

VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH ^{INC} – DECEMBER 2010



Introduction

This edition is much longer than normal due to the need to include summaries of quite lengthy documents concerning the Service and ex-Service communities. Comments and responses should be directed to president@vvaansw.org.

North Head Artillery Museum to close.

The manager of the Australian Army Artillery Museum at North Head has announced its closure as a result of unacceptable conditions of rent imposed by the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. The collection will be stored at Bandiana until a new museum can be funded and built at Puckapunyal, co-located with the School of Artillery.

In a later development, the Trust announced that it would be making the tunnels and fortifications open to the public as the museum was only open two days a week from 10am to 4pm and saw this as unreasonable use of a public asset.

Defence project disasters exposed.

Project management by the Defence Materiel Organisation doesn't seem to have improved much since it was effectively separated from Defence and removed from the scrutiny of Defence's internal audit function delivered by the Inspector General.

The National Audit Office (ANAO) reports RAAF's airborne early warning and control aircraft (Wedgetail) will not meet the phased array radar specification at delivery. This \$4b project is 48 months late. The \$660m High Frequency Modernisation project is now 10 years late — as a Defence IT Auditor I reviewed the IT aspects of this project probably 12 years ago!

Other tardy projects include the \$407m Collins submarine reliability (99 months late), \$1.5b guided missile frigate upgrade (84 months), \$485m Collins combat system (72 months), \$337m ANZAC frigate anti-ship missile defence (64 months).

Revolutionary US weapon system.

The US Army's new XM25 rifle fires a 'smart' 25mm explosive round which can be programmed to detonate plus or minus up to 3m from the laser-calculated target

distance. An entrenched or protected enemy can be engaged and despatched with what the US calls a "game changing" weapon.

Enhancements might include a HE "stun" capability.

I really do hope that it's not as good as they say and/or they have developed a counter to this weapon, because history tells us that it won't be too long before it is copied and available to the red force!

Budget submission by the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations.

The Alliance (Defence Force Welfare Association, Naval Association, Royal Australian Regiment Corporation, Australian Special Air Service Assoc, and the Royal Australian Air Force Association) formed in mid-2010, submitted a 2011-2012 budget document to government. The two main themes are the unique nature of military service and the need to reflect this in pay, superannuation and compensation payments.

The proposed budget initiatives are:

- indexation of all superannuation payments;
- abolition of MSBS maximum benefits limits (MBL);
- adjustment of veterans disability pension rates; and
- balancing of legal representation at the AAT.

ESO Issues Paper.

A similar coalition of the organisations listed below has released an Ex-Service Organisation Issues Paper :

- Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veteran's Association' (APPVA)
- Australian Federation of TPIs (TPI Association)
- Australian Special Air Service Association (ASSA)
- Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA)
- Defence Reserves Association (DRA)
- Defence Families of Australia (DFA)
- Naval Association
- Partners of Veterans Australia (PVA)
- Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Association
- Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) Corporation
- Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA)
- Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australian (VVFA)
- War Widows Guild

The issues paper canvassed the following issues. It can be obtained from your Sub-Branch or from any of the contributing organisations.

