydration).

Adding to suspicions about a Vietnam chemical cover-up were recollections of Government handling of pre-Vietnam military chemical and radiation exposure allegations: handling characterised by denials and long-delayed admissions of responsibility (see the previous instalment in this series). Cover-up suspicions were ones already encouraged by a tradition of concealment/conspiracy allegations in media stories about the civilian use of defoliants; attentive readers will recall that there were cover-up claims about defoliant exposure in Cairns in the establishment period, as well as suppression claims regarding a report on NSW defoliant exposure. Other 1970s cover-up and whitewashing stories also contributed to a view that Government was well practiced at concealing things it didn't want revealed to citizens.

The fact that the Federal Government claimed during the establishment period that it had been "following" defoliant-related developments in the US for a number of years would have fuelled suspicions of a cover-up. Veterans could justifiably have wondered when, in the absence of agitation by the Action Association, the Government would, finally, have revealed that there was a potential problem with chemical exposure.

Governments, in appearing reluctant to admit to the exposure of servicemen to harmful substances in various conflicts, encouraged conspiracy theories about the 'burying' of those harms in contravention of Hanlon's Razer (which suggests that stupidity, not malice, is more often the explanation for wrongs). Whether dealing with a Government which had foolishly ignored the Vietnam chemical harms issue or one that had determinedly kept knowledge of those harms secret, it was thought that Vietnam veterans would need the power of numbers to bring about an investigation.

A cover-up on Vietnam war chemical harms would, of course, have seemed unsurprising to veterans who believed themselves to have been betrayed by Government in war and peace ie who believed:

Continued page 16

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association: Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation

Continued from page 15

- (a) that Australian military operations in Vietnam had been strategically limited by politicians and that more should have been done by the same politicians to restrain anti-war elements at home; and
- (b) that their service was inadequately recognised by the Federal Government (demonstrated by poor support for transition to civilian life and by inadequate or begrudging compensation for problems believed to be war caused).

Organising was justified, too, by the expectation that manufacturers of chemicals used in Vietnam and in the civilian sphere were, for commercial and legal reasons, unlikely to admit to any wrongdoing (and were unlikely, thereby, to encourage either restrictions on use or damages claims). Early in the establishment period US chemical manufacturers involved in Agent Orange legal action formally claimed that their Government's negligence had made it responsible for any harms resulting from wartime chemical exposure. Australian manufacturers of the same and similar chemicals would also not have wanted their products to be subject to bans or restrictions, as they had been elsewhere.

The lengths to which major chemical companies could go to avoid blame for harm caused by their products had been indicated in mid-1979 by a US expert who "charged the chemical industry with suppressing, manipulating and destroying vital data on the health risks of many toxic and cancer-causing substances." The same expert had further claimed the absence of a permanent ban on 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D was down to political and economic factors, rather than science.

The idea that businesses could place profits before safety and could knowingly supply a dangerous product was given particular credence before the establishment period by Australian media reports on litigation over the Ford Pinto petrol tank design flaw (which saw the tank explode on even low-speed rear impact and resulted in a series of fiery deaths in the US). In the establishment period further Pinto legal proceedings, following the August 1978 deaths of three teenage girls and the recall of the vehicle, were reported, with prominence being given to the fact that Ford knew of the fault and did nothing about it, despite the small cost of rectification. Ralph Nader's earlier exposure of deadly design faults in the General Motors Corvair might also have been recalled by Vietnam veterans. The placing of profits before safety was also a potential part of the defective product occurrences mentioned in an earlier article in this series, and was most notably exemplified by the thalidomide tragedy. It was further evidenced in smoking-related deaths and in Australian instances of chemical dumping.

At least in theory, Vietnam veterans who saw merit in organising for the group-specific reasons outlined above would have expected a subset of existing ESOs to not just be at the forefront of efforts to resolve the chemical issue, but to be potential 'hosts' for their groups. Yet sufficient numbers of Vietnam veterans in the majority of States and Territories chose to adopt the model advanced by Bernie Szapiel and Holt McMinn in mid-December 1979 and set up their own organisation(s).

Many Vietnam veterans had by late 1979 joined ex-service organisations performing widely varying functions and with differing memberships. Existent organisations, many able to be joined by Vietnam veterans, ranged from those operating at multiple levels (like the RSL and the Korea and South East Asia Forces Association (KSEAFSA) to those existing only at a local level (like the Geelong Veterans Association, said to have been founded in 1974). They ranged from those with multi-theatre of war memberships (like, once again, the RSL and the KSEAFSA) to ones which

Continued page 17

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – **The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:** **Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation**

Continued from page 17

were conflict-specific (like the Geelong Association, again) or engagement-specific (eg the Rats of Tobruk Association). They ranged, further, from ones which were service-specific (like the Naval Association) to ones that were disability-focussed (eg organisations for blind and partially blind servicemen). Veterans may also have been members of regimental and unit organisations. There was, within this wide range of groups, no shortage of ESOs to, in theory, pursue the matters of concern to Vietnam veterans, whether in support of their Vietnam veteran members or out of sympathy for the most recent cohort of returned men. However, a mix of factors made most of these organisations unlikely champions of Vietnam veterans troubled about the consequences of chemical exposure; some organisations were formally function-limited, while others were by inclination unlikely to take up a cause which saw them in conflict with a conservative Government or, perhaps, any Government.

