



The Slouch Hat

August
2013

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*This Newsletter is
a publication of
the Geelong &
District Sub-
Branch of the
Vietnam Veterans
of Australia*



A day of memories

It was an emotional day on August 18. It was a day of reflection, comradeship as well as enjoyment. While the wind blew strongly, it didn't deter a large contingent of veterans who marched to the memorial. The ceremony was followed by a great day at the centre where many stories were told, some of which were no doubt true.

Vietnam Veterans of Australia Association Geelong & District Sub Branch

* Honour The Dead But Fight Like Hell For The Living



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Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is made up of the President, the two Vice-Presidents, The Secretary, and the Treasurer.

The Committee

The Committee is made up of the Executive, the Minute Secretary, and the remaining Committee members.

Meetings

A members meeting is convened monthly, usually on the second Monday of the month, while an executive meeting is held on the fourth Monday of the month.

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Vogue magazine in hunt for local talent

Rumour has it that the internationally acclaimed magazine was in Geelong recently checking out the Vietnam Veterans' Ladies at their monthly lunch outing. It is not clear who was signed up but no doubt there was a few. The ladies enjoy their food and wine and in their spare time have a vital role in supporting the men, most of whom need lots of support! Any ladies who would like to join the others but don't know where to go, contact Sue Ryan.



Osborne House attracts plenty of visitors

President Rieny welcomed Outer Eastern member Alan Sullivan for the Christmas in July meal (left) while Les showed Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs Senator Ronaldson around the fantastic museum. The visit from Outer Eastern sub-branch was a great success and is the start of another five visits before Christmas from various sub-branches around the state.

Senator Ronaldson was here to talk about veterans' welfare before the upcoming election.



President's message

In my last report I indicated that given our renewed lease at Osborne House I would invite other VVAA Sub Branches to join us on our Pay Day barbecues. Well, the response has been most pleasing with groups from across Melbourne wanting to share in our facilities at Osborne House. The most recent group came from the Outer Eastern SB and Kevin and Sully prepared a lovely Christmas in July lunch. Other SBs will join us through September – November.

Since ANZAC Day Steve, our Secretary, and I have attended State Councils in Ballarat and Bendigo. The next Council is in October and will be held at Port Fairy. At this State Council, a former President of the G & DVVA and life member, will be presented with his Life Membership at the State level.

The award recognises and confirms Alan Hughes for his service to the Veteran's community over many years and we congratulate him on behalf of all members of the G & DVVA.

A significant discussion is taking place around the issue of The Future of Advocacy and the Geelong Sub – Branch has made our submissions to the State level and to the Geelong Surfcoast Veterans Centre. Essentially, the DVA is attempting to remodel the advocacy process and our input is being sought.

We have had some important visitors to Geelong over the last few months. Firstly, Senator David Johnston – Shadow Minister for Defence, visited the VVA Centre in May.

Friend of the G & DVVA, and Liberal Candidate for Corio, Peter Read co-ordinated the Senator's visit. We were able to outline our Welfare Priority List to the Senator and had a sympathetic hearing. Later, in July, we attended a meeting with Senator Michael Ronaldson, Shadow Minister of Veteran Affairs. Again we had the opportunity to ask questions of the Shadow Minister and put forward veteran welfare issues on behalf of the G & DVVA.

During June we were saddened to hear of the passing of one of our members : Vale – Ron Pefferini who passed away on 28th June.

Much of our time has been occupied preparing for Vietnam Veterans Week. Gary Ryan has enlisted the help of many members in Badge selling at three locations around Geelong. There is a significant effort required by Gary to make sure all is in place for this very important fund raising event. Mick Mutton has been working hard to ensure the Vietnam Veteran's Dinner Dance, at the GFC, would be a great night. Unfortunately, Mick isn't well at the moment and we are very concerned over his health and the welfare of Deidre and family. We all wish Mick a speedy recovery to full health. Despite Mick's health issues others have stepped in to complete the work he had begun. The evening was a great success and very enjoyable for all who attended. Our

guest speaker, Lt.Col. Gary McKay (R'td) entertained the guests with his reflections on being a Nasho Officer in Vietnam.

