

## Message for Vietnam Veterans' Day

This year's anniversary of the battle of Long Tan may pass with a little less public fanfare than last year's 40<sup>th</sup> but the memories, both pleasant and unhappy, can be just as strong with each passing year.

Most Vietnam veterans and their families are conscious of the range of emotions such anniversaries evoke. If you are commemorating the anniversary this year, help each other to focus on the positives. If it is more difficult for some veterans, it is important to accept this rather than to pretend that negative emotions do not exist.

Each anniversary, I am reminded of the leading role Vietnam veterans have played in teaching us about the prevention and treatment of posttraumatic mental health problems. Thanks to lessons learnt as a result of the Vietnam War, mental health professionals are able to offer better treatment to people who have survived car and workplace accidents, physical assault and natural disasters.

We have also been better able to identify and effectively treat the mental health problems of older people who experienced trauma many years ago, such as World War II veterans.

On this anniversary, if your memories are upsetting, you may find yourself becoming irritable and angry with family and friends, wanting to withdraw into yourself, or using alcohol as a way of coping. Below are some tips that other veterans have found helpful:

- Try to limit the amount of TV and radio you watch and listen to about the anniversary, as well as discussions with other veterans
- Build into your days plenty of relaxing and enjoyable activities that are unrelated to the anniversary
- Spend time with other people and don't be afraid to ask for a bit of support if you need it
- Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat well-balanced meals; cut back on stimulants such as tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and cigarettes
- Don't try to drown the memories with drugs or alcohol; listen to soothing music, go for a walk, take a hot bath – whatever works for you
- Keeping a journal can be helpful; if you can't talk to others about how you feel, writing it down is almost as good

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need to. The best place to start is your local GP or VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, 1800 011 046.

Mark Creamer  
Director - Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health