



DEBRIEF

Patron: RADM Neil Ralph AO DSC RAN (RTD)

Edited and Published By

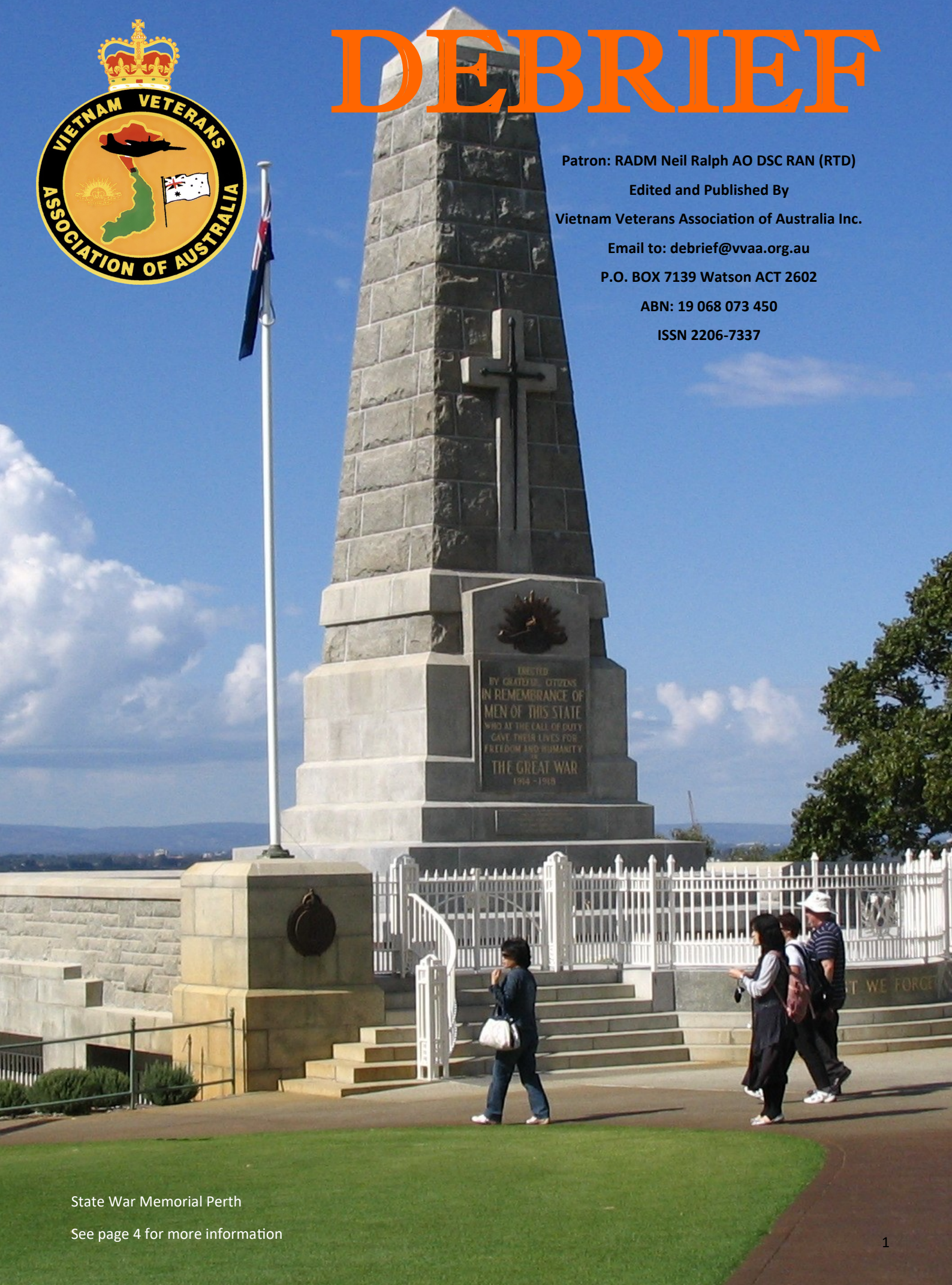
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Inc.

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State War Memorial Perth

See page 4 for more information

National Presidents Report

Members and readers may be aware that on 18 June 2020 the Association's National President, Ken Foster OAM JP, stood down as National President and from all other Association appointments. Ken had served as President since 2014 and prior to that had filled the positions of National Secretary and, on two occasions, was a National Vice President. The Association thanks Ken for his many contributions to the interests of the Association and its members over these years.



