

# VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH <sup>INC</sup> – JANUARY 2011



## Introduction

I hope that all of our readers had a safe and enjoyable festive season and that you and yours greet 2011 happy and healthy. Comments and feedback should be directed to [president@vvaansw.org](mailto:president@vvaansw.org).

## Long Tan medals - the saga continues.

2011 has revealed yet another facet to the long-running Long Tan medals debate. The creation of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeal Tribunal has opened the door for LTCOL Harry Smith to head up a class action in the Federal Court. Two eminent senior counsels are taking the case *pro bono*.

Smith points out that of the 726 awards made for Vietnam, only 22 went to private soldiers, while senior officers reaped the rewards without being anywhere near the action.

All three of the members of the Review Panel for the End of War List for Vietnam were concerned that D Coy 6 RAR was excluded from the Terms of Reference. While the Review Panel obtained a just result in the award of the Medal of Gallantry for six individuals it was apparent that the basis of awards was singularly inappropriate.

*“The ADF applied a strict quota to operational awards, and although Army attempted to change the quota late in the Vietnam war, that amendment did not occur. Army unit commanders sometimes made nominations that exceeded the quota.”*

*Some awards were therefore struck out either in country or by the Adjutant General in Australia. Others were reduced to MIDs, which had a separate quota. The quota favoured air operations over ground operations, despite the fact that this was predominantly a ground war with most of those ground troops in an operational role spending the majority of their time under operational conditions.”*

At the time I calculated that on the basis that Army ground troops spent 80% of their time on operations, that the ratio of ‘tooth’ to ‘tail’ was 6:10, and that one award was available for each 250 each six months, then the awards ratio for ground troops was greater than 1:500,000 operational hours compared to 1:300, 1:400 or

1:500 combat flying hours for various Air Force elements.

The citations for the DSOs awarded to CO 6 RAR LTCOL Townsend and Task Force Commander BRIG Jackson both reference the battle at Long Tan. Smith contends that Townsend did not arrive at the battlefield until the enemy had withdrawn, while Jackson did not get there until the next day. Both men are now deceased.

COL Adrian Roberts, then a Lieutenant in command of the armoured relief column supports these contentions while a further newspaper article makes the point that those who fought the battle are entitled to test the veracity of the DSO citations.

Contrast Long Tan with the battle of Rorke’s Drift during the Zulu War in 1879 which pitted 150 British Army defenders against 3,000 to 4,000 Zulu warriors. 17 of the defenders were killed and 15 wounded in action while 351 Zulus bodies were left on the field. The wounded were buried alive or killed on the spot by the relieving force which had come from the killing fields at Isandlwana. 14 Victoria Crosses were awarded for Rorke’s Drift.

## Pharmaceutical co-payments – too little too late?

A letter received in unusual circumstances and signed by the DVA General Manager of Service Division states that the Gillard government intends to introduce a Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme that it claims will result in free medicines for eligible veterans. It suggests payments will commence early 2013 for expenses incurred from 1 Jan 2012.

One wonders under what circumstances an arrangement like this would actually make sense!

## 30 year release of Agent Orange docs.

Documents released under the 30 year rule reveal that the Fraser government resisted calls for a judicial enquiry into the effects of Agent Orange because it “would place the government in an impossible position”.

Vietnam veterans could be excused for asking what happened to the duty of care that the

Australian government professes to hold for those whom it puts in harm's way. Most of those I have spoken to are simply stunned at the callousness of the decision.

### **DFRDB – Private Senator's Bill.**

Senator Michael Ronaldson (Lib, Victoria) introduced a Private Member's Bill entitled Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 on 18 Nov 2010.

The Bill is intended to amend the DFRDB Act 1973 so that the superannuation pension paid under the Act to retired Defence Force members over the age of 55 is indexed bi-annually by the greater of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) or Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE).

The Bill has not yet been referred to any committee and does not apply to pensions paid under the earlier DFRB or subsequent MSBS schemes. The Bill can be downloaded from <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bd/2010-11/11bd055.pdf>.

### **PTSD rorted by troops says RAN doctor.**

Navy Reservist CMDR Doug McKenzie states that a PTSD epidemic is sweeping through Defence ranks, and it features a host of fake illness claims. Dr McKenzie has served in both Timor and Iraq and says that there are 3,000 PTSD claims arising from service in Timor, 600 of which had been accepted.

McKenzie contends that up to 90% of PTSD claims are false, a contention strongly refuted by Tim McCombe of the Vietnam Veterans Federation and others.

Responses to PTSD stressors are highly individual and subjective and there are retired senior officers who are PTSD deniers. It seems that Doug McKenzie can be added to the list. It would be educational to examine the evidentiary basis for his claims – if there is one.

### **Advocacy funding for drastic cuts?**

Shadow Veterans Affairs Minister Michael Ronaldson claims that the findings of the Labor review of advocacy funding will result in drastic cuts to grass-roots funding. The study findings have been with Minister Snowdon for a month, and it is reported that ex-Service organisations (ESO) are concerned that the longer outcomes remain secret, the worse the news will be.

