HONOUR THE DEAD, But Fight like Hell for the Living
NATIONAL PRESIDENTS REPORT

Early in November I attended a presentation at Parliament House that outlined the proposed re-development of the Australian War Memorial over the next nine years.

A budget of almost $500m may seem a lot but it is a major re-development and funds are not coming from the Department of Veterans Affairs budget. I believe we should fully support the project.

The following day I attended the Ex-service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) hosted by DVA and relevant papers have been distributed to state branches, there is an opportunity at every one of these meetings for matters of concern to the ex-service community to be addressed.

11 November of course was a significant day being the 100th anniversary of the armistice that ended World War One, now Remembrance Day. The occasion was marked with dignified and respectful commemorative services across Australia. We did not forget.

I attended a meeting of the Advocacy Training and Development Program Strategic Governance Board on 20 November and an expansion of the web site www.atdp.org.au was discussed, this new access will allow ex service organisation administrators to manage the information related to their advocacy services.

In October changes to the V.V.A.A. process for authorising advocates to act on behalf of the association were adopted.

Advocates and their supporting sub branches should consider the implications of the insurance they rely on not necessarily being available without current authorities to act on behalf of the V.V.A.A. being in place. Administration Handbook policy AP 0001 Refers.

As we go into 2019 may I, on behalf of myself, my wife and our family and the National Executive wish all our members and supporters, state executive, sub branch executives and members, their families and supporters a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy new year, I look forward to working with you all in 2019.

Ken Foster OAM JP
National President
SOCIAL SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(SUPPORTING RETIREMENT INCOMES) BILL 2018

The Bill gives effect to measures announced in the 2018-19 Budget that aim to boost Australians’ confidence in their long-term financial security. These measures will:-
- introduce a more beneficial means test rules for pooled lifetime income streams.
- increase and extend the Pension Work Bonus,
- expand the Pension Loans Scheme, and

The measures are Department of Social Services’ led initiatives. The changes will apply to means tested income support payments administered by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA).

Amendments to the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) are required to ensure that veterans benefit from the changes. The changes to the VEA mirror those made to the Social Security Act 1991 (SSA).

Schedule 1 - Lifetime Income Streams
Approximately 30 veterans and partners will benefit in the first year from the new means testing rules to assess pooled lifetime retirement income stream products. The means testing changes will result some veterans and their partners receiving higher rates of income support such as the Service Pension.

Under the new means test rules, only 60 per cent of all payments from pooled lifetime income streams will be assessed as income.

Example:
Max receives an annual payment of $5,000 from a lifetime income stream. 60 per cent ($3,000) is assessed as income under the income test. As Max’s retirement income payments increase due to indexation, 60 per cent of the payments will continue to be assessed under the income test for the duration of the lifetime income stream.

Under the new means test rules, only 60 per cent of the purchase price of pooled lifetime income streams will be assessed as an asset under the assets test from the date of purchase until the life expectancy of a 65-year-old male (currently 19 years), or a minimum of five years. After this, 30 per cent of the purchase price will be assessed for the rest of the duration of the pooled lifetime income stream.

Example:
Alice purchases a lifetime income stream at age 65 for $200,000. At purchase, the life expectancy of a 65-year-old male is 19 years. Initially, 60 per cent of the purchase price ($120,000) is assessed as an asset under the assets test. 60 per cent continues to be assessed for 19 years, after which point 30 per cent ($60,000) of the purchase price is assessed as an asset under the assets test.

30 per cent is then assessed for the rest of the duration of the lifetime income stream. The new rules will apply to all pooled lifetime income streams purchased on or after 1 July 2019. Pooled lifetime income streams purchased before 1 July 2019 will continue to be assessed under the current rules for long-term asset-tested income streams (100% of the asset value included in the assessment).

Schedule 2 - Work Bonus
Currently the Work Bonus provides an income test concession for veterans over pension age, working as an employee and receiving an income support payment such as age Service Pension.

From 1 July 2019, the Work Bonus will increase to $300 per fortnight, up from $250 per fortnight. This means that the first $300 of income from work each fortnight will not count towards the pension income test.
Example:
John is a single service pensioner working one day a week and earning $450 a fortnight. John has no other income and his assets are below the asset value limit. His pension is currently reduced because of his earnings.
Under the changes, the first $300 of John’s earnings will not be assessed and only $150 will count for the pension income test.
As this is less than the pension income test free area, his pension will increase by $16 per fortnight to the maximum rate. Eligibility will also be expanded to include income from self-employment. This will allow veterans with a small business to have income from their business excluded from the income test.
Example:
Ann is a single part rate service pensioner who runs a small business.
Ann earns an average of $1,000 a fortnight. Her assets are below the pension asset value limit. As Ann’s income from self-employment is now eligible for the Work Bonus, the first $300 of her income will be excluded from the pension income test, and Ann will receive a higher part-rate Service Pension.
Her pension will increase by $150 per fortnight.
To ensure the Work Bonus only applies to actual engagement in gainful work, there will be a 'personal exertion' test. It is not intended that the Work Bonus would apply to income associated with returns on financial or real estate investments.
The work bonus bank will also increase. Veterans will also continue to accrue unused amounts of the fortnightly Work Bonus, which can exempt future earnings from the pension income test. The maximum accrual amount will increase from $6,500 to $7,800.
This measure will benefit approximately 3050 veterans and partners.
Schedule 3 – Pension Loan Scheme
From 1 July 2019, the Pension Loans Scheme (PLS) will be expanded to include all Australians of Age Pension age including maximum rate service pensioners.
* The maximum allowable combined Service Pension and PLS income stream will be increased to 150 per cent of the Service Pension rate, this is currently set at a maximum of the Service Pension rate.
* Full rate pensioners will be able to increase their income by up to $11,799 (singles) or $17,787 (couples) per year by unlocking the equity in their home. PLS participants have the flexibility to start or stop receiving PLS payments as their personal circumstances change, and generally repay the loan once their home is sold.
Existing age-based loan to value ratio limits will continue to apply. This means that PLS holders will not be able to owe the Government more than what their home is worth. The current PLS interest rate of 5.25 per cent per annum will apply to existing and new loans. This has been the rate since 1997 and is lower than market reverse mortgage rates. The measure will better target the PLS to those who would benefit the most and give older Australians more choice to draw on the equity in their homes to support their standard of living in retirement.
Example: Janet is a 70 year old single maximum rate Service Pensioner with a house valued at $400,000.
Janet’s Service Pension income is currently $908 per fortnight ($23,598 per year).
Under the expanded PLS, Janet is now able to access some of the value in her home.
Janet chooses to receive an additional income stream of around $6,000 in the first year.
Her income increases to $1,135 per fortnight ($29,497 per year), 125 per cent of the maximum rate of the Service Pension.
The value of the income stream increases over time in line with the indexation of the pension.
Janet continues to draw down a PLS income stream for 20 years at an interest rate of 5.25 per cent.
Janet passes away at age 90.
Her family sell her house for $750,000.
The PLS loan owed to the Government has increased to around $300,000, which is paid from the house sale proceeds. Around $450,000 remains in her estate.
Over the 20 years, Janet receives around $170,000 in additional income to support her standard of living in retirement. Approximately 70 veterans and partners will benefit from this measure. Currently there are 21 persons who receive fortnightly pension loan scheme payments, who will have the ability to increase their payment to the new 150% of the maximum Service Pension rate.
31 December 1967 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment arrives in South Vietnam
The 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, sailed to Vietnam on HMAS Sydney.