In accordance with the Rules of the Association the National Executive convened a meeting of the National Council as soon as practicable. This meeting (by Zoom software) was held on Monday 29 June at which I was elected as National President and adjustments were made to all other appointments until the 2021 National Congress. The National Executive now comprises myself, and the existing members, Terry Roe (National Secretary), Peter Fox (National Treasurer) and Michael Benyk (National Vice President). I thank the members of the Executive for their support, teamwork and attention to detail as we have adjusted to the new situation.

An important appointment made by Council was that of a new Editor for Debrief. Council was pleased to appoint Robynne Mitchell to this position. Robynne has had a long association with the VVAA and Vietnam veterans generally, especially in the ACT and NSW. Council also decided that the frequency of publication of Debrief would be changed to bi-monthly, effective from this edition.

Since the end of June I have attended (via Zoom) two DVA convened meetings designed to update the members of the ESO Round Table with current issues, and a third meeting of ESORT members to discuss further those issues. These have included;

- Productivity Commission Recommendations re DVA – a government response to the PC Report is currently expected in the Budget processes later this year.
- Advocacy – it seems unlikely that the budget processes will include a response to the report on advocacy services written by Robert Cornall AO. The Cornall Report did not address in detail such matters as where advocates are located, hours of availability and intentions of future service so DVA has commissioned the University of NSW to report on those and similar matters. It is understood that this project will be completed by January 2021.
- Open Arms – the COVID situation has resulted in an escalation of calls upon the Counselling Service.

Separately, we have written recently to the Minister regarding concerns expressed by National Council as to some aspects of government policies that affect the operations of Open Arms and we await a response.

Finally, I wish to express my personal sadness at the recent loss of Sheldon Maher OAM. Sheldon, with his wife Cathy, had attended as observers several meetings of Council and Congress in Canberra and had impressed all with his knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment to matters of concern to Vietnam veterans and their families.

With best wishes,

Max Ball

DISCLAIMER—The material in DEBRIEF is in the nature of general comment only and neither purports nor is intended to be advice on any particular matter. NO persons should act on the basis of any matter contain in DEBRIEF without considering and, if necessary, taking appropriate professional advice upon their own particular circumstances. The V.V.A.A. the authors and editors, expressly disclaim all and any liability in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by any such person in reliance, whether whole or partial, upon the whole or part of the contents of DEBRIEF.

Cover Photo

The State War Memorial Cenotaph, situated at the top of Kings Park and Botanic Garden escarpment, overlooks the city of Perth with beautiful views of the Swan and Canning Rivers and the Darling Ranges.

The memorial was developed around an 18m tall obelisk as the principal feature, which is almost a replica of the Australian Imperial Force Memorials erected in France and Belgium. This makes for a very impressive ANZAC Day Dawn Service.

The heavy concrete foundations are supplemented by heavy brick walls which enclose an inner chamber or crypt. The walls surrounding the crypt are covered with The Roll of Honour; marble tablets which list under their units the names of more than 7,000 members of the services killed in action or as a result of World War 1. Glass cases enclose the colours of the 1st, and 2nd, 11th, 16th, 28th and 44th Infantry Battalions and of the 10th Light Horse Regiment.

Bronze plaques on the outside wall of the crypt entrance list under Navy, Army, Airforce, Women's Services and Merchant Navy nearly 4000 Western Australians killed or who died from effects of World War 2. Inside the crypt on a marble tablet are the names of Western Australians killed in Korea (1950-1953), Malaya (1950-1960), Borneo (1962-1966) and Vietnam (1962-1973).

Construction was started in 1928 and on 24 November 1929 the Cenotaph was unveiled by the State Governor and committed to the care of the Western Australian Branch of the Returned and Services League.

For many years, members of the Highgate RSL Sub-branch have accepted the responsibility for maintaining over 1100 plaques for the memorial trees in the Honour Avenues in the park.

Each ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day, the students from Carine High School lay a flower at each of these memorial plaques.



AVCAT ESSAY PRIZE 2020

AVCAT presents the inaugural AVCAT Essay Prize 2020, promoting recognition of the impact of the Vietnam War on veterans, their families and loved ones.

The essay winners will be announced on Remembrance Day, 11th November 2020 for any essay, up to 2500 words, addressing the theme "Impact of the Vietnam War on Family".

Entries open on Vietnam Veterans' Day, 18 August 2020 and close at midnight 16 October 2020.

The prizes, donated by **Vietnam Veteran's' Association** are:

First Prize:	\$500
Second Prize:	\$200
Third Prize:	\$100

AVCAT Essay Prize 2020 is open to all entrants over the age of 18 years as at 18 August 2020.