Some veterans in the establishment period believed that the RSL was the entity best equipped to represent Vietnam veterans' interests in relation to chemical harms. The holding of early 1980 Vietnam veteran meetings on RSL premises to discuss the chemical issue and to formally establish branches of the Action Association doubtless reminded some veterans of the vastly greater resources and power the RSL could theoretically deploy in the chemical cause. And the League was not slow to use such meetings to absorb Vietnam veterans. It recruited new members at them in at least Melbourne and Perth, and prevented the establishment of an Action Association Branch in WA (see previous articles in this series). At least initially, too, prominent RSL figures seemed supportive of Vietnam veterans' calls for a chemical investigation and compensation ... even if the National President, Sir William Keys, was soon vacillating.

Other veterans, though, were less inclined to place their faith in the RSL. Many would have recalled the unwelcoming reception they'd received in RSL clubs during and after the war (something that could only, in due course, bring Vietnam men together) and would have concluded that the League (which, admittedly, did not run the clubs) would consequently be unconcerned about their later welfare. Some veterans may also have recalled the League's enthusiasm for conscription and the war, and may have deduced that it wouldn't be keen to accept its share of the blame for placing servicemen in the way of chemical harms. (Interestingly, none of the veterans the author has interviewed recalled RSL actions before 1980 which might have offset a negative impression of the organisation; they didn't, for example, recall RSL opposition to anti-war elements during the war, the funding of war-time recreational amenities in Vietnam, the League's war-time gift program or any RSL advocacy during the war for improved service and post-service conditions. Just as importantly, none recalled RSL support for Vietnam veterans at the State and National levels during the 1970s – despite the matters listed at Appendix 1 (available from the author) – or assistance from RSL sub-branches to assist them in that decade.) Some Vietnam veterans may also have recalled the RSL President's report to the 1974 National Congress in which he indicated that, further to the repatriation changes introduced by the Whitlam Government, the League's job was largely done; this would not have encouraged a view among Vietnam veterans that the organisation would be inclined to wage a campaign for recognition of emergent health issues for their relatively small cohort.

The historical lack of useful action by the RSL on the defoliant issue would, in particular, have made some veterans pessimistic about the prospects of substantial RSL action in early 1980. Veterans outside WA would not, it's true, have known about the WA RSL's failure to make the promised July 1979 defoliant submission to the National Executive. Similarly, the failed oppor-

Continued page 18

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association: Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation

Continued from page 17

tunity to properly investigate the impact of chemicals after Justice Toose's 1972 questions about a defoliant/cancer link may not have been widely recalled 8 years later ... and may, in any event, have been excused on the basis that US concerns were yet to emerge. However, the failure of League National President, Sir William Keys, to act in a substantial way on Bernie Szapiel's request for help in March of 1979 was something veterans were reminded of in late 1979/early 1980. Some veterans may have recalled, too, the lack of any public RSL reaction to the brief resurgence of media interest in the Vietnam chemical issue in late May 1979. And within the establishment period Keys' changing position – in effect the League National Executive's changing position, because Keys dominated that body – morphed from support for the Action Association's goals to support dependent on a proven link between chemicals and harms – a retreat well covered in the media.

Any pessimism about the League's ongoing interest in veterans' chemical concerns would have been reinforced by recollections of the RSL's focus on issues of importance to its predominantly WW2 membership (and to the evident detriment of gassed servicemen from WW1). Vietnam veterans would reasonably have anticipated dilution of Vietnam-specific concerns by the League's broader membership. A complementary yet less flattering view – that the League lacked the mettle to take on the important forces opposed to investigation of the wartime chemical issue – would also have made some Vietnam veterans sceptical about a useful RSL-intervention. The result was inevitably a view among some Vietnam veterans that **only they** could be relied upon to pursue their interests. That view – driven by a perception that others could not be trusted to push the chemical struggle through to a useful conclusion – worked in concert with various factors tending to bring Vietnam servicemen together and to incline a proportion of veterans to support an organisation of their own. These factors tending to bring Vietnam veterans together are now explored.