Australia’s entry into the Vietnam War had been gradual and grew from the initial commitment of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) in 1962 to the deployment of an initial infantry battalion, 1 RAR in April 1965. This grew again in May 1966 when the two battalion-strong 1st Australian Task Force (1 ATF) was committed; when 3 RAR arrived in December 1967, 1 ATF consisted of three battalions.

3 RAR’s entry coincided with a new phase of the war. When 1 RAR first deployed it worked with the US forces in Bien Hoa. With the establishment of the 1 ATF, operations had been aimed at pacifying and securing the Phuoc Tuy province. With the launching of the Tet Offensive in January 1968, Australians would enter a new phase of the war where they would often work outside the Phuoc Tuy Province against main force and regular North Vietnamese troops.

After a short period of acclimatisation allowed the Battalion to feel its way in the theatre and to familiarise itself with the operational techniques of the Americans and Vietnamese. The Battalion's first operation against the Viet Cong began with A Company deploying to Baria, the provincial capital, at the start of the Tet Offensive.

Subsequent operations were undertaken in and out of Phuoc Tuy province with the Battalion employed on mine clearing, counter mortar and rocket tasks and on numerous reconnaissance-in-force operations. During 26 and 28 May 1968, 3 RAR, while in a battalion defensive position, withstood two determined assaults by regimental sized units of the North Vietnamese Army at Fire Support Base (FSPB) 'Balmoral'. This symbolised the first concerted ground assault against an Australian FSPB.

The battalion's tour in South Vietnam was the first time National Servicemen had served with 3 RAR on active service. Their devotion to duty was in the highest traditions of the Australian Army and helped to maintain the proud reputation and esprit de corps of 'Old Faithful'. 3 RAR casualties as a result of the year’s fighting were 24 KIA and 93 WIA.

While in Vietnam, 3 RAR once again formed many close ties with supporting arms and services and the RAAF. The Battalion was proud to be associated with 161 Field Battery, RNZA, a 105mm Howitzer battery of the 16 Field Regiment, RNZA that supported 3 RAR during the Battle of Kapyong.
OUR MILITARY HISTORY

HMAS PERTH First deployment Vietnam War

On 14 September 1967, Vietnam duties were handed to Perth by Hobart.

The destroyer’s first assignment was the gunline off the II Corps operating area, where Perth rendezvoused with USS Radford on 26 September. The ship was specifically tasked with providing gunfire support for the 1st Cavalry Division of the United States Army, which was involved in Operation Pershing.

Three days later, Perth was reassigned to the northern part of South Vietnam, in response to increased North Vietnamese activity. On 2 October, both turrets broke down; both were repaired by 23:00, but the aft turret failed again the next evening, with the new problem beyond repair until replacement parts were air-dropped on 5 October. Perth was redeployed to Sea Dragon operations on 16 October, joining American cruiser USS Newport News.

On the morning of 18 October, the destroyer was fired on by coastal artillery while investigating a group of fishing junks; Perth was hit once, with the shell deflecting off the aft gun turret and penetrating the superstructure to start a fire in the confidential books vault.

The gun turret captain was later awarded a Distinguished Service Medal for his actions in response to the attack, while the officer of the watch was mentioned in despatches for courage and calmness under fire. Six days later, Perth and USS Rupertus fired on six small supply craft, sinking five.

Perth sailed to Subic for emergency maintenance and rebarrelling on 26 October, and returned to Sea Dragon duties on 1 November. Another maintenance period occurred between 7 and 16 November, after which Perth sailed to Singapore for shore leave, returning to operations on 27 November.

This gunline deployment lasted until 20 December, with Perth coming under shore battery fire on two occasions, but receiving no hits or damage.

After maintenance at Subic, the destroyer returned Sea Dragon operations on 9 January. Problems with the forward gun turret and the starboard propeller saw Perth withdraw to Subic for repairs on 2 February. These were completed by 14 February, with the destroyer returning to the Sea Dragon force that day.