The essay winners will be announced on Remembrance Day, 11 November 2020



AVCAT scholarships are for the children and grandchildren of Australian Veterans to study at university or TAFE

Every donation helps our young people achieve their dreams and build a better future

It's easier than ever to donate, visit our website to click the DONATE button now

www.avcat.org.au



02 9213 7999 avcat@dva.gov.au
PO Box K978 Haymarket NSW 1240

DFRDB Update July 2020



Australian Defence Force Retirees Association Inc.

No. A0108026R

We represent the interests of Defence Force Retirees regarding their Superannuation

www: <https://www.adfra.org/>

Email: admin@adfra.org

DFRDB UPDATE - JULY 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic persists, and many have been impacted.

This update is another short one, but it is significant.

CDDA Application

We have seen several replies to CDDA claims, and the fundamental basis for rejection is always the legal interpretation of the wording of the Act and the financial modelling cited in the Ombudsman's report, which now appears to have become Government policy.

Herb has still heard nothing regarding his claim.

Legal Action

In [Request for Amendment of the DFRDB Act](#) we have asked for:

1. The amendment of the DFRDB Act;
2. The recalculation of the retirement pay reduction for recipients yet to reach Schedule 3 life expectancy;
3. The refund of all retirement pay and invalidity pay reductions which exceed the amount commuted; and
4. The restoration of the relativity of DFRDB benefits to the rates of those benefits at the time of retirement.

If it is rejected, we will take it to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

We have already had many Ex-Service Organizations (ESO's) sign up to our MOU, including some state and regional bodies that are subordinate to National groups, and we thank each one of them. However, we still do not have the critical mass we need. If you are an ESO, we ask you to give some thought to signing up to our non-binding MOU.

You can download the MOU by clicking on this link:

https://adfra.org/docPDF/ADFRA_Memorandum_of_Understanding_1.pdf

Stay safe.

Jim Hislop OAM

President

DVA Media Release



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 2 July 2020

VETERANS VIEWS SOUGHT TO SHAPE FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

VETERANS and their families are being asked to provide their views on how the ex-service community is consulted and engaged, and how this can be improved.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester said the views of the serving and ex-service community are essential as the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) continues to change and to ensure veterans and their families can access the services they need, when they need them.

"The Government is committed to putting veterans and their families first, and part of this is consulting with the right groups in the ex-service community and seeking a broad range of views on services, support and commemoration," Mr Chester said.

"Along with DVA, ex-service organisations have played a critical role in supporting veterans and their families for more than 100 years, and this review ensures their changing views and requirements are heard. I encourage all those in the ex-service community to participate and provide their feedback."

The National Consultation Framework has been in place since 2009 and is reviewed every three years in consultation with the ex-service community. It aims to facilitate the needs of veterans and their families are voiced and listened to by DVA, through forum structures, membership of various forums, appropriate representation on fora and capacity of member organisations.

Repatriation Commissioner Don Spinks, who is responsible for Veteran Engagement at DVA, said everyone's suggestions will be heard and will play an important role informing the future consultation model.

"This review is essential to giving veterans a voice so I encourage everyone in the serving and ex-service community to get involved and have their say," Commissioner Spinks said.

Further information on the review, including participating in the survey, is available on the [DVA website](#). The survey will be available until 26 July 2020 with the final report expected to be completed in late 2020.

Repatriation Commissioner Don Spinks is available for interview to discuss the National Consultation Framework. Please phone the DVA Media Team 02 6289 6466.

ENDS

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Cedric Szigeti: 02 6277 7820
DVA Media: 02 6289 6466

Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Canberra ACT.

Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au

Members Note: Re: NCF Consultation (above). The National President has submitted comments on the survey forms and the Executive will be writing directly to Commissioner Spinks on this matter.

Australian War Memorial to Re-Opens



Dear valued supporter of the Australian War Memorial.

I am writing to advise you on the Memorial reopened to the public on Wednesday 1 July 2020.

The Memorial's galleries and reading room re-opened, and the daily Last Post Ceremony is now being conducted live. Some programming, such as voluntary guided tours and family history research assistance will not start on this date.

Whilst we are very keen to welcome visitors back, the timeline within the ACT Government's *COVID Recovery Plan* anticipates a gradual easing of restrictions for gallery spaces the size of the Memorial's. We are required to meet (as a minimum) the ACT Government's 1 person to 4 sq metre social distancing and personal hygiene measures including hand sanitisation availability and a regular regime of cleaning of surfaces.

However, re-opening has come with new measures such as free timed ticketed entry, that can be booked via online booking. Visitors planning to attend the Last Post Ceremony will also need to book to ensure we carefully manage attendance numbers. More information on timed entry can be found on the website here <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit>.