The ESO Issues

- Apply the same community standard of indexation of superannuation for DFRB/DFRDB/ MSBS as adopted for Age and Service pensions.
- Remove Immediately the maximum benefit limits (MBL) from MSBS superannuation.
- Adopt current life expectancy tables for the calculation of commutation and fortnightly DFRB superannuation payments to new superannuants.
- Rectify injustices arising from the application of improper life expectancy tables to those calculations for existing DFRB/DFRDB superannuants.
- Enable more flexible MSBS membership for Reservists, together with a 9% employer contribution under the Superannuation Guarantee (administration) Act 1992 to all Reservists not presently covered.
- Remove Income Tax on DFRB/DFRDB/MSBS military superannuation pensions, including death and invalidity or the separation of taxed military superannuation pensions from other taxed income on taxation returns.
- Adjust the rates for veterans' disability pensions by the 2.7% Male Total Average Weekly Earning (MTAWE) increment granted by the 2009 budget to the Single Rate of Service Pension .
- Conduct a review, in conjunction with selected ex-Service Organisations (ESO), to eliminate deficiencies in record-keeping and the following processes associated with separation from Service employment:
 - access to invalidity and financial entitlements;
 - recording full details of all postings and deployments including overseas and remote areas, qualifying and non-qualifying service;
 - all service-related medical conditions, illnesses and treatments;
 - Institute and maintain appropriate and uninterrupted treatment and rehabilitation regimes for service-related illnesses and injuries
 - Comprehensive financial advice, vocational guidance and family support to ensure smooth transition from the Service.
- Comprehensive advice concerning access to post-separation medical treatment and services provided by ex-Service Organisations; and
- Provision of timely and appropriate support by the Services to resolve any residual issues;
- DVA to adopt Model Litigant rules and restrict its legal resources to the same level as those available to veterans.
- VVCS facilities be physically separate from DVA offices and the Veteran and Veterans' Families Counselling Service be established as a statutory body.
- Rectification of injustices arising from the use of inappropriate life expectancy tables for existing DFRB/DFRDB superannuants.
- Benefits arising from conditions of service be removed from FBT reporting.
- Compensate ADF members affected by aircraft maintenance activities in the same way as the F111 deseal/reseal.
- DVA to coordinate a national mental health case management plan.
- Review temporary and permanent accommodation available to physically or mentally disabled younger veterans to maximise the opportunity for them to remain with families and community.
- Establish a health plan or programme to assist carers to carry out their role.
- Extend the cut-off period for carer payments from 63 to 126 days to reduce administrative overhead.
- Extend the transport arrangements to include the return to home of carers when veterans are admitted to a health care facility.
- Investigate the need for subsidised accommodation for carers when a veteran is admitted to a health-care facility which is not in the immediate vicinity of their home.
- Increase respite entitlements for carers from 196 to 260 hours per year.
- Increase the Defence Service Home Loan grant from the \$25k established in 1972 and benchmark to the Australian Median Home Price Index.
- Amend the Health Initiative for Defence Families to include:

- school commencement age;
 - curricula;
 - handwriting styles;
 - class names; and
 - transition to secondary schooling.
- Benchmark the reversionary rate for MSBS superannuation (ie, the pension rate for the widow/er of superannuants) to not less than 67% and consider of an increase to the pre-2004 parliamentary rate of 82.5%.

Discussion of ESO issues.

I paraphrased many of these points both for clarity and brevity. Any errors of transcription or interpretation are mine, and I recommend that readers seek out the original document.

My personal opinion is that while most are genuine and worthwhile, there is at least one item on the list which represents an attempt to make the Commonwealth responsible for something which I personally believe is an individual responsibility— family health care insurance.

Consolidation and standardisation of the school curricula and other related standards has been beyond the power of any government thus far, and even though the present Labor government is attempting to overcome the barriers, success is not assured.

Consolidation of purpose among ESOs.

It should be gratifying for the members of the ex-service community to see unanimity of purpose within the ESOs and a continuing refinement of their mutual goals. I hope that it is equally disquieting to government to see this consolidation in the knowledge that the divide and conquer strategy has failed.

The changes instituted by DVA to the consultative forums had, in my opinion, enabled the department to deliver information to the ESOs in an environment where it controlled both the agenda and membership. DVA may well be suffering from figurative powder burns as the strategy has blown back in its face.

Readjustment to 'normal'—CMVH.

The Centre for Military and Veteran's Health is an initiative of the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs together with a consortium of universities headed by the University of Queensland.

The executive summary of a literature review in support of the 2010 think tank study **Readjustment to 'normal'—how can DVA and Defence help?** has been released and is available from VVAA Sub-Branch and Branch Secretaries. Not wishing to summarise a summary, I simply note the findings that there is little research on the normative process of reintegration or evaluation of new programs for resilience training or decompression.

The topics covered by the literature review were:

- the stressors of modern military service;
- stressors during specific deployment phases;
- organisational factors across the deployment cycle;
- military life and families;
- adjustment matters beyond the deployment cycle;
- economic/employment issues;
- reservists; and
- rehabilitation of injured Service members.