The commanding officer of Perth was appointed overall commander of both the northern and southern task units; the northern unit was normally led by the commander of the assigned cruiser, but Newport News was in dock for maintenance.

In mid-February, the forward gun mount malfunctioned again, which left the turret operational but unable to rotate. On 1 March, the destroyer withdrew for maintenance, returning to operations ten days later. On 23 March, Perth withdrew to Subic to conclude her tour of duty, and was replaced on 31 March by Hobart.

The destroyer was awarded the United States Navy Unit Commendation for her service during the deployment. In addition to the two personnel awards for actions in response to the 18 October hit, Perth’s commanding officer was Mentioned in Despatches, and 22 personnel received Naval Board commendations.
BE IT KNOWN that with the authority of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second, Queen of Australia, I have awarded the

UNIT CITATION for GALLANTRY

to

1ST AUSTRALIAN TASK FORCE (FORWARD) which includes
   Headquarters 1st Australian Task Force (Forward)
   1st and 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment
   A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
   C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment
   12th Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery
   1st Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers
   Detachments in direct support of and located with
   1st Australian Task Force (Forward)

in recognition of acts of extraordinary gallantry in action

CITATION

For extraordinary gallantry in action in the Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces of South Vietnam from 12 May 1968 to 6 June 1968, during Operation THOAN THANG.

GIVEN at Government House, Canberra
this fifteenth day of May 2018.

By His Excellency’s Command

Official Secretary to the Governor-General
JUST ASK ABOUT YOUR MILITARY HISTORY, YOU MIGHT BE AMAZED

AUSTRALIANS are being encouraged to Just Ask questions within their families and make enquiries online to see if they have a lost family connection to one of the almost two million people who have served Australia in wars, conflicts and on peacekeeping operations over the past century.

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC Darren Chester said the Anzac Centenary period encouraged many Australians to research their family history, which had uncovered for some a lost connection to the First World War.

“As time moves forward Australia continues to lose more of the original living memories of our wartime history, but uncovering the story of military ancestors is a straightforward process that can yield amazing results,” Mr Chester said.

“Start by asking your oldest relatives what they know or if anyone has letters, diaries, medals or other memorabilia from a war, conflict or peacekeeping mission that could provide some clues.

“From there, it’s as simple as searching the online database of the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia, the National Library of Australia and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

“Communities should also use the valuable local resources such as local libraries, RSL branches and historical societies, which do an amazing job at documenting and preserving our history.”

In addition, if your relative was from the UK or New Zealand, you can search sites such as the UK National Archives and the NZ National Archives. As part of the launch of the Just Ask initiative, Ancestry.com is providing 100 hours’ free access to its database from 9–12 November 2018 for people to track their family story.

“Throughout the Anzac Centenary period 2014–18, many people have found long-lost connections to the First World War, giving them a broader understanding and respect for their family history,” Mr Chester said.

“I have been privileged to hear first-hand the experiences of Australians reconnecting with their family history and what it has meant to them.

“With the additional access to Ancestry, Australians will be able to readily research their family’s history and start the search for a connection to our military history.

“As a nation we need to take collective responsibility for preserving our family history and acknowledge those who have served and who are currently serving our country.

“On Remembrance Day this year, the 100th anniversary of the First World War Armistice, I encourage all Australians to buy a poppy, attend their local commemorative service, and stop for a minute’s silence.”

For more information about how to research your family connection, visit the Department of Veterans’ Affairs website.
Dear Mr Ken Foster

Thank you for joining us at Parliament House for the announcement of the Australian War Memorial redevelopment plans. It was an honour to host the event and to hear the support for our plans to build the Memorial for the next generation.

The announcement by the Honourable Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia, of $498 million in funding for the Memorial’s redevelopment over nine years, supported by Federal Opposition representative the Honourable Amanda Rishworth MP, was timely in that it now allows the Memorial to actively plan for the future.

We look forward to working with the community, especially the veteran community, on the next steps for the redevelopment in early 2019, including the creation of project teams and development timeframes. In providing this additional gallery and exhibition space, we have an opportunity to tell more fully the stories of the men and women who have recently served and continue to serve Australia.

I encourage you to keep in touch with the redevelopment and the evolving plans. Videos and information from the recent event are available on the Memorial website at https://www.awm.gov.au/futureplans.

Further information will also be shared regularly via eMemorial, the Memorial’s online newsletter, which will contain regular updates on the redevelopment as it progresses. You can subscribe at https://www.awm.gov.au/get-involved/eMemorial/Archive.

Once again, thank you for joining us for the momentous event last week; we hope you will stay in contact and share this development journey with us.

Regards

Dr Brendan Nelson

YOUR ACTIVITIES REPORTED IN DEBRIEF

States and sub branches are encouraged to contribute reports on their activities, particularly an opportunity to let others know what is happening in your area.

Email text in Word or photos in JPG to the editor at www.debrief@vvaa.org.au
VIRTUAL REALITY BRINGS AUSTRALIAN REMEMBRANCE TRAIL TO LIFE

VIRTUAL reality technology and stunning 360-degree drone footage are bringing the Australian Remembrance Trail along the Western Front to Australians across the world, through an Anzac 360 app featuring interactive videos.

The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC, Darren Chester, recently launched the new app at the Sir John Monash Centre in France.

“While Gallipoli will be forever etched in our nation’s history, it was right here on the Western Front that we suffered our greatest losses during the First World War,” Mr Chester said.

“This new app and videos, developed in partnership with News Corp Australia and produced by Grainger Films, will allow all Australians, including our next generation of school children, to experience these sites from their classroom or at home in their living room.

“Most importantly, it allows those who cannot visit these sites in person the opportunity to feel like a visitor, but at the same time inspiring others to travel over here to France, or across the border in Belgium.”