The Memorial's existing program of digital engagement through our website content and social media has been in high demand. This content includes videos, podcasts and 360 degree experiences; never so important as it was to commemorate *Anzac at Home*, where we delivered a number of innovative ways for the community and veterans to connect and keep in touch 'online'.

As a transitional measure, in early June the daily Last Post Ceremony moved from the *#LPC archive* presentation to new pre-recorded ceremonies. With the assistance of the Australian Defence Force, some of these Last Post stories were read by deployed service members who have been filmed on location. This was a new and important dimension of the Last Post Ceremony in highlighting Defence service and online connectivity.

As visitors and veterans start to turn their minds to domestic and regional travel, other aspects of the Memorial's ceremonial program will recommence.

We certainly look forward to welcoming you and thank you for your ongoing support and interest.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Anderson, PSM

Director

matt.anderson@awm.gov.au | t +61 (0)2 6243 4262 | m +61 (0)417 157 725

Australian War Memorial | GPO Box 345 Canberra ACT 2601 | www.awm.gov.au

VALE

SHELDON MITCHELL MAHER OAM

19 September 1947 — 12 June 2020

TRIBUTES TO A VETERAN

(Extract: Northern Star Lismore 17 June 2020)

COMMUNITY MOURNS LOSS OF ADVOCATE

Family, friends and former colleagues are mourning the death of the “heart and soul” of the Northern Rivers veteran community, Sheldon Maher OAM, who passed away quietly in the early hours of Friday 12th June 2020.

This dedicated veteran advocate was Secretary of the Far North Coast Sub-Branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association for 10 years before becoming President.

Maher was born in Tenterfield where he lived and was educated throughout his childhood, before basing himself in Lismore with his family.

After leaving school he joined the Australian Public Service where he worked for 38 years.

Condolences go to Sheldon’s wife Cathy and his family.



*Sheldon Maher OAM at Lismore Remembrance Day Service in 2019
Pic courtesy: Northern Star Newspaper.*



BRIAN KEITH ROLFE 9 SQN

18 December 1945 – 17-July 2020

It is with deep sadness that I inform you of the passing of our dear friend and Vietnam Veteran Barry Keith Rolfe A223429. Barry was born in Goulburn NSW and served in Vietnam with 9 Squadron RAAF as an Airframe Fitter from 28 May 1969 to 30 April 1970 then again from 23 June 1971 to 8 October 1971

You served your country well rest in peace Barry.

JOHN ALBERT SMITH

1945-2020

Condolences to the family of John Albert Smith, the President of VVAA Burdekin Sub Branch who was killed in a tragic accident at Deep Creek, Queensland.

John’s Vietnam services was with the Royal Australian Engineers 17th Construction Squadron from 3 October 1967 to 20 August 1968

A well attended memorial service was held on 8th July at the Deep Creek Retreat.



DVA Cost Saving—Vetaffairs

Dear ESORT members

As a follow-up to teleconference yesterday, I just want to clarify, we have no plans to stop production of Vetaffairs in hard copy while there are veterans that would like to receive it via the post. Just as we will always produce an audio recording of each issue for those who are visually impaired.

We are simply planning to move to three bumper editions annually in hard copy each year instead of four normal editions.

You might be interested to know that currently Vetaffairs goes to 258,000 in hardcopy and 15,422 receive digital notification (and who don't receive hardcopy). For those who prefer to view Vetaffairs on our website rather than in hardcopy, they are able to opt out of hardcopy, and their record will be manually updated. I will ensure your record is double checked and updated to remove hardcopy. My apologies this hasn't occurred already.

Since our recent e-news bulletin offering a digital only option for receipt of Vetaffairs, the team have received many requests from veterans wishing to transfer to digital only.

Given the changing needs and expectations of our veteran cohort, we are now developing a full digital 'magazine' version of Vetaffairs for rolling out in the coming months. Should a veteran choose to receive Vetaffairs digitally then they will no longer receive hardcopy. However, if a veteran does not voluntarily opt in to receiving a digital copy then they will continue to receive Vetaffairs in the mail.

The largest portion of the cost of Vetaffairs is actually postage so changing the format will not reduce this cost.

A reminder the date for the next full ESORT meeting is 20 August 2020. I understand the Secretariat has already reached out to you seeking your submissions. As advised yesterday, I will add the *Chief Health Officer Operating Model* to the August agenda and I am seeking your views on DVA services that may only require small adjustments to enable them to be more accessible for our veterans and their families. We can discuss the full agenda when we meet via Zoom on 5 August 2020

Regards,

Liz

Liz Cosson AM CSC
Secretary
Department of Veterans' Affairs

T: 02 6289 6735 Ext: 616735
E: Liz.Cosson@dva.gov.au
E: secretary@dva.gov.au



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DVA Gold Card

DVA GOLD CARD FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS OVER 70 YEARS OLD

Members and readers are reminded that veterans aged 70 years or more who have qualifying service are eligible to receive a DVA Gold card for medical treatment.