A number of us attended the unveiling of the memorial stone dedicated to the Peacekeepers & Peacemakers at the Geelong RSL in July.

This memorial stone is a significant acknowledgement of the sacrifice of these men and women, in many different deployments around the world.

We held one of our General Meetings at the Drysdale RSL and thank Geoff Frisby, and the Ladies Auxiliary for their welcome and warm hospitality. Thank you ladies for the morning tea and lunch.

The main Vietnam Veteran's Week celebrations were held on Sunday 18th August with a Remembrance Service at St.Thomas' Church in Drysdale, this was followed by a Wreath Laying ceremony at the Geelong Peace Memorial. The annual Vietnam Veteran's March and Memorial Service was held at the Vietnam Memorial on Melbourne Road. It was great to see such an enthusiastic turnout of veterans, despite the gale force winds, who did us proud as they marched, most in step, to the music of the RSL Pipes and Drums. We also thank the 8/7 Royal Victorian Rifles and WO Brad Percy, for providing the Catafalque Party. A feature of our service is the wonderful singing of Hannah Pearson.

After the Memorial Service veterans and friends came back to Osborne House for lunch, prepared by the Air Cadet Parent Auxiliary. It was a really great occasion to see so many enjoying each other's company and sharing their stories of their Vietnam experience.

As I have said before these events, including our Pay Day barbecues, the Pako barbecues and our days at Bunnings (Norlane) don't happen by accident. There are many people who help and our team of dedicated Committee members who make sure everything is in place to ensure all goes well. There is always the hope that more members will become more actively involved in all these activities and take on greater responsibility.

The G & DVVA is YOUR Association, it is there for its members and its main charter is the welfare of all members. So please get involved in YOUR Association.



Geoff Frisby welcomed Rieny to Drysdale for our meeting.

This was a story in the Herald Sun recently

VETERANS Affairs told a partially paralysed Iraq veteran - injured when an army truck fell on him - to "buy a goat" when he asked for help to keep the grass down around his house. Father-of-three Micheal McLaren asked the DVA for funding to help with the lawn at his home near Warrnambool, but was told he wasn't entitled to a gardener or a ride-on mower. A DVA lifestyle assessment suggested his wife, who was heavily pregnant with their second child, could mow the lawn around the house. A small paddock - which he did not seek help for - could be "used to house a family farm animal". Mr McLaren followed up the 2007 report with a call to the DVA's head office, and was told "a goat or a couple of sheep" would fix his problem. He was finally funded for a regular lawnmowing service six months ago, only after a veteran's advocate took on his case. And the advocate was able to convince the DVA that he should be deemed "totally and permanently incapacitated" because his injuries meant he would never be able to work again.

"I'd tried for years on my own to get 'TPI' (but) DVA relies on veterans giving up after being constantly knocked back," Mr McLaren said. "They didn't give it to me, but I was entitled to it. It gives me access to small things that make a big difference when you are supporting a family."

Mr McLaren was critically injured eight years ago as a private in the army. Most of his contemporaries have now advanced to earn around \$100,000. It is estimated his pension is capped

at half of his potential had he not been injured.

Mr McLaren decided to speak out about his run-in with the DVA because he said it highlighted an obstructionist approach by a department that didn't understand the predicament of the former servicemen and women it was supposed to be helping. He served in the Defence Force for six years, including one tour of Iraq. In 2005, Mr McLaren, a mechanic based in Townsville, was seriously injured while he was fixing a Uni-mog army truck's brakes during a training exercise. The four-tonne truck crushed him across his back and both shoulders when the jack failed. It fractured a vertebrae and badly damaged his spinal cord. The right side of his body has only limited movement; the left side is numb. Doctors describe him as an "incomplete tetraplegic".

"In the six months after it happened, Rebecca was told I'd be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life. It's a minor miracle that I can get around, but I am severely limited in what I can do," Mr McLaren said. "My right side is dead weight. I tire easily and I'm constantly falling over. I need crutches, a walking stick or sometimes a wheelchair if I am away from the house."

He said his injuries meant he regularly woke up "bent and buckled" and was easily fatigued because of the effort need to be mobile.

Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association advocate, Mick Quinn, said: "Micheal did the right thing, set himself and his family up cheap outside of town but then gets treated poorly by people in the DVA who tell him to buy a goat."

Commemorative Service to be held at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne

A Commemorative Service will be held at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne on Thursday 17 October at 1.30pm in the vicinity of the Vietnam plaque. Here we will gather to commemorate the third anniversary of the dedication of the plaque, along with the 42nd anniversary of the battle of Nui Le. The service also gives us the opportunity for our own personal reflection on our time as a part of the Australian Vietnam Forces.

It is suggested that those members from Geelong, along with their wives/partners who can attend the service might like to go on the train to Melbourne (the ones that leave Marshall at 9.18am or 10.18am), have lunch in the city, then attend the service at the Cathedral. If you did not wish to have lunch in Melbourne, the train which leaves South Geelong at 11.18pm would also get people there in time.

Based on last year, the service would not last any longer than 40 minutes. Following the service, people could return to Geelong at their leisure and probably take in some shopping.

Notification that members would like to attend can be via an email sent either to the Veterans Centre email gdvvaa@bigpond.com or to n_h_wilson@bigpond.com while a phone message could also be left at the centre.

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Vietnam Veterans' Day



Left: The wind meant the old blokes carrying the banner had to push hard; **(centre left)** guest speaker WO2 Peter Daniels; Rieny opens proceedings; **(below)** Gary lays a wreath; and the wind wasn't kind to Hannah Pearson.



Vietnam Veterans' Day



Above: Apart from the wind, it was a beautiful setting for the service; **(left)** The catafalque party at work; **(below)** Ted Heffernan says a prayer for the ADF and there were many wreaths laid in memory of those who served and those who are no longer with us.



Vietnam Veterans' Day



Left: A quartet of beauties who enjoyed the day back at the centre and **(centre left)** a duo of the same. **(right)** The Clancys enjoyed the day while **(below)** the men behind the bar enjoyed a joke and listened to the many stories that flew around the centre.



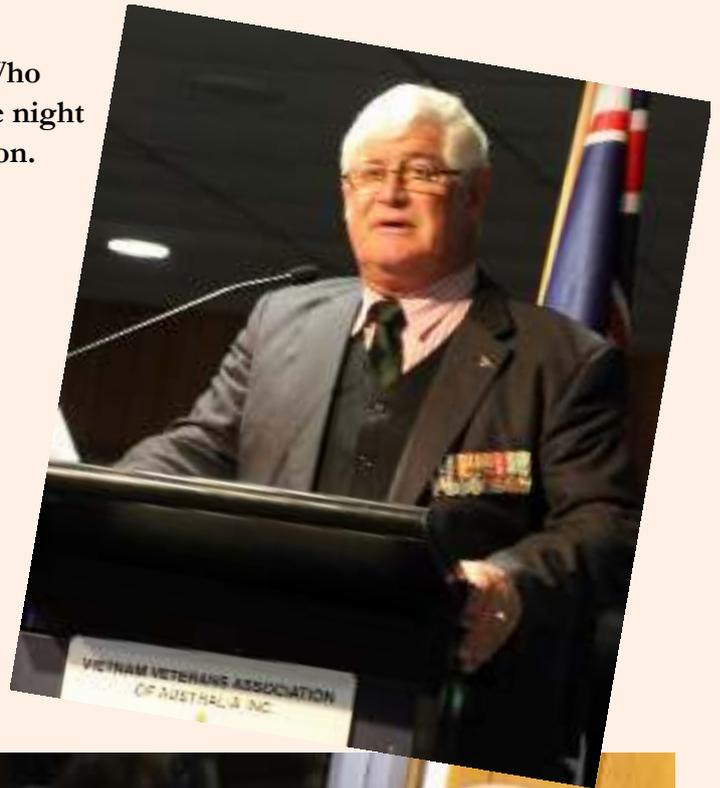
Vietnam Veterans' Day

Left: Old soldiers never die they just
crap on. **(centre left)** A chat about
welfare issues and **(right)** have sol-
diers grown bigger these days?
(below) Standing up was taking a toll
so seats were the order of the day
and these other two looked worried
about something but were not sure
what.