“The partnership with News Corp Australia will allow us to take viewers on a journey by exploring Australia’s story on the Western Front through a present day lens and technology.”

Eight key sites and battles are explained, highlighting the challenges our troops faced some 100 years ago, from the well positioned enemy to the tactical decisions that had to be made, or moments of bravery that resulted in a Victoria Cross.

The clips merge 360-degree aerial and ground footage from the present day with period imagery, graphics and more.

“This year we have seen our nation commemorate the 100th anniversary of the battles in Le Hamel and Villers-Bretonneux, and also mark the opening of the Sir John Monash Centre, which covers just some of the topics and sites featured in these videos,” Mr Chester said.

“I encourage all Australians to download the app and view the videos, learn more about the Australian Remembrance Trail and in doing so, never forgetting our troops and what they did right here on the Western Front,” Mr Chester said.

The app is free to download from the App Store and Google Play- search Anzac 360.
Operation ANZAC Revamp

The word “ANZAC” continues to resonate with the Australian and New Zealand communities as they honour the memories and gallant work undertaken by the combined defence forces since the coining of the term during World War I.

In Western Australia, a unique bond has been established through a small Cottage in the Perth suburb of Mount Hawthorn. This Cottage, built in one day in February 1916, served two purposes: as a memorial to those who lost their life at Gallipoli and as a home for a returned wounded soldier and his family. A perfect example of community spirit and of the respect held by those “back home”, the Cottage was built entirely through donations of money, skills, furniture and building materials. Sadly, during the 1990s the Cottage was severely neglected and there was talk of demolishing the building. Enter the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (Western Australia Branch Inc) under the guiding hands of then President, Rob Cox OAM who was succeeded by Life Member and Immediate Past President Peter Ramsay BEM (a New Zealand Vietnam Veteran - Victor 4 Company RNZIR & 6RAR/NZ ANZAC Bn) who took on the daunting task of repairing the Cottage and restoring it to its 1916 state. Thus a bond was formed.

This relationship has been further forged in a recent imaginative project undertaken by the Friends of ANZAC Cottage, a group based in the Cottage which undertakes the community engagement role, ensuring that the story of ANZAC Cottage lives on and the purposes for which it was built over a century ago are upheld along with the observation of significant commemorative services held throughout the year.

This new project entitled “Operation ANZAC Revamp” was an idea hatched in the fertile mind of Peter Ramsay and implemented through the Friends of ANZAC Cottage. It involved the revamping of two bus stops close to ANZAC Cottage to reflect those two conflicts that are so closely interwoven with the Cottage: World War I and the Vietnam War. Peter’s vision saw three elements common to both conflicts; timber, corrugated iron and sandbags, the latter being the most problematic given their instability. This dilemma was solved when he came across a memorial recently constructed in New Zealand that involved sandbags of a different kind.

Thus Operation ANZAC Revamp was born. In a tribute to the ANZAC tradition, personnel from both the Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces were recruited to take on the ‘sandbag ‘ aspect of the operation. Whilst this sounds quite easy, the procedure for the sandbag construction was complex and to achieve this the Friends of ANZAC Cottage brought Lance Corporal Andy Good, who devised and developed the New Zealand Memorial to the West and obtained the willing and expert assistance of the engineers of the 13 Field Squadron from Irwin Barracks to work with Andy. The process took a whole week, and the success of this aspect can be judged both by the extensive media coverage and the wholehearted support from community members, businesses and local government.
ANZAC Cottage article continues.

The finishing touches will be supplied by Drew Straker, a mural artist who will be painting the murals at the local primary school, giving the students at that school an opportunity to interact with the artist not only regarding his artist’s practice but also the story behind the murals.

Whilst Operation ANZAC Revamp has generated a lot of interest, and some valuable connections, a surprising outcome of the project came through the “Nui Dat” bus stop. The mural design was inspired by the cover photo of Vietnam Veteran Steve Lewis’s book “My Vietnam”. Steve told us that the photo was taken by Peter Fischer, himself a Vietnam Veteran, who was a member of the Long Tan burial party on August 19, 1966. As can be seen from the bus stop concept, Peter was an excellent photographer. And in the circle of coincidence that often epitomises ANZAC Cottage, Peter was also passionate about the Waler horses used in World War I and was instrumental in forming the Waler Horse Society and developing a website dedicated to this significant animal.

The success of Operation ANZAC Revamp and projects of this type are best summed up in the words of Steve Lewis himself: “I marvel at the string of coincidence that seems to surface when the veterans’ community undertake projects of this nature, and am humbled and proud to be one small factor in this event”.

Anne Chapple
Secretary
Friends of ANZAC Cottage Inc

Operation ANZAC Revamp was made possible by funding through the City of Vincent, Rosewood Care Group and Bendigo Bank North Perth

CITY OF VINCENT

And substantial in-kind contributions from
ANZAC Cottage project photos

ANZAC Cottage, “The House That Was Built in a Day” in 1916, a Memorial to the Gallipoli Landings, passed into the hands of the V.V.A.A. W.A. in 1991. The Cottage was then restored to its original condition, the house first, later the gardens were replanted and front fence erected.

In 2006, the possibility of renaming the 2 bus stops, in the vicinity of ANZAC Cottage, Gallipoli and Nui Dat, was discussed as a V.V.A.A. W.A. initiative and project. Initial planning began, due to red tape and other obstacles, the proposal did not eventuate at that time. By 2008 the initial planning file had been “lost” to the V.V.A.A. W.A.

Richard Williams.

V.V.A.A. W.A. November 2018.
The following article is taken from the C Company 6 RAR Vietnam Veterans newsletter
"C Company Lines"

Thank you to the Editor of “C Company Lines” and Geoff Jones

PREFACE

was looking through my computer files only to become reacquainted with a paper I had presented to a professional body and had long since forgotten.