To lodge a claim go to the DVA web site and search firstly for Gold card and then “How to get your Gold Card”. This will bring up the form “Application for a Gold card for Veterans of Australia’s Defence Force” DVA form D3057.

When completing the form you can ignore Question 16. We believe that this question is irrelevant and inappropriate and we have requested the department to remove it.

History Task Continues

Canberra author, Kel Robertson, is continuing work on the history of the VVAA, despite the corona-virus closure of national research institutions in recent months.

Robertson’s focus, since beginning work last year, has been on the founding of the Association.

“It’s been slow going,” he said, “because the few surviving records from this period are scattered across a large number of VVAA and RSL files, and because I’ve had to rely a lot on newspaper reports, which are time consuming to locate. However, the volume of Association records in the War Memorial increases dramatically from 1981. From that point on, the task gets easier.”

When asked what most impressed him about the early Association, Robertson says: “There were remarkable people in nearly all states who, in the summer of 1979-80, formed organisations to improve the care of Vietnam veterans and their families. And they did this even though they had no experience in running public associations or in dealing with politicians and the media. It was a gutsy collective effort.”

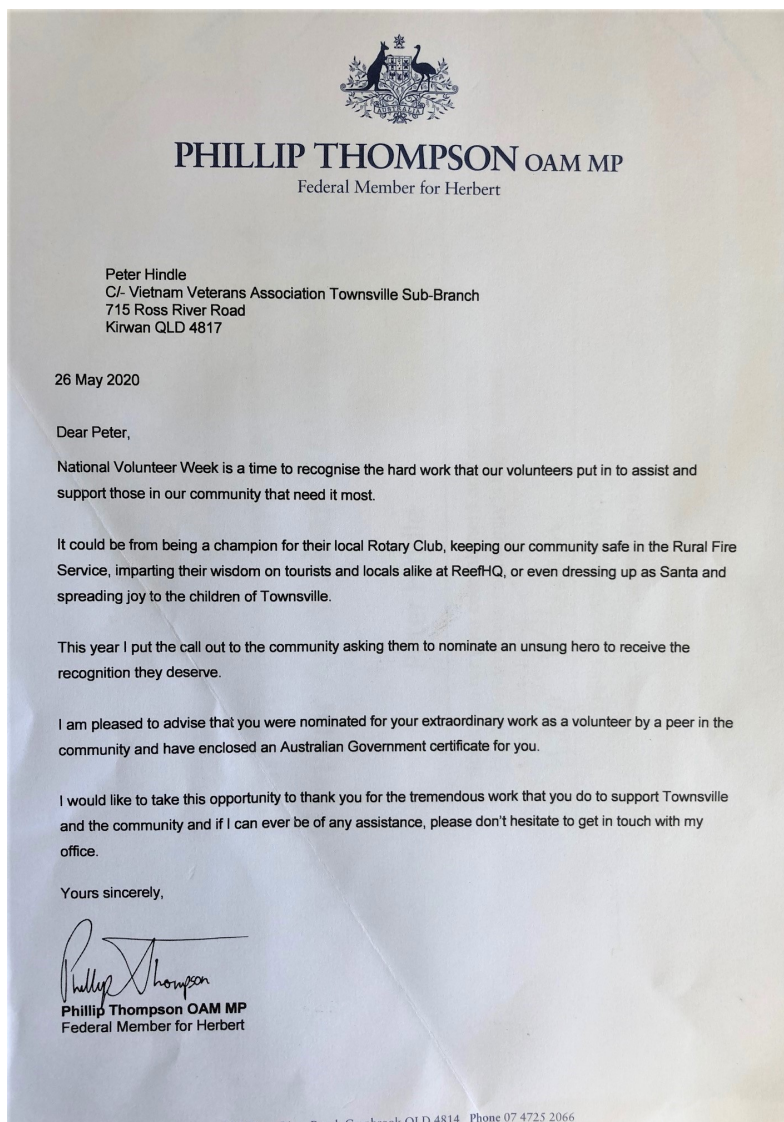
A number of individuals who were involved in the early Association have been interviewed by Robertson since he began work, but interviews will continue in August and September. If the whereabouts is known of **James (Jim) Wares**, the inaugural President in NSW; he left Australia for, perhaps, Britain in the 1980s, and **Terry Spriggs**, active in the early years in WA., please advise your State President.