I could not, however, let the following paragraph pass without remark, as DVA has denied all attempts by the VVAA over many years to have 'secondary PTSD' or traumatisation of partners and children of those suffering extreme forms of PTSD accepted or investigated. It's ironic that their own project states:

'Close contact with and emotional connection to a traumatised person can become a chronic stressor, resulting in the experiencing of symptoms of traumatisation (for spouses) and reduced relationship satisfaction, often compounded by the veteran's substance abuse and depression. Such contact may lead to developmental, behavioural and emotional problems in children. For children, the mother's mental health status seems the most important predictor of mental health, but more research is needed.'

F111 deseal/reseal DNA damage study.

DVA has initiated a study to determine whether those exposed to chemicals and jet fuel in the RAAF deseal/reseal program have suffered DNA damage. The jet fuel study comes about as a result of a parliamentary inquiry.

Small preliminary studies have detected changes in mitochondrial DNA which is critical in respiration and energy production. This study may open the way for children to sue the Department of Defence.

Tenuous advances in Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Smith has endorsed a US assessment of the status of the war in Afghanistan. President Obama released the review but stated that the gains achieved through the “surge” were fragile and reversible.

Obama flagged the possibility of a troop reduction beginning in July 2011.

Critics have pointed out that the study was short on both evidence and detail. It did not include criticisms of the Pakistani and Afghan governments which have featured in US documents revealed on Wikileaks. Guess that’s what they mean by “diplomacy”.

Veteran imposter jailed and fined.

Veteran imposter Arthur “Rex” Crane pleaded guilty in the Brisbane District Court to defrauding the Commonwealth of more than \$413,000 by falsely claiming to have been a prisoner of the Japanese in relatively obscure circumstances during WW2.

Crane was sentenced to four year’s jail and ordered to repay \$413,000 to the Commonwealth. He can be released after six months by entering into a four year good behaviour bond. Given his limited resources, DVA is unlikely to be able to recover all of the money.

Crane, 84, had been sufficiently plausible to have been elected President of the Ex-POW Association until outed by an historian after Crane appeared to give a speech to veterans. It does not appear as if he has been charged with wearing medals without entitlement.

Sailors alleged to use and sell illegal drugs.

Members of the RAN based in Sydney are under investigation by civil and military investigators for using and selling drugs out of Sydney’s Garden Island Naval base.

While no charges have been laid, raids have netted illegal firearms and a range of drugs including ecstasy, cocaine and steroids.

It has been alleged that a large number of RAN personnel are involved in the use and trafficking of drugs out of Garden Island’s HMAS KUTTABUL. Other allegations involve extortion and assaults on Sydney backpackers.

Drug use whilst on active service is a growing problem within the ADF, and a number of incidents have come to light over the last few years. There has been no speculation yet as to whether there might be similar entrepreneurial arrangements in other Defence bases.

US ditches “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy

President Obama has repealed the controversial 17 year-old policy which required military and other officials not to ask about or require members to reveal their sexual orientation. The full name of the policy was “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue”. A “Don’t Harass” provision was added later.

This policy existed in conjunction with a long-standing policy barring homosexuals from serving in the US military. As a result, those who did reveal their homosexuality either deliberately or by accident during this time were discharged from the armed forces.

Obama has encouraged those discharged from the military as a result of that policy to re-enlist.

In a November 2010 poll, 77% of Americans say that gays and lesbians who publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be able to serve in the military. Other polls have revealed similar results, reflecting a sea-change in community attitudes towards same-sex relationships in both the US and Australia.

Grievance over Victoria Cross nomination.

The Sydney Morning Herald aired grievances over a nomination for the award of Victoria Cross which it claimed is being pushed “from above”. Some senior officers and NCOs have refused to write citations in support of the nomination.

There are two separate issues according to the report. The first issue is that the nominee is unpopular and has been the subject of complaints of bullying. The second cause for complaint is that the other members of the small elite team shared the danger and acted no less courageously than the nominee and should be equally recognised.

Popularity has never been a criterion for awards of valour and many so recognised have never been team players, so it hardly seems likely that this factor alone would stand in the way of a nomination.

The Letters Patent (Commonwealth of Australia Gazette dated 4 Feb 1991) which created the Victoria Cross for Australia makes provision for individual not unit awards. I don’t expect we’ll see any discussion of this particular nomination in the media before announcement of the award.



Clive Mitchell-Taylor – VVAA NSW President