Annual Dinner Dance

Bagpipes, guest speakers and beautiful people. Who could ask for more? The dinner dance was a huge night but was missing one thing—old mate Mick Mutton.



Annual Dinner Dance

The Addy has its social scene pages but those who appear are no match for this lot. Apologies for no dancing photos but the camera was entrusted (not) to certain blokes who managed to take 20 photos all of which were horribly out of focus. Not that they were under the influence of anything, of course.



Bernard Clancy and the Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs, Senator Ronaldson have been writing to each other on welfare matters

Dear Bernie,

Thank you for attending the Geelong Veterans' Forum at the Geelong RSL where you provided me with a document outlining areas for examination and review. The first issue related to Section 24 of the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 and the 'alone' test, which requires that Defence accepted conditions alone be the reason for the veteran ceasing work in order to qualify for Special Rate pension. At this time, the Coalition has no plans to review the operation of this provision but I would be happy to seek the advice of the Repatriation Commission in the future about the operation of that provision as it may apply in individual circumstances.

Labor's decision to slash veterans' advocacy and welfare funding has had a dramatic impact in the Geelong region. I still do not understand why Labor made the cuts given the large number of veterans currently returning from conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East and peacekeeping missions in our own region.

In 2007 the Coalition left a strong and functioning veterans' advocacy funding model in place. Over the last six years, Labor has turned a system working well into a system which is well short of the funds needed to operate properly and a system with no certainty. Labor has repeatedly moved the funding and eligibility goal posts for advocacy funding, making it increasingly difficult for veteran and ex-service organisations to apply with funding with any confidence whatsoever.

The Coalition is determined to restore confidence to the advocacy funding system.

I have asked questions of the Department about staff training and understanding of military service. Following my questions I know that a series of small changes were made, but I believe that more can be done to further improve DVA staff understanding of military service and the unique needs of veterans and their families.

I would be happy to look at the claims determination process, as you have outlined, for claims which are to be refused. I understand the angst and anxiety which is caused by the refusal by the Commissions of a claim for compensation. As you know, the first step for a veteran to appeal a decision of the Commissions is a reference back to the Commission and then, if the decision is upheld, the Veterans' Review Board. I regret that I cannot give you any firm commitments at this time to address all of the issues you have identified. However, if I am the Minister for Veterans' Affairs I am determined to continue to consult widely with veterans, ex-service people and their families to ensure that the Coalition always responds appropriately to the need/ of veterans and their families.

**Yours sincerely,
Senator Ronaldson**

Bernie's reply.

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate your response to my concerns raised with you at the Geelong RSL veterans' forum. You covered a number of issues, and well, including my own. I feel that if you become Minister you will do your best to address those issues. I did, however, take careful note of your "probably no money" proviso!

It's odd, isn't it, that governments of any persuasion can always find money to send our young people to war but it suddenly disappears when (or if) they come home!

As Minister, you will face a myriad of issues to deal with but in my view, and that of many others, they're peripheral. The cornerstone problem of why veterans' affairs is in such a mess is more fundamental, and it is this: somewhere down the years we have lost - in a mass of red tape, bureaucracy and political indifference - the sense of compassion and caring on which I'm sure the original Veterans Affairs Act was based.

Until such time as those basic issues are addressed, veterans will continue to be abused by a system that is supposed to work FOR them, but more often than not, works against them. We need to get back to the philosophy of the 3Cs - the core, the caring, the compassion. Only then will the needs of veterans be truly served.

I remind you again of the words of George Washington: 'The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, is directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.'

And Barack Obama: "I don't think that our troops on the battlefield should have to take notes to keep for a claims application, and I've met enough veterans to know that you don't have to engage in a fire fight to endure the trauma of war."

And on that latter point, my pet pony, sir, is PTSD. I am a Vietnam veteran and, among other things, the author of a play about PTSD titled "Foxholes of the Mind" which premiered at the prestigious La Mama theatre in Melbourne in 2010 to full houses for a full two-week season.