Robertson is particularly interested in seeing any account of the May 1980 National Conference (sometimes referred to as “the national seminar”), minutes of the March 1981 meeting of State representatives in Sydney, and minutes of the May 1981 National Conference in Canberra. If you have any of these records, please let your State President know.

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: debrief@vvaa.org.au

Volunteer Week Recognition



Congratulations

Peter Hindle, President of VVAA Queensland, and Townsville Sub-Branch, along with Peter Martin, an active Level 3 Advocate for the VVAA Townsville Sub-Branch received certificates from the Federal Member for Herbert, Phil Thompson OAM MP for their contribution to supporting their community.



Vietnam Veterans Day

If there are any doubts as to what commemoration services are being held in your area contact your sub-branch secretary for clarification.

Victoria—For the first time in 30 years there will be not be “traditional” Vietnam Veterans Day commemorations at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. Instead, a short virtual VV Day service will be conducted by Shrine staff within the inner sanctum of the Shrine. The service, which will be live streamed and available on the Shrine Facebook page, will include messages from the Victorian Premier the Hon Daniel Andrews and the VVAA Victorian State President Bob Elworthy AM.

Canberra—Unless conditions change at the last minute, all Vietnam Veterans are invited to attend the brief Service at the National Vietnam Memorial on ANZAC Parade, Canberra at 10:00am on 18 August 2020. There will be no seating available. The traditional camaraderie afternoon will be at the Ainslie Football Club, 52 Wakefield Ave, Ainslie 1200hrs to 1500hrs.

Remembrance House—Burpengary QLD

Photo Gallery



We Need Your Help! - QLD Air Museum—Caloundra

We, RAAF Vietnam Lunch Club, don't normally do this, but this is for a good cause. The Qld Air Museum (<https://www.radschool.org.au/magazines/Vol68/Page15.htm>) needs our help.

Please read the following and then, if able, please sign the petition. We need your help...

A petition lead by the Queensland Air Museum's volunteers seeking an extension of their existing lease to incorporate vacant land adjacent to the Museum has been launched.

As you are no doubt aware, for many years the QAM have been attempting to negotiate the Museums expansion with the Sunshine Coast Council who are trustees of the additional land located on Caloundra Road. Despite eight years of ongoing interaction they have reached an impasse so a decision was made to petition the State Government directly.

QAM have been very patient and respectful of due process in their pursuit of a lease extension but have been met with very little information or feedback including exactly which Department can approve this request. At this point they are no more advanced in receiving a decision despite the recommendation of the 2012 Caloundra Aerodrome Master Plan (10.5).

It is now time to get this matter resolved.

QAM has been based in Caloundra for 33 years and holds the largest collection of civil and military aircraft and aviation memorabilia in all of Australia but this collection has outgrown the Museum's current land. It is critical that QAM can be allowed to grow our facilities onto the neighbouring land within the local environmental requirements.

They are ready to expand. They have a very strong volunteer workforce and local community support and their 380 members have been frustrated for quite a long time with the lack of progress.

The Museum sees 25,000 visitors each year, but they find a lot of people do not know where they are because they cannot be seen from the main road. Improving their presence would be a major benefit for the economy of the Sunshine Coast and ensure the Museum's future is sustainable and that they will continue to be Australia's foremost aviation museum.

They want to expand facilities with large hangers to protect their historic aircraft, new exhibit storage facilities, educational activities, and new restoration workshops. There are also a number of new significant aircraft opportunities for QAM to potentially acquire, but they are not sure if they can say yes because they have run out of room. This would be a great loss to the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, and Australia.

How can you help? For **Queensland residents** please click on the link to sign the Qld Parliament petition Queenslanders - click to sign:

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/petitions/petition-details?id=3355>

For **interstate/overseas residents** please follow this link to sign the Change.org petition: - click to sign

https://www.change.org/p/australian-aviation-enthusiast-help-us-save-australian-aviation-heritage?utm_content=cl_sharecopy_22256449_en-US%3Av3&recruiter=880508889&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=share_petition

Please only complete one of the petitions.

The deadline is Friday 7th August 2020. The combined total of both petitions will help them gain their goal and dream of making QAM bigger and better than what it already is. Please spread this message to friends and family here in Queensland, interstate or even overseas.

Cameron Elmes
President QAM Inc.

Reunions

21 Engineer Support Troop Reunion

The Troop Reunion Scheduled for 31 August 2020 has had to be postponed due to the COVID19 outbreak.