The claimed uniqueness of the war, itself (even without exposure to chemicals) enabled veterans to be seen as 'different' by others and, more importantly, by themselves. The singularity of Vietnam veterans' war experience was remarked on as early as 1966 by the (then) RSL National Secretary, Bill Keys. Their post-war reception, whether marred by hostility from older veterans or indifference in the broader community (see article 2), also enabled them, without an accurate understanding of how previous cohorts had been treated, to see themselves as unique in Australian military history (enabling, at the same time, others to share that perception).

A particular organising impetus related to the uniqueness of the cohort's war and post-war experiences was the reminding of Vietnam veterans that their war had been (uniquely) lost. In concert with other negative interactions, these unjust and pointless reminders – anecdotally from previous generations of diggers – caused some veterans to isolate (see Appendix 2, available from the author) and disposed them to self-reliance when the right motivating issue (possible chemical harms) arose. This "lost war" impetus was not diminished by frequent reporting of events in the later years of the decade which again demonstrated the ascendancy of the enemy viz (a) the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Australia from 1975; (b) the success of the Vietnam People's Army in swiftly conquering Cambodia (backed by China) in early 1979; and (c) the countering of attacks by China, itself, in February/March 1979. (By the end of 1979, newspaper reports on various aspects of the Vietnamese refugee issue – and on the arrival of 'boat people', in particular – must have seemed akin to a ceaseless reminder that the enemy had prevailed. Such reports could only have made it harder for veterans anxious to put the war behind them to 'move on'. (It is usefully noted that Vietnamese immigration can be distinguished from its post WW11 equivalent as 'flight consequent upon the enemy's victory', even if, in both cases, many indi-

Continued page 19

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association: Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation

Continued from page 18

viduals were escaping an unappealing peace.)

Inevitably, the likelihood of chemical harms (where illnesses, children’s disabilities and failed pregnancies hadn’t already been linked by veterans to chemical wartime exposure) did even more to push veterans together; some doubtless thought that being poisoned made their cohort chillingly unique, despite the chemical exposure of some previous groups of servicemen. Fear of latent harms and, in particular, fear for the wellbeing of family members, was inevitably a strong binding factor.

The poor experiences some Vietnam veterans had of post-military life – made most graphic by the circumstances of men who’d descended into alcoholism, unemployment, homelessness and criminality (but also highlighted by the desperate circumstances of those with failing health not accepted as war-caused by DVA) added to the view among many Vietnam veterans that, as a group, they were less well cared for than previous generations of servicemen. Even members of the cohort who were doing well could conclude, on learning of the circumstances of their most troubled colleagues, that Vietnam veterans as a group were not receiving the assistance they were owed (and which they believed had been provided to earlier cohorts). The Vietnam men would have been even more aggrieved about their treatment had they been aware in early 1980 of the less generous repatriation arrangements which applied to them and to other veterans of South-East Asian conflicts (because of a legislated restriction, in effect, on the health conditions that could be claimed for – the “occurrence” requirement).

Of course, some Vietnam veterans may have been instinctively attracted to the Action Association by the David and Goliath nature of the struggle ahead. Similarly, others who’d experienced their own and familial health problems, and had received no meaningful help from the repatriation system or ESOs, may not have needed to think twice about active commitment to the new organisation. What other options did they have in late 1979 and early 1980? Who else could give them hope?

But for other veterans made time-poor by the need to care for sick or disabled children, and juggling the demands of employment with family responsibilities, there probably needed to be prospective benefit of some sort, if they were to be active participants in the new organization. It wasn’t enough that their options for assistance might have been limited. They needed to believe that there would be positive consequences of their own involvement, even if they thought the founding of a State component of the Action Association to be an inherently positive thing.

Foremost among the positive consequences that could be hoped for was, of course, success ie the obtaining of Government agreement to an independent investigation of chemical harms and to compensation for affected individuals, including wives and children. Even with a good understanding of the powerful vested interests – political and commercial – ranged against them, most active members could have believed that there was some prospect of success.

The idea that the new organisation could succeed was doubtless encouraged by the attention paid to its claims in the establishment period by significant individuals and, especially by the responses of Veterans Affairs Minister Adermann and other politicians to the Association’s requirement for an investigation into ill-health and child deformities; the announcement of a scientific study on 7 January 1980 and its allocation to an institution a few days later would have been seen as a significant step, even though that study wasn’t the judicial inquiry sought by the Association ... and

Continued page 20

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – **The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:** **Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation**

Continued from page 19

notwithstanding doubts soon aired about its utility.

Success was made plausible, further, by the other early achievements of the Action Association, itself. These achievements – including the establishment of branches in multiple States, the obtaining of meetings with Minister Adermann, the garnering of continuing media attention, and the acquisition of voluntary expert assistance of various sorts – had as much to do with the energy, determination and larrikin assertiveness of the inaugural president, Holt McMinn, as with the support of scientific adviser, John Evans, the support of the media and the fact that the McMinn/Szapiel call to organise had not fallen flat.