I sought the counsel of several C Company brethren for their opinion on its suitability for C Company Lines or whether it should be returned to its hiding place in my computer.

Each of the reviewers gave me the thumbs up with Brian McFarlane opining, ‘Your article is an excellent one and I am sure would be suitable for C Company Lines. Most of the readers would identify closely with what you describe’.

And, David Beasley. Wow ! That brought back a lot of memories. You have done a magnificent job of portraying one’s emotions to the events at the time. There is also a message that bears repeating that we are surrounded by support in family and in the noble effort of doing something.

Jeff Foster was equally complimentary. Thank you all.

So, with such reassurance, here it is. Ed.

Getting on with Combat Stress

A presentation by Geoff Jones to the

Australian Critical Incident Stress Association (ACISA) Conference

At the Carlton Crest Hotel, Brisbane on 3 August 2001

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for asking me to present this paper.

It is my experience that combat stress can be caused by an event, a set of conditions or a combination of events and conditions.

Combat stress can be caused by a fear of death or injury. It can be from a fear of the unknown or the ever-present fear of capture, torture and internment.

Fear can come from the uncertainty of being able to distinguish the enemy from the populace. The stress too, of destroying him and burying him, of patching up the wounded and farewelling fallen mates. The physical stresses of chronic fatigue; lack of sleep; heavy loads; being wet and cold; wet and hot; always wet; hungry; dirty; chafed; infected; foot sore, with aching back and shoulders, sick; always sick. Fighting the elements, the terrain and the darkness.

These are the stresses that combat soldiers have to ‘get on’ with. They have to accept them. They have to live with them always.

In this paper I will refer to my combat experience as a medic in ‘C’ Company, 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment in the Vietnam War.

Governments send young men to war. As a nineteen-year old regular soldier, I volunteered for war. What an adventure – what an experience for a testosterone filled young man – I was trained to go to war and I was as keen as anyone to get there. As to where Vietnam was I knew little. However, I knew that when we got there, we would be fighting the communist Viet Cong.
In 1966 the controversy of the Vietnam war had not taken shape. We were heroes then. Indeed, we were farewelled by record lunchtime crowds lining Brisbane’s streets and in 1967 they were there on our return. But how that changed.

As television images of the war’s savagery beamed in to Australian homes elements within this country turned against the war, attacked the government and vilified the soldiers. We were embroiled in controversy – became villains – whatever support there had been, quickly evaporated. Having to justify our position – as noble as it seemed to us – was almost as great a battle as any we faced. In pubs it was easy to get in a fight; bitter arguments among friends and families was commonplace. There was resentment by those whose birthday marble in the conscription ballot came out for those whose did not. We questioned our worth as the sons and grandsons of Anzac’s. The RSL was divided about conscription and the war; as our natural allies we felt that they too had deserted us.

We could not understand these things, they were and continue to be, added stressors. It is our legacy.

My training as a medic comprised two formal courses of six weeks duration with on the job training in between.

My first experience with warlike stress was at Enoggera. A claymore mine exploded at the feet of a soldier who was inspecting it. It blew him apart. My training had prepared me for this but I found something unexpected, something that caused an involuntary reaction. I pulled my hand away from his bleeding body. I had never realised or been told by my trainers that blood pumping at 37°C is hot, very hot. I had a lot to learn about my craft if this was a foretaste of things to come.

Despite his horrific injuries, Len Usher survived. He did not go to Vietnam and his days as a soldier were numbered. I see him on Anzac day. He is a healthy, happy man, a bilateral amputee at the hip and he has three adult children.

Vietnam could not have been a more exotic place. A tropical paradise – Saigon – the Paris of the orient. Where beautiful women in traditional dress stroll the wide boulevards and stop at shaded cafes and bars. On Le Loi street, ‘the street of flowers’, the hustle and bustle of commerce is unaffected by war. A block away, refugees live on the streets and somehow eke out an existence. Human waste and squalor litter the streets. It is a decaying unhealthy city.

In the wet season the temperature is high and the humidity oppressive. The enervating climate is only relieved by a cleansing and refreshing afternoon storm. You can set your watch by it.

In the countryside there are coolies in rice fields, their faces shaded under conical hats. Small boys ride water buffalo as naturally as the man from Snowy River on horseback. There are villages of thatch roof huts and a sprinkling of substantial brick and tile houses. Escaping the heat a mama san will sway to and fro in a hammock, a grandchild asleep on her tummy.

In the town, urchins can be seen begging, profiteers are swaggering, prostitutes are plying their trade and soldiers are living for today.

There are men with guns. Serious men checking people’s ‘ID’ at a road block. Massive military trucks are on the move, mounted soldiers ready and vigilant. Armoured personnel carriers sporting 50 calibre machine guns lumber by; jeeps dart through traffic; squawking radio transmissions; the unmistakeable sound of a Huey Helicopter gunship is heard overhead. An ambulance passes through the road block; artillery guns fire in the distance.

These are the paradoxical sights and sounds of a country subjected to guerrilla war. It is a situation not unlike what is going on in many countries and cultures in the world today.
After a short acclimatisation in the enervating tropical heat we commenced military operations. Our first task was to search and destroy the village of Long Phuoc, a Viet Cong bastion of resistance to government rule.

C Company commander, Brian McFarlane describes in his book ‘We band of brothers’ the heralding of the operation. ‘Before we moved in, the known points of resistance were attacked by US Air Force jets that wheeled over our heads one after the other like giant birds of prey. Huge smoke rings went skywards from the exploding 500 pound bombs and napalm, as we nervously watched and hoped that the opposition would be quietened by this fiery onslaught from the sky’

But quietened, ‘Charlie was not. Charlie was our name for the Viet Cong or VC. It was a shortening of the phonetic alphabet of the letters, ‘V’ and ‘C’; ‘Victor Charlie’.

