

**VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
CENTRAL QUEENSLAND BRANCH
1997 PRESIDENTS REPORT**

1 Feb 1998

Nick Quigley - President

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1997 was an incredibly busy year, starting on the 2nd February with our meeting at the Monorail Kershaw Gardens. Our Treasurer reported a balance of six hundred and seventy two dollars and thirty-six cents (\$672.36). With a good financial start to the year, things could only look up.

So, in no particular order our year was filled with joy and sadness and we learnt more about one-another as we searched our ways through PTSD, and other war related sicknesses.

The Drop In Center at the Naval Cadets Unit, 310 Quay Street, Rockhampton has been an overwhelming success. It opened on the 4th July 1996 and since then, seven hundred and twenty four (724) visits have been recorded. 1997 recorded five hundred and twenty six (526) between 9th Jan and 18th Dec. We met the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Bruce Scott MP and the member for Rockhampton Paul Marek MLA at the Drop in Center to discuss the problems that Veterans and their partners have whilst seeking medical assistance and with claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Submissions from wives and partners and Vietnam Veterans were given to the Minister. His response glazed over some of the questions raised. However, his letter hinted that he was interested in the well being of Veterans and their families. On the issue of Dapsone, the Minister said that a report was available and in part the report did not conclude that a period of 24 years since Australia's involvement in Vietnam began, was too soon to detect any increased incidence of any disease with any very long latency periods.

The Minister went on to say that it had been agreed between the DVA Transport Unit and the Health Medical Adviser Unit that air travel from Rockhampton and other major provincial towns of Queensland is the most suitable and cost effective mode of travel.

On ANZAC Day this year we again presented flowers and a certificate to the mother and a teddy bear to the first born baby (Tyler Morrice). The family was all present and appreciated our efforts. Fifty dollars was presented to the Country Women's Association to go towards the ANZAC Breakfast provided by their small dedicated group of ladies.

Long Tan Day was remembered at the Cenotaph at the Botanical Gardens. Although we were down in numbers, (the Townsville Reunion was on at the same time) we had a good rollup from the public. Our Local Council had a special meeting on at the same time, but Councilors and Local Members were represented by their wives. The memorial Flags of Pte Cox and Pte Prior are taken on parade on ANZAC Day and Long Tan Day. In August we were informed of the passing of Mrs Prior. Her two remaining sons still live in George Street. On the morning of Long Tan, we again presented flowers, a certificate and a teddy bear to the first born on the day (Heidi Smith). Then later in the day Councilor Rose Swaddling and I planted a commemorative tree in the Kershaw Gardens near the Veterans Barbecue area. Rose has an arrangement with the Parks & Gardens and on the days of our Barbecues this area is reserved for our use. Our thanks go to the Rockhampton City Council Parks and Gardens staff for their assistance on these days.

The Townsville Reunion was attended by quite a number of our local veterans and all reported having a good time. The reunion was well organised; with entertainment and unit get togethers for all to attend.

Because of reduced numbers (Townsville reunion) for the first time in four years the annual dinner was not held. This was missed by some, however, I'm sure we will make up for it this year.

Our weekend away at the Ferns Hideaway had to be cancelled, due to lack of numbers. Our thanks go to Phil Aplin who organised, collected, packed and delivered lamingtons as a fundraiser for Ferns. This money was not used and was put into general revenue.

Bruce Acutt our local VVCS Psychologist, is to be commended with his opening up of an area at Mt Wheeler, to the east of Rockhampton to be freely used by Vietnam Veterans and their families. The Cockscomb Farm has been in the Bruce's family for some years now, and the area set aside has been developed by veterans to provide a quiet bush retreat. Veterans who have worked on the project at Cockscomb are also to be commended for their efforts in building, trenching and erecting the shelter.

There will always be work to be done, but the groundwork is nearly complete. Veterans visiting the farm should be aware of the 3 main rules that state " No firearms, no glass bottles, no one is the boss".

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When you use fire wood, collect some more to replace it. Take your rubbish home and be very careful with your use of the tank water. The campsite has no fresh running water and is not yet powered.

During the year we wrote to our local member Paul Marek and he made available an Australian Flag. He also sent us the National Anthem on tape and a portrait of HM the Queen. These items will be used at meetings. Our flag will fly near to our Barbecue site on all meeting/barbecue days.

While we are on the subject of thanking people other than veterans we need to thank Mark Cutajar, who has been selling military badges on behalf of our Association. Mark displays the badges on the wall at his East Street Barbers shop.

The TPI Association has grown in recent months, with more of our Veteran counterparts being accepted as totally incapacitated. Brian Fisher, along with his wife Beverly and other helpers are driving the TPI Association to new levels. Their monthly newsletter is newsy and a credit to the organisation.

During the year Joan left the RSL and went to Mackey to be with her husband Lance. Since Joan's departure Keith Joyce has been very busy with the running of the office, advocacy work and the pending court case. Keith has a small band of helpers and Welfare officers who attend to cases. Keith has said that Veterans intending on putting a claim into the Department should FIRST seek help through the RSL office. Don't try to do it all alone, there is assistance available.

The ANZAC Club Management under the guidance of Tony Dawes and Pat Wilson has turned the club around and are promoting and encouraging Veterans to eat and meet at the club. The restaurant is providing good meals and with the availability of full size snooker tables and poker machines, you can enjoy a day or a night out at the ANZAC Club.

For veterans visiting Brisbane to attend PTSD courses and other medical procedures, you will be pleased to know that the management at Angus House has changed. The Committee wishes to inform visiting veterans that beds are generally available at a minimal fee. Angus House has helped many of our local veterans during their visits to hospital, but if more don't use it, they may lose their funding.

At the last count our membership stood at 39 including associate members. With yearly subs due again I hope members take the opportunity to renew and help keep the local association going. It will also help the National and Federal Body to keep afloat. National and Federal jointly are our advocates fighting for our wellbeing. They also produce O'Group and DeBrief magazines, which are posted to all financial members. There are approximately 700 Vietnam Veterans in the Central Queensland area. Our membership only represents 5%. So if you know a veteran ask them to consider joining. The Federation Vietnam Veterans Association also represents Veterans in this area; however, I have no statistical figures on their Association.

Members have asked for a newsletter and although some have been produced, a newsletter is about the group, and without input from the group, a newsletter has no news. The 1998 calendar will be produced as soon as possible after the AGM and will be mailed to all financial members.

Back in January 1997 I wrote a submission on behalf of our Association to go toward the nomination of Canon John Warby for an Australian Order. It was with great pleasure that we read on Australia Day 1998 that John had been awarded an OAM for his services to the Veteran community, the RSL, his church and his time that he spent with the mission. Congratulations Canon John Warby OAM.

It is regrettable that I also need to announce the passing of Ken Kittles wife, Karen. After a long sickness Karen died on Friday 30th Jan at the Mater Hospital, Rockhampton. Ken, our thoughts are with you and your family.

I wish to thank all members and their families for attending barbecues and dinners throughout the year. I'd also like to thank my wife Helen for her support and tolerance. Special thanks to our fourth term Secretary, Lorraine McConachy. To Pauline Aplin our Treasurer and Phil Aplin who collects the mail twice a week. Stew Robinson for opening the Drop in Center every Thursday. Keith Joyce for assisting our fellow veterans as an advocate and running the RSL Office. Gene Owens, Jim Drever and Paul Muscat for their assistance with Veteran claims and Councilor Rose Swaddling and Psychologist Bruce Acutt for providing assistance to the Veteran community.