Action Association success was made to seem credible, in particular, by widespread media and public sympathy for Vietnam veterans and for the war chemical cause, noting that that cause was in step with community apprehension about the impact of chemicals and, in particular with the impact of chemicals on children and the unborn. (Some prominent VVAA figures would later claim that it took a good while for the Association to elicit sympathy from the media and the public, but this claim is at odds with the number and flavour of media stories and editorials in early 1980, and with the majority of published letters from members of the public about the chemical issue at this time.)

The extraordinary financial and moral support of NSW RSL sub-branches and clubs for the NSW Action Association during 1980 (covered in a later article) demonstrates that even other veterans were sympathetic to the Action Association's goals. The early support of Colin Hines, NSW RSL Branch President, and Bruce Ruxton, Victorian Branch President, was also notable, even if erased in veterans' memories by later events.

There seemed to be promise, too, in activities as various as the involvement of the Association's legal adviser in the US class action (and preparation of other litigation), and others' plans for a trip to Vietnam to gather evidence and shoot an income-generating movie. And, if all that wasn't enough, money seemed not to be a problem (albeit because key individuals self-funded their travel and expensive inter-state phone calls etc).

Ironically, the RSL's inflated claims to success in influencing Governments (mentioned earlier) may have encouraged a view among Vietnam veterans that they too, if persistent enough, could enjoy lobbying success. Even more ironically, the moratoria, and what they exemplified about the utility of collective action, appear to have had some influence. Some veterans may also have felt optimistic about local outcomes because US veterans were engaged in a similar struggle.

Another of the things which may have attracted active support for the new organisation might have been instinctively known of viz. the psychological benefit of taking action. Notwithstanding any apprehensions active members of the new organisation may have felt about the unfamiliar tasks ahead of them, the taking of action after a period in which help seemed inadequate or beyond reach was bound to have a positive psychological impact. By organising, they were taking some measure of control over matters and would consequently experience (at least for a while) a range of uplifting feelings. Word would soon have spread about how good it felt to be doing something in aid of the chemical investigation and compensation cause.

Early active participant would readily have anticipated the same sense of purpose experienced by Szapiel and McMinn, and evident in early public pronouncements by the two men. That sense of purpose, whether aimed at improving their own situations or the situations of others, would have been especially attractive to veterans whose business ventures had been unsuccessful, whose post-

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association: Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation

Continued from page 20

war employment was uninteresting or disempowering, who were unemployed or who were otherwise dispirited. Association-related activity of almost any sort was soon valued by unemployed or under-employed Vietnam veterans.

The sympathy which characterised media stories on individual veterans and their families in the establishment period may also have been a gratifying prospect for veterans contemplating active involvement. Someone outside their own cohort could yet be acknowledging and validating their difficulties by publicising them. Similarly, active participation in the Association promised ongoing reassurance that families were not alone in dealing with their difficulties and fears. The sharing of common experiences and coping strategies among wives anecdotally began at the time of initial contact and was probably touted as a benefit of involvement, even for those wives already aware of the intractable nature of their husband's problems. That the banding together of these veterans and their wives had attractive therapeutic consequences can't be doubted.

Veterans considering active membership would also have been aware that Australian society approved of work on behalf of veterans and of organisations doing that work. Honours lists published in the establishment period included, as they had traditionally done, numerous people specifically rewarded for service to veterans. Aspiring active members could legitimately see themselves as part of the "caring for veterans and their families" tradition, even if conservative Australians, noting the Association's early conduct and criticism of the Fraser Government, may have harboured doubts about the organisation's respectability. The satisfaction likely to be gained from altruism and work for the Action Association also sat in contrast to the less remarkable aspects of most civilian life and day-to-day civilian work.

Something resembling military camaraderie could also be an attractive aspect of active participation in the new organisation, along with some semblance of teamwork, although not in all cases in a traditional service-like environment (as veterans' wives and mothers performed a variety of functions in some early branches, and would continue to be prominent in some branches and sub-branches).

For some veterans the prospect of engaging in struggle against the Government which had let them down in war and in peace (see earlier remarks in this article about betrayal) would have been an additionally attractive aspect of active involvement, just as a participation in a concerted struggle against a repatriation system regarded as unsympathetic, may have been satisfying.

As ex-officers expressed little early interest in the new organisation, there were also opportunities for prospective members from the other ranks to make a difference and not play the passive or subordinate roles to which they were mostly relegated in other service organisations. This aspect of things made the Action Association different from other ESOs from the very beginning and would have made active membership a positive thing for some. (The notion of looking after other veterans would also have sat well with senior members of the other ranks who'd been trained to look after their subordinates while in uniform.)