It was highly acclaimed by veterans, their families and all who saw it (I can supply evidence of all that, including the script if you wish). It saved lives. It brought estranged families back together. It helped.

However our plans to take the play on tour, to help as many vets and their families as possible, to educate and inform those outside the veteran community, has fallen foul of an inability to attract funding. An approach to DVA (among many others) was unsuccessful though DVA does support other "help" programs (which, indeed, this play is).

If you can help in this regard I and my director, Wolf Heidecker, would be most appreciative. Again, I can supply any further detail you may wish.

All the best on September 7, I'm sure you'll be our next Minister.

**Yours Sincerely
Bernard Clancy**

Myths and Legends

Dr Brian O'Toole from the ANZAC Institute has a long interest in the health of Vietnam veterans and the health consequences of war service. He has worked on the Australian agent orange scientific studies, was a member for 18 years of the NAC to the Minister for Vets affairs on the VVCS, and conducted the first cohort health study of any returned service group in Australia, the Vietnam Veterans Health Study. He has conducted this longitudinal study over two waves of assessments, 14 years apart, of a random sample of Vietnam veterans, making the study unique in Australia and one of only a few such studies worldwide. He has recently conducted a companion study of veterans' wives, and is one of the few people in Australia with an expert knowledge of the long term effects of war service on veterans and their families. In this article he addresses some of the myths and legends...

Research can only report what is found; I can't make it up and can only report what I'm told by the diggers and the data that they give me. But there is some false knowledge out there. Here are some myths that I have encountered over the years that I would like to shed some light on, using the data from my research studies.

It was safer in Vietnam than in Australia for the Nashos

Only 1-in-16 young men who were called up actually got enlisted in the Army. From the 63,745 NSM who were enlisted in the eligible time period, 19,450 were sent to Vietnam. That's 30.5%, less than a third. So even if you were called up, there was actually only a 1.9% chance that you would be sent to Vietnam. During the conflict there were 215 deaths of NSM in Vietnam; the mortality rate of NSM veterans in Vietnam was about 1.1%, very similar to the Regular mortality rate and very similar to the overall American mortality rate. Australia's contribution was exactly proportional. But during the war years there were 188 deaths of NSM in Australia, where most of the deaths occurred on the roads. This is a mortality rate of less than 0.3%. So the relative risk of death, if you were a Nasho and were sent to Vietnam, was 4 times higher than the risk if you were a Nasho who stayed at home. So it wasn't safer in Vietnam at all, and there was no-one actually trying to kill you in Australia.

Only the ones dumb enough not to get out of it went

The Army had a screening Psych test administered on enlistment called the AGC that basically measured intelligence. It was scaled, or "normed" on a general Regular population to have an average of 10.5 on a scale of 1-20. Several Army Officers have told me they "lifted the whole standard of the Army". Indeed, the average AGC score of the Nasho veterans was 13.5, much higher than the Regular Army population of 10.5. But, when compared with the Nasho veterans, the Regulars were not different; this means that the Regs who went to Vietnam were significantly brighter than the ones who stayed at home. Australia sent its best, fittest and brightest of both Regulars and Nasho's to Vietnam and it's more likely that the dumb ones stayed home

The Nasho had it easier than the Regs

The study measured the potential for combat exposure in several different ways, from interviews with the diggers using an American questionnaire and from Army sources. Both showed that the average level of exposure was indeed slightly higher for Regs than for Nasho's, but looking at the extent of the exposure showed that Regs and Nasho's together had very similar risks of high intense combat, but that Nasho's had slightly more who experienced low levels. But it's not just direct combat that hurts. When you look at the rate of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental disorders in Regs and Nasho's, there is absolutely no difference. This means that you don't need lots of direct combat or be a Regular enlistee to be vulnerable to PTSD and depression. Eight months in a war zone alone will do it for you, whether you were a Nasho or a Reg. Sometimes, it can only take one day.