‘Charlie’ would resist to the bitter end. Sniper fire dogged us for two weeks as we searched and destroyed houses, tunnel systems, air raid shelters and fighting bays. We apprehended Viet Cong suspects and seized rice, salt and ammunition. Four enemy soldiers were killed and one of our own men was wounded.

What had seemed a great adventure had suddenly become very serious. I had been fired on – by direct aimed fire. While I will never know if I was the intended target of someone else’s aim, it was nonetheless, a very personal thing. Being at war suddenly entered my consciousness.

Afterwards, I looked upon a dead enemy soldier. I had not seen death before. It had a sobering effect on me and the others. We now understood that this was not a game – not a training exercise in Queensland. This was real. For the first time I had felt fear. A fear of death. At the same time I was repulsed at the sight before me. The soldier had not died immediately. He was mortally wounded days before and had crawled some distance to hide in a banana grove. His swollen and putrefying remains were under attack by maggots, ants and other creatures.

Perhaps the thing that distinguished the Australian infantryman’s experience in the Vietnam War is that he was in a state of constant tension. There was no let-up in the patrolling program – there was no front line – the enemy was indistinguishable from the population – there were no long periods of rest. The tour of duty was twelve long exhausting months.

Typically, we had one or two days rest every three months to savour the delights of the seaside town of Vung Tau. It was an irony of the war that ‘Charlie’ also took his rest there. One was always conscious that the sullen young man in the bar or market place would have us in his cross hairs at another place and time.

Five days rest and recreation leave was taken after six months in an exotic city such as Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore or Taipei. Afterwards it was back to the continuous mental and physical grind of aggressive patrolling and close fighting.

The full realisation that Charlie meant business was known to us after six weeks. He had taken that time to assess our strength and our methods of operating – our tactics. However, he needed also to bring us to battle, to assess our weaknesses and if he could, to destroy us.

And, bring us to battle he did. It happened by way of a chance encounter. One history records, ‘after patrolling for about 500 metres, the leading troops approached a cleared area where the padi fields made an in indent into the jungle. 7 Platoon saw two VC watching from a bamboo clump located about 60 metres out in the cleared area. Opening fire, the two VC were hit but immediately afterwards, on a front of about 125 metres, the tree line across the cleared indent erupted in a hail of fire directed at 7 platoon’.

The enemy advanced across the clearing in an attacking line with bugles sounding and guidons flying. Mortars slammed into our midst as we took up firing positions.
We were outnumbered by three to one. For more than 30 minutes belt after belt of machine gun fire was directed at the attacking line and our artillery fire began to cut the enemy down. The attack was beaten off but at the expense of three of our own men wounded.

Because of the medical evacuation of our wounded, the battlefield was not immediately searched and the Viet Cong removed the bodies of their dead. They usually carried their casualties from the battlefield, both to deny us intelligence and to give their dead a proper burial. We learned they were grateful that we were respectful when we buried the bodies of their comrades.

Two of our wounded men were in a bad way. One with his arm sliced away by hot shrapnel and the other with a gun-shot wound to the head. It was my job now to patch them up and prepare them for evacuation by helicopter. Despite his pain and debilitating wound Bill Winterford was cheerful. He joked that he only needed one hand to hold a cigarette. Les Prowse was unconscious and fitting. After tending their wounds I could do no more than make them comfortable while waiting for the chopper.

My memory of this action is clear. It was a closely run battle and because I was on my feet and moving to tend the casualties, I afterwards realised how near I may have been to getting hit myself.

When it was over I experienced a delayed reaction. It took me quite by surprise. Suddenly, I got the shakes, my knees were like jelly and my bowel had turned to water. There is a crude description of how the bowel can react to a fright. I know it to be true because I had just proved it.

Mike Dakin, our New Zealand battery artillery officer wrote, ‘the remarkable thing to me was the high energy levels after the event and the incredible chattering that went on as the men compared their experiences. I remember in particular the radio operator from Sydney asking if I’d heard the VC bugles calling. Others excitedly said, “Yes” they had. “No”, I hadn’t, and I wondered why’.

It turned out Mike was as deaf as a post and didn’t know it. His recollection well describes the ‘high’ we were all on. A high based on adrenalin and our salvation.

There was little sleep that night as the enemy was lurking nearby.

In the morning it was reported by two-way radio that Prowsey had died. I was devastated. I felt flat - depressed. All my casualties had survived. In training they had always got up.

I could not comprehend of them dying – no one had told me that some of them would die. They always got up, laughed and soldiered on. I somehow felt responsible - that I had not done enough for him.

Fortunately, an old soldier who had already served with distinction in the Second World War and the Korean War saw the signs and he took me aside. Every military unit needs an experienced campaigner who can give explanation to the obscenity of war. And, can help the kids rationalise their feelings. I give thanks still, for his wisdom.

It was about this time when tension was at its height that we experienced a joy of mateship and humour.

The enemy was lurking nearby and the darkness was as black as pitch. The only light was from the fire-flies – strangely, looking like tracer bullets. The company occupied a perimeter of about 100 metres circumference. Platoon machine gunners manned their posts and peered into the blackness, alert and suspicious of every sound. Their nerves taut. A radio operator in the centre of the perimeter was sending reports to battalion headquarters in a hushed tone. 100 men were lying on the wet ground under nylon hootchies – trying to settle down but with nerves like strained fencing wire. Sleep won't come for a long time yet, and then, just as it does it is your turn to man the machine gun.
Some of you may remember a radio serial of two lovers – John and Marsha. John Winstone, a bear of a man, a great wit and first-class soldier – had by coincidence, a girlfriend at home in Australia named Marsha.