Similarly, the "uncharted" nature of early activities and the absence of internal restrictions on the actions of Association branches and office bearers (mostly because the organisation was new and lacked a functional framework) may have been especially attractive for the ex-WOs, NCOS and corporals who'd been trained in the military to be decisive and to prize action over deliberation. Such individuals weren't limited in their work for the Association by the bureaucratic processes

Continued page 22

VVAA HISTORY DRAFTS – Article 14 – **The Early Vietnam Veterans Action Association:** **Why Vietnam Veterans Established Their Own Organisation**

Continued from page 21

which hampered the keen and the energetic in larger, older organisations like the RSL (with its 5 layers of decision making and long-established policies and procedures.)

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the most frequently stated early goals of the Association in the establishment period – the holding of a judicial inquiry and the (consequent) providing of Federal Government care and compensation to any harmed individuals – were not unreasonable ones. The inquiry request was made at a time when there were many Government inquiries afoot (see the forthcoming instalments in this series covering 1980 events). The care and compensation request was in keeping with the spirit of Australian repatriation and with the long-existent ‘contract’ between servicemen and the nation, even though, in seeking care and compensation for affected family members, the request sought to broaden the reach of the repatriation system.

The next article in this series looks at the ‘big picture’ reasons why veterans might have joined the VVAA and reviews how other commentators have explained the establishment of the organisation.

Kel Robertson is a Canberra writer. He is currently working on the history of the VVAA. The views expressed in this article are his and not those of the Association.

The aim of “VVAA History Drafts” is to inform readers about progress made with the Association’s history and encourage people who have relevant extra information to contact the writer. Readers with additional information can contact Kel at vvhistory99@gmail.com. Readers taking issue with the content of this version of this article are encouraged to contact Kel for the full version, including sources.

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[2] *If the author correctly understands the structure of the RSL, resolutions would, if successful at all points, move from a sub-branch to a district council, from there to a (State) Congress and to the National Administrative matters presumably had a less tortuous path, involving sub-branch, district committee, state branch and national office. Congress, thence to a meeting of the National Executive.*

Scootaville Qld 2024

Howdy all,

I've finished the Scootaville Qld 2024 story. If you were a part of this great experience it will bring back some great memories. We certainly did a lot.

If you weren't on it, this is what you missed. See here <https://radschool.org.au/ScootavilleQld2024/>

Thanks again to everyone who helped us along the way, who helped make the event possible, we couldn't have done it without you.

We're off again in Aug/Sept this year (Qld) and Nov (Vic), if you'd like to be a part of the Qld or the Vic events, (or both?) click here <https://radschool.org.au/Scootaville/Participants/ScootavilleParticipants.htm>

Trev Benneworth

trev@radschool.org.au 0414 359 173



Continued page 26

Vietnam War Memorial Walk

Coobowie Progress Association

Things are progressing at a pace, there are not enough hours in each day but here we go.

The Yorke Peninsula Council and ourselves are about to approve the final draft of the story boards, and requests for quotes for the supports are about to be sent out. The timeline is running to the original program and will certainly be met by all involved.

John Schumann and The Vagabond Crew with their 'Behind The Lines' Concert are locked in and tickets are now available at <https://boxoffice.satix.com.au/event/3191:19252/3191:55735/> . Tickets are also available by phone at SA Tix on 1300 072 849. Remember veterans, if you supply your Service Number you can purchase 2 tickets at \$53.00 per ticket, general entry price is \$78.00 per ticket. We are offering tickets to our supporters 6 weeks early as our advertising campaign does not start until the middle of March.



The program for **18th August 2025** is 0900 Cenotaph Service at the Edithburgh War Memorial by the Edithburgh RSL 1100 Official Opening of the Vietnam War Memorial Walk 1200 Official guests retire to the Edithburgh RSL for lunch 1200 Edithburgh Community Club will be open for lunch at the Edithburgh Oval 1400 John Schumann and The Vagabond Crew 'Behind the Lines' concert at the Light Church Auditorium 13 Yorketown Road Edithburgh

For those who wish to sponsor a memorial seat we require a basic design by the 31st of March so that we can get them produced ready for placement well before the official opening of the Vietnam War Memorial Walk. The cost of seat sponsorship is \$5,500.00 incl. GST payable to the Edithburgh Progress Association.

An invoice will be provided once the design is completed and approved prior to production. We have attached a copy of the sponsored seat Flyer.

We have been fortunate to receive several donations from local people toward the development of this important project and we have set up an account with the Edithburgh Progress Association for this purpose. As you would appreciate this is not a cheap exercise. If anyone would like to assist financially, donations can be made to;

Payable to:- Edithburgh Progress Association BSB 105063 Ac No. 028988840
Identifier * really important VWMW (plus) Name For example; VWMW-Jim-Bloggs

Please let Roger know the detail of your payment by SMS to 0409844991 or by email to admin@yorke.sa.gov.au

A range of accommodation is available on Yorke Peninsula as it is seen as a tourism destination in South Australia with about 50% of housing being holiday homes or rental accommodation.