The reunion will now be held from 30 August to 3 September 2021. It will still be at Forster—Tuncurry on the NSW coast. It is intended that all accommodation, venues and activities will remain the same.

Any further changes that are forced on us will be posted on the website and sent out by email. Please make sure that we have your current email address. For further information contact Ian (below), Phil Hicks 0414 761932 phil.hicks@gmail.com or Stan Monkley 0411 506787 stan21est@gmail.com.

Contact Ian McLean
0412 431297
jaim@hotmail.com.au
Website: www.21est.org

2 RAR B Coy, 67-68 Reunion.

Unfortunately the B Company Reunion has been postponed due to COVID19.

Plans are underway for the Reunion to be held in Gympie Queensland, mid-August 2021. Exact dates haven't been decided but would incorporate Vietnam Veterans' Day, the 18th August.

Please ensure your email address is up to date and if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact Leonie Millard (Schwarz) 0408015815, leonieschwarz@bigpond.com or Ros Kirkpatrick (daughter) 0429 942528 ros.acugympie@gmail.com

104 Sig Sqn National Reunion 2021

20-22 July 2021, Twin Towns Service Club, Gold Coast.



55th Anniversary Reunion for all ex members and families of 104 Sig Sqn, SVN and later. Other RASigs most welcome. Meet and Greet, Dinner, Memorial Service and Farewell Lunch.

Contact: Denis Hare
0419334535

reunion@au104.org

<http://2021.au104.org>

Facebook Page: 104 Sig Sqn National Reunion 2021

Letters to the Editor

I am an American Vietnam Veteran 1966-1969, served with the 101st Airborne Division and as an Advisor to the Vietnamese MIKE Force. I wanted to thank you and tell you how proud and grateful I am that the Australian Army assisted us in the Vietnam War. I have read of your proud and valiant history there.

If possible, even though I am but one man, I would appreciate it if you would somehow convey to the surviving veterans my heart-felt compassion and gratitude for their service there.

SSG(R) Kenneth POTTS—U.S. Army Retired

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We wish to inform your members on a national level that a stage production of the critically acclaimed play “*Foxholes of the Mind*”, about PTSD, written by Vietnam veteran, author and playwright Bernard Clancy, is coming to a theatre near you in June 2021.

Performances in your area are part of a nation-wide tour supported by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services to further enhance the public discussion about the devastating effects of military-caused PTSD as well as that which strikes down first responders also carrying out their professional duties.

Strongly supported by veterans’ organisations, “*Foxholes of the Mind*”, is a gripping story and non-clinical treatise about how PTSD strikes at the human coalface: the family, wives, children, friends, all those close to and swamped by the ripple effect of the PTSD volcano, was professionally toured in Victoria in 2016 after its sell-out inaugural season at the famous La Mama Theatre in Melbourne in 2010.

Audience reaction from previous shows has been high in praise for the simplicity of the message of what PTSD is, and how to best deal with it - conveyed in a theatrically captivating way. (See Testimonials on www.bernardclancy.net).

However, to ensure that the message of how to cope is spread as widely as possible around the country, we need your support. This is, very definitely, NOT a request for money. Primarily, we need your help to spread the word about the play to your sub-branches and encourage their support.

We will employ professional marketers to help get the message across to the general public but they will need local knowledge to do so and maybe sub-branches could help in some way in that regard. Any offers of help would be most welcome, in whatever regard, especially valuable contacts. Ultimately we need to get the message into your communities about the positive educational and emotional impact “*Foxholes of the Mind*” could have on your community generally.

We want to keep the price of a ticket as low as possible but the cost of hiring municipal theatres around Australia is very high. However some councils do offer discounted fees for community-benefit programs. And that’s certainly what this play is. Your support could open doors here as well, literally.

Playwright Bernard Clancy says “this tour is the culmination of 15 years’ work to ‘shout out’ about PTSD. Your support will make that call, especially against suicide, even louder. Together we can make a difference.” For updated information: www.bernardclancy.net

Wolf Heidecker
Producer/Director
0413 555630
whamflow@gmail.com

Bernard Clancy
0408367921
clancybc@bigpond.net

An extract from the book “Vietnam—Our Stories”
Copies available from www.wilkinsonpublishing.com.au

CHRISTMAS EVE - VUNG TAU

Alan White, Sandringham Victoria

It's been two weeks since I arrived in South Vietnam as an RAAF airfield defence guard, or adg' as we're sometimes called.

I'd been posted to the RAAF airfield in Vung Tau, the other base is up country, at Phang Rang with 2 Squadron, who fly Canberra bombers.