John was hootched up with another bloke who in the tension of the night and with a whispered rising inflection said, “John?”. Thinking of home perhaps, John answered “Marsha!”. This was picked up by the blokes in the next hootch, “John” – Marsha and onwards around the perimeter; “John” – “Marsha”. As it was passed on so did an erotic inflection of “Johhhnnn” – “Maaarrshha”. This built to a crescendo of erotic fantasy. We started to giggle, stifling it at first but then not able to contain ourselves. We laughed and giggled and for a few minutes we forgot the dangers of ‘Charlie’ lurking in the dark. The tension was broken and we settled down for the best sleep in ages.

In the morning there was no sign of the enemy. They withdrew in the night, probably in the belief they had been subjected to a new form of psychological warfare.

It was said by a contemporary historian that the battle of Long Tan started with a whimper and ended in a bang.

On the night of 16/17 August the Australian Task Force base was hit by heavy enemy mortar and rocket fire. It was essential that the enemy’s intentions be known so D company was deployed to the field to find the enemy and destroy him.

On the afternoon of 18 August a few shots rang out as D Company’s 11 platoon detected and fired on a squad of enemy soldiers. Within a few minutes, in a blinding monsoon rain storm, the Australians were fighting for their lives. Numbering a little more than 100 they were confronted by a Viet Cong main force of approximately 2,000. They were outnumbered by twenty to one. After three hours of intense and furious battle Australian reinforcements arrived.

Under cover of darkness the enemy withdrew, bloodied and beaten.

D company also withdrew to a secure position close by. In the morning the company was to lead the rest of the battalion on to the battlefield to recover the missing.

The enemy left behind 245 dead. D company lost 17 men killed and 21 wounded. Another soldier from the reinforceing unit was mortally wounded. Our dead and wounded were evacuated by helicopter in the night.

The battlefield was like a charnel house. Bodies and body parts everywhere. Rubber trees were shredded and torn, some with their crowns ripped off, such was the power of exploding artillery upon them. It was a ghastly sight and in the morning’s heat the smell of death and dying was all around.

As we advanced towards the scene I saw in the near distance an enemy soldier with his left arm in the air. He looked to be greeting us or calling for help. Getting closer I saw that he had no head, no right chest or right arm – he was a macabre sight and he was only one of many that I was to see in the remaining hours of that day.

Gunshots rang out on our flank as wounded enemy soldiers intent on making a heroic last stand were despatched. All our senses were at high pitch as we expected any moment that the enemy would return in strength and the battle would be resumed.

Our task was to secure and clear the battlefield. This entailed searching the bodies, being careful that they were not booby trapped, and burying them.

But, where to start this grisly task. Some are complete but there is a just torso here or a leg there. We set about digging with our small entrenching shovels. The ground was wet clay and it was hard going. When we had dug down a few feet we dragged a body to the grave and covered it over.
I watched one soldier, so repulsed by the scene that he would not touch the remains, choosing a body that was lying face up with no apparent wound and a rather peaceful expression. He tied a rope around the dead man's ankle and pulled, only to see a trail of brain matter and entrails left behind. The enemy soldier's entire back was blown away.

We soon found that the task was exhausting. The digging was impossible and our numbers were too few. The graves became shallower with two and sometimes three bodies covered over.

We had great respect for Charlie. He was a good soldier and a courageous fighter.

We revisited the horror of these sights a few days later when we passed through the battlefield. The shallow graves had subsided in the monsoon rains. Arms and legs were sticking up grotesquely and there were signs that animals had feasted.

Black humour sustained us throughout these days.

On my second tour of duty I witnessed scores of bodies at the US Army Mortuary Unit being prepared for their return home. They were mostly American but some were Australian. Brave young men, their war-ravaged bodies being prepared for return to their relatives.

I was morbidly fascinated by the remains of several Americans whose pitifully few bones each occupied a stretcher and were covered by a blanket. These were the unidentified remains of men, but with hope eternal they were reverently stored for a breakthrough in technology that would allow them to be identified and be returned to their families. I had the privilege of being on hand when the newly identified remains of a previously unknown soldier were being prepared for a hero's return. He was a helicopter pilot who had been shot down four years previously.

The cost to Australia from the Vietnam war was 500 dead. Six did not return. They are missing presumed killed.

I went back to Vietnam in 1997. I stood at the memorial cross that now stands on the Long Tan battlefield – the killing ground where I had last stood, and, which I had turned with an entrenching shovel, more than 30 years before.

I had an overwhelming sense of loss – for all who died that day. Suddenly, I collapsed to the ground. I broke down, and, I sobbed uncontrollably.

Ladies and gentlemen. I have related some of my experience of combat and combat stress. There are many ex-servicemen with a similar story. Indeed, many more have combat experience that far exceeds mine. I think, they will be no less affected by their experience.

I am mindful that as I speak, many hundreds of people are experiencing the same trauma in guerrilla war hot spots around the world.

In this paper I set out to describe the affects of my experience of war, then and now. I trust I have done that.

I knew then and I know now, that I had to find a way of getting on with combat stress. It is ever present – one has to live with it – one even has to 'get on with it'.

I would now like to conclude with a story, which for me is uplifting.

Not so long ago I had the privilege of chatting with a First World War veteran and centenarian (100 years young). His mind was razor sharp and his recall was detailed. For his privacy, I will call him Tom Smith.