MISSING

Does anyone know the whereabouts or contact details of:

Steve Hilty WALLIS #17893

Australian Force Vietnam Provost Unit 11 DEC 1967—15 JUL 1968.

Please let me know As soon as Possible if you have a contact phone number or email address.

Terry Roe troey1@bigpond.com 0400 140 870

BOOKS

WHERE HAVE ALL THE BIRDS GONE?

By Peter McCann

Pages 456

Book Type: Paperback

ISBN:0646881914

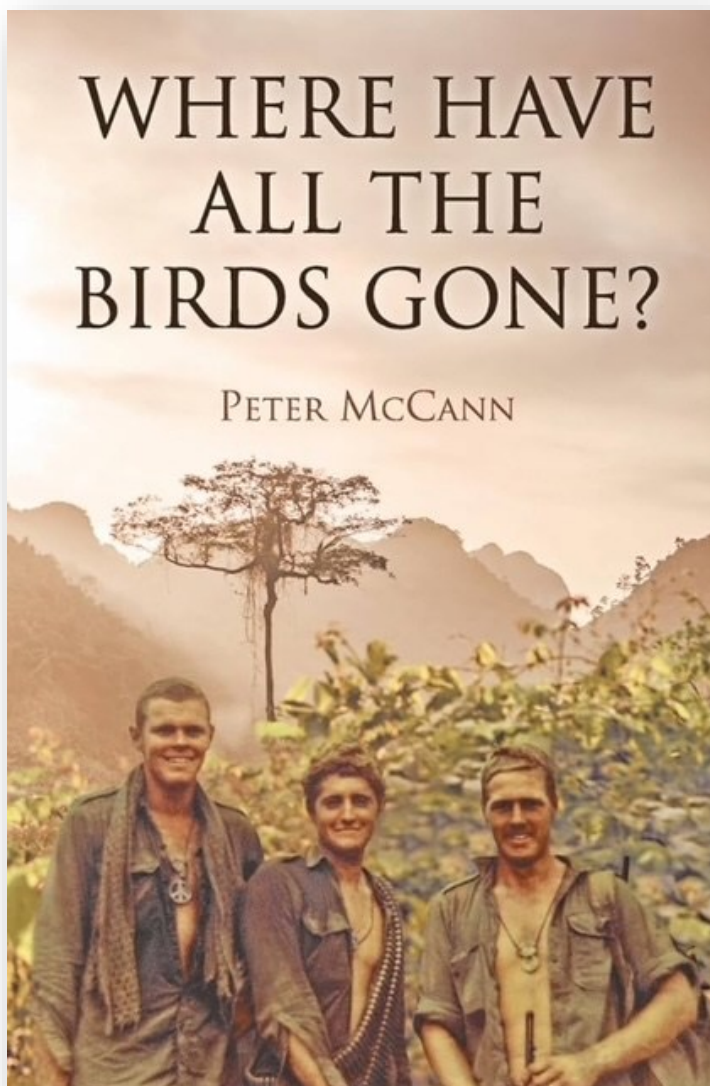
A captivating expose of a National Serviceman's deployment to Vietnam. Brutally honest, this confronting memoir covers extensive military detail and personal revelation, so rarely told.

Serving in the Australian Army from 30 January 1969 until 29 January 1971, Peter McCann intimately shares his experiences as an infantryman undertaking recruit, corps, and operational training in Australia prior to deployment on active service and soldiering in Vietnam.

During that time, he served with 8 Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (8RAR) for 12 months in Vietnam from November 1969-November 1970. This fascinating story focuses extensively on that period of his life and reveals how military service forever changed him.

The substantial amount of technical and educative detail included is nothing short of astonishing, though it's also prudently interspersed with humour and pathos. Returning to civilian life in Australia, McCann also raises some of his strongly held views on several issues of continuing interest within many veteran networks and wider community frameworks operating in Australia today.

Beyond a record of military history, McCann's compelling 'in your face' account is a public disclosure of the author's inner soul. He explains how he coped and dealt with a range of related subsequent personal issues that might well have defeated many other veterans.



Review published in "Duty First" RAR National Magazine Autumn 2025

AROUND THE STATES

COMMEMORATION OF THE BATTLE OF CORAL/BALMORAL AND PRIVATE RICHARD NORDEN VC

PROGRESS is ongoing for the construction and dedication of a memorial in Gundagai to honour the Battle of Coral/Balmoral and the actions of its Victoria Cross for Australia recipient, Private Richard Norden VC, with the Gundagai RSL and Council installing a sign to be placed at the memorial site located in the council park on Sheridan Street.