At Vung Tau we're confined to the base and its security. We're not alone: the Yanks have an air force component of a Squadron of helicopter gunships, called 'cobras' or 'snakes', a flight of recce helicopters called 'bumblebees' and a two-engine aircraft used in a ground attack called a 'warthog'.

The rest of the base has the usual military support for the Yanks and our contingent, which consists of 9 Squadron, flying 'Huey' helicopters, made up of gunships and medical dust-off choppers.

35 Squadron also operate out of Vung Tau, flying Caribous for general transport around Vietnam. The RAAF compound is secured within the base, with its security gate, sleeping, eating and associated support all in the compound. The flight line is within the main base and is a five minute drive away, along with the techos' equipment and repair units.

Many local Vietnamese work in the airfield, even doing our cleaning, washing our clothes and sweeping out our sleeping huts, so life is not too bad.

It's Christmas Eve, 1969, and my section pulled duty this night.

We are on a rotating roster: 24 hours on, 24 off and 24 on stand by. Ben Hall and I have the first hour, starting at 1800 hours. We're sitting on a bunker just inside the perimeter wire at the approach to the runway.

For the first hour the two of us will be here, then Ben will head back to the radio room in the RAAF compound and I'll be left to my thoughts.

The brilliance of the stars is magnified by little surface light from the surrounding area. Ben's not been gone long when this stillness is broken by the sound of an approaching aircraft.

Generally, it's fairly quiet, with very little aircraft movement at night, especially on Christmas Eve. As I watch the aircraft approaching the runway, I realise that it's way too low for a landing. It even appears to be below the power lines that are on the other side of the road around the base.

This does not look good and it's getting closer. I jump off the bunker just as the aircraft pulls up sharply, clearing the power lines, straightens up and then banks to the right of the airfield, over the swamp to have another go.

plane is a Cessna 'push and pull' or 'Skymaster', with an engine at the front and back of the fuselage, used mainly for artillery spotting and forward area control for marking bombing and ground attacks. I scramble back on to the bunker and radio in what's happening as it's coming around for a second attempt.

Christmas Eve— Vung Tau continued.....

Christmas Eve –Vung Tau continued.....

This time the approach seems to be too high and flat as if it's going to do a pass down the runway. A quarter of the way down the strip the engines cut out. Losing power, the Cessna drops quickly, banking off to the right, nose down it hurtles into the swamp with a horrible thud. There is no explosion, just a strange quietness.

I radio back in again and in a few minutes, Ben is back in a Land Rover.

We didn't wait for back up but headed through the perimeter wire fence, running in the direction of the crash. We waded into the smelly waters, full of weeds, vegetation and God knows what.

We call out a couple of times but there's no response. Then we smell avgas (aviation fuel), so we know we're not far from the Cessna.

By now the airbase fire brigade is on the side road, playing spotlights across the swamp searching or attempting to locate the aircraft. The brigade is run by American contractors and manned by local Vietnamese. Suddenly, there's a couple of popping sounds.

The brigade is setting off magnesium flares. All we need now is for one of them to drop into the avgas floating on the water and we're cooked.

The flares do give us a better chance to see around the area. Then I hear a voice, a sort of muffled cry. I call back but there's no reply.

Pushing through the weeds we come around a small bend and there it is, nose down in a shallow part of the swamp.

As I approach the plane, I can see that the pilot's door is hanging off the hinges. Ben and I quickly wade over to find the two crew members slumped forward over the controls.

As I pull the pilot back into the seat there's a rattling sound from him, like there might be some bones broken.

I've lost track of time and we now hear jeeps approaching along the back of the swamp. One stops at the bank. It belongs to the RAAF service police and the driver is 'Moonface' (his features are circular).

A minute later a Yank MP jeep turns up. We climb out of the swamp, wet, exhausted and feeling numb. It's the first dead body I've seen and yet I have no reaction, I feel like I'm on automatic. This is something I would experience later when on patrol on the outskirts of Nui Dat.

Ben and I give the Yank MPs' our version of what happen, then we climb into the back of Moon-faces' jeep. Leaving the MPs to sort out the mess, not much is said on the trip back.

Back at the huts in the RAAF compound, we strip off the smelly jungle greens, shower and change in to some dry clothes

We wander back to HQ. 'Toddy' is the duty corporal on that night, we give him our story, then our Commanding Officer turns up and we go through the events again for him.

Ben and I are a bit wound up after what's happened. 'Toddy' goes for the medic, Harvey, to have a look at us. He gives each of us a shot in the arm to settle us. It's late in the evening, we finish our reports and then are taken off duty for the rest of the night to try to sleep off the events of the evening.

Alan White, Sandringham Victoria



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