He related his experiences as a stretcher bearer in October 1917 at the great battle of Passchendaele. The 3rd Australian Division, the New Zealand Division and the 4th Australian Brigade were thrust into the line to break through strongly fortified German positions. For over two weeks they went over the top – into the killing machine of machine gun fire and artillery barrages. It was a battle of attrition. 7,000 Australians and New Zealanders were killed and wounded.
Tom saw many men blown to bits. He had saw others drown in water filled shell holes or in the thigh deep glutinous mud despite his best efforts to rescue them. In the end he had to give up as they were impossible to reach. Hundreds of men were never found. They drowned, or their bodies were blown into extinction.

Tom returned to Australia and married his sweetheart. They started a family. In 1924, at the Brisbane Exhibition Ground, while watching skyrockets explode Tom had a flashback to the war years. He related that while clutching his new-born child, he collapsed to his knees and he vomited. His nerves were shot. He was told he had shell shock. He could not work for three months and finally he went to the Repatriation Department.

"But, Mr Smith", the Repat official said.

“I have your record. When you returned from the war, you said you had no disabilities”.

And, with that, he was turned away.

I asked him, “what did you do?”

He replied, “what could I do, I had to find my own solution”.

“And, what was your solution?” I asked.

He said, “my work and my family”.

‘My work and my family’

Ladies and gentlemen. I think they are inspiring words.

I too, was fortunate. I had a long and satisfying army career as well as the love and support of my family. It was these things that inspired me – that helped me find a way to get on with combat stress.

I continue to need that support.

Countless others across all cultures and experiences who are not so blessed may need your help and support. Please give it.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer your questions.
ADVOCACY CORNER.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) went live on July 1

On 1 July 2018, the ATDP introduced its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) module. It replaces the TIP refresher training requirements used to demonstrate currency for professional indemnity purposes. The CPD requirement is one which is common to many professional environments. The ATDP believes that it has great potential to enhance the abilities of advocates to deliver high-quality services to the veteran community.

All Level 1 - 4 advocates who have completed Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and who are not on a learning pathway should undertake CPD to ensure continuity of VITA Professional Indemnity Insurance coverage. To date, more than 210 Advocates or 55 per cent of all advocates with a CPD obligation have formally enrolled. More pleasing is the fact that more than 150 advocates have commenced earning CPD points.

A fundamental premise of CPD is that advocacy training and development is both continuing and self-directed. Continuing means that advocates who have a CPD obligation should earn no less than 15 CPD points annually and 45 CPD points over any three-year period. In the first CPD year advocates are especially requested to also complete the ‘update’ modules which specifically address the unique challenges facing younger veterans identified during the Younger Veteran workshops conducted in 2018.

Feedback on the CPD module has been positive. However, some advocates are still experiencing log-in difficulties because their contact details haven’t been updated, or they are using an incorrect username, or password. Authorising ex-service organisations (ESOs) need to work with advocates to make sure that advocates’ details have been updated in a timely manner.

The current CPD delivery platform is mainly IT-based. To this end the CPD team is currently developing additional CPD activities such as on-line case studies and the inclusion of specialist webinars. Advocates also have the opportunity to complete non IT-based activities.

The CPD team recognizes that learning also occurs in a variety of learning environments. In this regard, the CPD team has had considerable interest from advocates seeking to have non-ATDP learning based activities recognised for CPD points.

The most urgent task facing the CPD team is to make contact with those advocates who still may not be aware that they have a CPD obligation. Please contact the CPD team at cpd@atdp.org.au to update your contact details, or get yourself registered for CPD, so you can begin your CPD journey.

Further information about CPD please visit: http://www.atdp.org.au/cpd/

HAVE YOUR SAY—LETTERS TO DEBRIEF ARE WELCOME

The subject matter should be generally of interest to Vietnam Veterans and their families. Brief, to the point letters have a better chance of publication. Photographs should be of good colour, quality and subject matter, in jpg or similar format. Text should be submitted in Word format with minimum formatting. Vietnam Veteran writers must identify themselves by name, state, Vietnam Unit and Tour dates. Email: brief@vvaa.org.au
REUNIONS
HEADQUARTER COY,
1ST AUSTRALIAN LOGISTIC SUPPORT GROUP
and it is held in BALLARAT,
from the meet and greet on the 8TH NOVEMBER
2019 till the 11TH NOVEMBER 2019

for ACCOMMODATION AND REUNION DETAILS
contact TONY BROWN on 0428852736 or
email on tony11raye13@bigpond.com.

30 Terminal Sqn Reunion
Townsville 2019
16-18 Aug 19
An event to get all past and present termites
together in a fun and relaxed atmosphere to
share the trials and tribulations of being a ter-
mite (and possibly some tall tales)
Craig Ingram
Unit 5 28 lowth St Rosslea Qld 4812
0407173321
craig Ingram@westnet.com.au

HMAS Duchess Reunion 2019
Notice, Venue and Dates
Registrations are now called for the 9th reunion of HMAS Duchess Crew, to be held at Hotel Grand Chancellor, Ade-
laide, over the weekend 29th to 31st March, 2019.
Full cost will be $200.00, which includes Friday night light meal or cocktail service (yet to be decided), Saturday night
dinner and Sunday brunch, with a certain amount of dry till Friday and Saturday night. Deposit of $50.00/head for
prospective attendees to be paid 31st December 2018, balance of payment by 15th February, 2019. Phone or email
for registration form and details to Bruce Bowmaker Ph 0403243795, or email littlefish.in@bigpond.com.

VETERAN FRIENDLY RETREATS
Future listing of these facilities should be available on the various VVAA State branch web sites
and these can be accessed through the web site www.vvaa.org.au
THE WAR WIDOWS GUILD OF AUSTRALIA

“We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life.”

A strong part of the Guilds History is the origins of its Logo.

The kookaburra was adopted as the Guilds Logo from its early inception and remains today.

The Kookaburra is also present on all War Widows’ Guild Badges.