



VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

12 October 2003

PROPOSED VISIT OF VETERANS FROM VIETNAM

The National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Mr Brian McKenzie said today, 'that Media reports in the Sunday Telegraph that former North Vietnamese soldiers would be visiting Australia in February 2004 conveniently lacked accuracy in order to cause maximum controversy.

Mr McKenzie along with Major General Peter Phillips from the Returned and Services League of Australia, Mr Bob Tyrell from the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia and Mr Paul Murphy from the Australia Veterans Vietnam Reconstruction Group were part of a government delegation lead by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Danna Vale that visited Vietnam eight weeks ago to hold talks with government officials and Vietnamese veterans, on the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and Vietnam.

Mr McKenzie said 'that matters discussed included protocols for the continued access by Australian Vietnam veterans to the site of the Memorial "Long Tan Cross" site which is visited by thousands each year. All Australians are aware of the significance of this site and we are reliant on the co-operation and support of the Vietnamese government for this to continue; he said.

Mr McKenzie said; that the delegation was also extensively briefed by United States (US) Military Team who is responsible for bringing home those US soldiers who are 'missing in action'. This briefing also included the latest update on progress of trying to locate the six missing Australians who remain unaccounted for.

Mr McKenzie said; as veterans we were warmly greeted and treated with respect by our former foes. A proposal to extend an invitation for a visit to Australia by them was proposed by the Veteran element of the delegation. Our Association will be discussing that proposal at our National Council meeting in Adelaide on the 18/19 October 2003.

Mr McKenzie said; 'any suggestion that the visit is a 'done deal' is completely incorrect as there are still many issues to work through with our members and the government. Given the sensitivity of the matter I cannot imagine the visit going ahead without the support of the members of our respective organisations and the wider Vietnam veteran community - to suggest otherwise is to create mischief'.

Media Contact:

National President - Brian McKenzie 0439 030 429