The blokes who came home by sea have less PTSD

This was a common myth heard around DVA and military senior ranks for some time; that a nice sea voyage home, fuelled by lots of beer, would leave PTSD behind, much like the line of cans that floated behind the Vung Tau Ferry on the return trip. Controversy raged and was fed by the image of men fighting in the jungle one day, and the next finding themselves discharged at the airport and alone late at night on the way home. But when I looked at the different rates of PTSD for those who came home by sea and by air, there was absolutely no difference. That doesn't mean that the homecoming is not important – our research clearly shows it was important to veterans' later adjustment, particularly in the weeks and months after RTA, when they were reluctant to talk about their experiences, bottling them up, hitting the deck when a car backfired, and then hitting the booze, in an atmosphere of government neglect and hysterical media opposition.

Just get over it, son, it'll get easier as you get older

Population evidence shows that the prevalence of most mental disorders actually reduces as people age – older people have better overall mental health, except for the dementing disorders. The ages of 15-25 are dangerous for schizophrenia and the psychotic disorders, and the ages of 35-55 are dangerous for anxiety and depression, with the peak age of suicide in men occurring in their mid-50s. In my study, at wave 1 the veterans were aged between 39 and 73, with an average age of 46, and at wave 2 the spread was 46 to 87, with an average age of 60. We would expect that the prevalence of psychological disorders would decrease with time, but that is not what was found. The veterans had many times higher rates of depression and anxiety than expected based on population figures. Although it is a rare condition, imagine rates of recurrent, severe, chronic depression at literally 40 times higher, not just 40% higher, than for the same age groups in the Australian population. And this is three decades after the war.

*** More myths in the next issue**

Barbies are a huge success for fund-raising

Amounts raised at recent barbecues were: Heritage Meats in Pakington St (27th July) \$584.35 and at Bunnings (13th July) \$721.55 even though the day turned out wet and cold. More barbecues are scheduled with volunteers needed.



Don't forget there are more photos and other news on all sorts of subjects our new website. Log on to www.geelongvietnamvets.com

Important notice for Osborne House liquor licence

GDVVAA has a Restricted Club Licence for use at Osborne House.

A summary of our licensing obligations and requirements are:

- Supply of liquor is to members and guests of members.
- Our licence is for restricted hours that cover our regular social functions and commemorative functions.
- Liquor is only to be consumed in the Branscombe Room and the outside paved area on the east side of the building. Not on the adjoining grassed area.
- Members and guests are not permitted to bring alcohol into O.H. or to take alcohol away.
- Guests are to sign the Guest's Register. Members continue to sign the Member's Register located at the front door.
- Those under 18 are allowed in the licenced area providing they are with a member or a guest.

Christmas in July



What a day! What a meal! Christmas in July attracted nearly 100 people for lunch, including 36 visitors. There was lots of great food and great community friendship. Two of our lovely ladies (left) checked out the machine in the foyer. They weren't around when the day finished though. Two blokes without teeth cooked alongside the best looking Sullivan. Santa made an appearance and the place was chockers with diners. A big well done to all who helped out, especially Sully and Kevin.

Have any news?

Have a story to tell or an idea to share? Maybe you want to write a letter to the editor, or send in a photo.

If so, then please contact Steve Strevens, editor of The Slouch Hat. Call 0418 534 526 or email scestrevo@hotmail.com.

You can also send your contribution to the centre and it will be forwarded. Send stories as simple Word docs (no format-



Welfare and pensions change address

Many of us are, from time to time, in need of some welfare or pension advice. Or perhaps you know someone who could do with some help. When that arises, contact the Welfare and Pensions Centre at 120 Settlement Rd, Belmont or call them on 52226003. You can also email them on gvwc@geelongvets.org.au. There are plenty of caring blokes there who can help you or someone you know sort out what can be a very trying time.

Membership draw comp

At the start of the year, the committee decided to run a competition to attract members to pay their annual fees as early as possible. To be eligible, all those who paid their dues by April 5 this year went into a draw for a prize of \$150. This attracted a grand total of 247 members who

rushed to give us their money. The draw was held on May 27 at the Osborne House Centre. The winner was Mel Volders of St Leonards with ticket number 224. Mel generously donated the \$150 prize back to the G&DVVAA for which she has our grateful thanks.

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You may find some errors in this Newsletter. That is in keeping with our policy of having something for everyone.