Joe Morton of Goanna Graphics has been commissioned to complete the sign, which the Gundagai RSL aims to have installed during the week of March 10.

The memorial will commemorate the largest and most protracted battle Australians fought in the Vietnam War. The Australian Government recognised its significance in 2022, awarding a Unit Citation for Gallantry 54 years after the event.

On November 11 last year, Private Richard Norden of the 1st Battalion RAR was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia in recognition of his exceptional bravery and courage displayed during this battle.

The memorial will tell the history of the Battle of Coral/Balmoral and its VC recipient through static information plaques and QR coded audio/visual technology, allowing the public to access an array of information relating to this important part of Australia's military heritage.

A bronze statue will display the actions of Private Norden saving the life of his badly wounded Section Commander, Lance Corporal Daniel (Joe) Kelly, in the middle of a fierce fire fight.

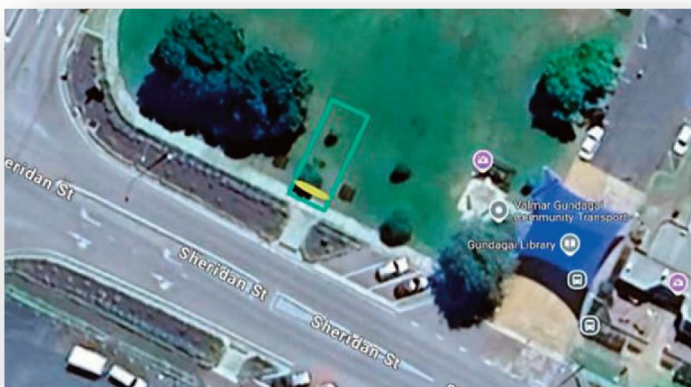
Gundagai RSL said the proposed memorial, conveniently located near the gateway to Gundagai, will offer an educational and deeply moving experience for the tens of thousands of visitors passing through the area annually. Its proximity to the newly refurbished Gundagai Visitor Information Centre ensures strong support from tourism and visitor assistance staff, who will actively promote the memorial as a key attraction.

It is envisioned that integrating the memorial with existing attractions will boost the local economy by drawing more visitors to the town's historical and cultural sites.

The opening ceremony for the Gundagai commemoration and memorial is planned for May 14, 2026; the anniversary of the day on which Private Norden's heroic action took place in 1968.

Funding support for the memorial is being sought through an application to the Department of Veterans' Affairs Commemorative Grants Program, together with donations sought through RSL NSW Sub-Branches, regional business entities and the Gundagai community.

Individuals or businesses wishing to contribute to the project by way of donation should visit the Gundagai Bendigo Bank branch or contact the Gundagai RSL Sub-Branch by email at GundagaiSB@rslnsw.org.au, or phone Sub-Branch treasurer John Knight on 0403 748 420.



An overhead view of the memorial site location (green square) across the street from the Gundagai Services Club



Richard Norden VC

SCOOTAVILLE



**Please indicate if you want to be part of one of these wonderful events in the future .
If some questions are not relevant to you—just leave them blank.**

We provide everything, scooters, helmets, jackets, bedding and most meals.

You can come as:

As a rider—2 riders to each Scooter, swapping every hour or so, non-riding person takes a rest and follows in a bus.

A supporter—Supporters required: Cook, Driver, Load master, General hands, Path finders, Marshalls, Medics.

Remember you need a motor bike license to ride the scooters.

As we want to look professional and as a part of a team, those riding will wear the same gear.

You will be issued with a helmet, gloves and jacket.

Please do not bring your own.

Event costs will be Rider \$1100, Supporter \$750. (Rider discounted if you do more than one)

The Radschool Association Inc has an affiliation with Motorcycling Groups in various States and as such those participating in the Scootaville event are covered by Motorcycling Australia's insurance product. You can see what is covered <https://www.ma.org.au/support/insurance/>

As we could be overnighing at several ADF bases, we will need to have a copy of you driver's licence (or similar form of ID) sometime in the future.

To Register copy this into your internet bar: <https://radschool.org.au/Scootaville/Participants/ScootavilleParticipants.htm>

If you make a mistake filling in the form, click RESET and start again. You can nominate with a friend, (your bike buddy) which means you and your friend will take it in turns to ride the same scooter for the whole trip. Your bike buddy (or carer) must also fill in this form.

VALE

#2791095 ANDREWS Richard Grosvenor

5/11/1948 - 7/01/2025

1st Australian Reinforcement Regiment 16 JUL 1969 – 5 AUG 1969
9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment 6 AUG 1969 - 11 NOV 1969

#61813 BALLARD Ivan Royce

30/12/1949 – 4/12/2024

17th Construction Squadron 25 JUN 1970 – 23 JUN 1971

#3796356 BERRY Michael (Chuck) David

23/3/1947—1/3/2025

7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment 16 FEB 1970—4 MAY 1970

#6708757 DAVIS Brian Lewis

15/7/1946 – 25/2/2025

1 Australia Reinforcement Regiment 17 JAN 1968 – 7 MAR 1968
3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment 8 MAR 1968 – 25 MAY 1968

#4719287 FOWLER Michael (Mick) Bruce

12/2/1947—6/3/2025

4th Field Regiment 8/1/1968—13/4/1968
12th Field Regiment 14 APR 1968—15 OCT 1968

#67068 IMLACH Bobby Wallace

27/7/1948 – 1/3/2025

A Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment 27 AUG 1970 – 16 DEC 1970
C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment 17 DEC 1970 - 8 JUL 1971

#6708684 JAMES Geoffrey Brendon

30/6/1946 – 10/2/2025

17th Construction Squadron 27 MAY 1967 – 26 FEB 1968

National Vietnam Veteran Museum

Neville Goodwin OAM, member of NVVM Board of Directors passed away 28th February 2025. Neville was a valuable member of the board, he had extensive knowledge of the local environment having been involved in council matters and local government activities for many years. His knowledge opened many doors for us.

Bob Elworthy AM





**SAFE ZONE
SUPPORT**

**FREE ANONYMOUS
COUNSELLING LINE
CALL 1800 142 072**

Safe Zone Support is a free and anonymous counselling line, for veterans and their families – call **1800 142 072** (available 24/7).

This service provides access to specialised counsellors, with an understanding of military culture and experience.

The service offers care without the need for individuals to identify themselves or be concerned that their call will be recorded.

This line has been created for vulnerable cohorts of veterans and their families which might not otherwise seek mental health care.

VVAA HISTORY

Recent research has identified a loss of records from our associations past. If anyone has copies of VVAA. National Congress minutes prior to 1996 please forward to:

president@vvaa.org.au or secretary@vvaa.org.au

TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOUR ACTIVITIES

VVAA States and sub branches are encouraged to contribute reports on their local activities for publication in Debrief.

Don't miss this opportunity promote your group; it may give others ideas of what they can do for, and with, members and their families.

The preferred method is to attach to an email the article in Word format and photographs in JPG format for better quality, to debriefeditor@gmail.com

Has your Email Address Changed?

Please advise your new email address to the VVAA National Secretary at secretary@vvaa.org.au.

NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

Office Use Only

Become a Friend of NVVM

Membership Number



The Friends of NVVM program unites people committed to supporting the mission of this unique museum: to remember, interpret and understand the experience of Vietnam War veterans and the enduring impact of the war on society.

As well as demonstrating your high regard for NVVM and its work, Friendship brings you:

- ♥ Free admission on all visits to the museum.
- ♥ 2 free guest passes per year.
- ♥ 10% discount on admission cost for immediate family.
- ♥ 10% discount in NVVM shop & Nui Dat Cafe.
- ♥ Exclusive "Friends" only private viewing & events.
- ♥ Regular newsletters.
- ♥ Discounts for guest lectures, film nights, conference and other special events.
- ♥ Single vote at AGM.

Payment:	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year
Individual	\$35 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$65 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$95 <input type="checkbox"/>
Concession	\$25 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$45 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$65 <input type="checkbox"/>
Family	\$70 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$130 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$190 <input type="checkbox"/>
Corporate	\$200 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$350 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$500 <input type="checkbox"/>
Life: Aged 60 yrs+			
Individual	\$800 <input type="checkbox"/>	Concession \$600 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Life: Aged under 60 yrs			
Individual	\$1200 <input type="checkbox"/>	Concession \$800 <input type="checkbox"/>	

Direct payments can be made to:
NVVM Ltd Trading Acct
Bendigo Bank BSB 633 000
Account: 149738577

Primary Members Details (please print)

Company name:

Title:, Surname

First Name/s:

Address:

State: Postcode:

Email address:

@

Phone:

Signature:

Date:/...../.....

Immediate family in Friend's household.
 (Please provide given name and surname).

.....

.....

Concession applies to veteran card holders, full time students & pensioners, does NOT include Senior Card. Benefits as per individual member.

Family allows for 2 adults and up to 4 children. Benefits as per individual member.

Corporate allows for four adults and up to 10 children. Benefits as per individual member.

Post: Friends of NVVM Association
 PO Box 318
 San Remo VIC 3925

Email: office@vietnamvetmuseum.org

phone: 03 5956 6400

Website: www.vietnamvetmuseum.org

25 Veterans Drive, Newhaven, Phillip Island VIC

Cheque Visa Mastercard

Expiry date:/...../.....

Card holder's name:

Signature:

Card number:

Date signed:/...../.....