Not having heard any of these ESO concerns voiced, this might be classified as a bit of Opposition kite flying.

### **Afghanistan casualties.**

The Department of Defence has released a summary of Afghanistan battle casualties as at 31 Dec 2010. This summary is available at <http://www.defence.gov.au/op/afghanistan/info/personnel.htm>.

Since Op Slipper commenced, 164 Australians have been WIA and 21 KIA – there is much more detail on the site, including types of wounds:

2002-04.....	4 WIA .....	1 KIA
2005 .....	2 WIA .....	0 KIA
2006 .....	10 WIA .....	0 KIA
2007 .....	21 WIA .....	3 KIA
2008 .....	26 WIA .....	2 KIA
2009 .....	37 WIA .....	4 KIA
2010 .....	64 WIA .....	10 KIA

In late January another soldier was injured in clearing captured weapons. The Department of Defence has instituted an enquiry into the incident.

### **Queensland flood support.**

Prime Minister Gillard pledged to provide whatever level of Australian Defence Force support is necessary.

15 helicopters and a number of fixed wing aircraft are assisting with rescue, evacuations, recovery and resupply. MAJ GEN Mick Slater has been appointed to lead the Queensland Flood Recovery Taskforce and 1,200 military personnel have been assigned in direct support.

Having been involved in that activity during my years in uniform, I feel for those whose primary task is searching for the missing and recovering bodies, particularly where children are involved.

Readers will have followed the development of this natural disaster as it unfolded so I will not attempt to further summarise.

### **DFWA archive concerns canvassed.**

Veterans' military records may be obtained from the National Archives under the 30 year rule. In an odd twist veterans are not advised of this access and are unable to learn who has obtained their information as that person is protected under the Privacy Act!

The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) is canvassing opinion from within the veteran

community. Part of their concern is that it seems as if the period of protection for these records may be reduced to 20 or possibly even 10 years.

Individual records have been used to identify “wannabe’s” – those wearing medals and accoutrements without entitlement. I have also seen records used to denigrate or belittle the service of individuals. Sadly, in almost every case the person posting such derogatory comments had little or no understanding of the nature of the service. Historians also have legitimate access entitlements.

The situation is well overdue for review. Living veterans and ex-Service personnel are entitled to at least the same protection as the enquirers, perhaps within an environment where general questions can be answered by a third party who has access to the individual records and can protect the more personal information.

It struck me when researching this item that the practice of protecting the identities of Special Forces personnel when wounded or awarded plays directly into the hands of the future wannabes.

It makes it almost a zero-risk strategy for a wannabe to claim service in Special Services, WIA status and a chest-full of service and gallantry awards. In practical terms there’s virtually no way to validate or disprove their claimed service.

### **Cyber attack more effective than bombs.**

Stuxnet, a cyber malware attack allegedly developed jointly by Israel and the US has been credited with setting Iran’s nuclear capability back by four years. An planned bombing attack on Iranian facilities was anticipated to set the program back by only three years.

Although Siemens had originally denied that the worm had caused any damage, Iran has admitted that its nuclear program had been damaged by Stuxnet. The attacks are pin-point targeted at specific hardware/software/operating system combinations, varying the rotational speed of centrifuges, making them unstable and ultimately destroying them.

Symantec notes that 80% of the infected computers are in Iran. Russia’s Kaspersky Labs said that the attacks could only have been carried out with nation-state support, making Iran the first target of real cyber warfare.

2436 computers in Australia are infected.

### **Second SAS VC awarded for Afghanistan.**

Officialdom overcame the sensitivities I mentioned in December’s newsletter and gathered at Campbell Barracks on 23<sup>rd</sup> January for the GG to present SAS Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith with the second Victoria Cross of Australia to be awarded for action in Afghanistan.

Congratulations to CPL Ben whose October 2010 gallantry at Sha Wali Kot in northern Kandahar, together with members of the Commando Regiment, led to the award. His citation states that by exposing himself to fire he put his patrol into a position where it could nullify one Taliban machinegun position with a grenade and he then personally took out two other machineguns in defence against a Taliban formation which lost 60 in the battle.

This is no isolated act of bravery, as Roberts-Smith was previously awarded the Medal for Gallantry (MG) when a Lance Corporal in Afghanistan in 2006. This makes him now the most awarded member of the present-day ADF.

He appears to have an uncanny ability to read the battlefield and never hesitates to himself into a position of danger in order to turn events in favour of his comrades.

With the MG as a LCPL and the VC as a CPL, I hesitate to think what might follow his promotion to SGT!

The faces of Corporals Ben Roberts-Smith and Mark Donaldson are well-known and it remains to be seen if their high public profile will still enable them to continue their chosen careers.

As January moved on and the rain continued, it was good to see the three living VC recipients using their high profile to boost fundraising efforts.



**VC Recipients Honoured**

### **Conference: Stories of Australians at War.**

A-PAC, the Public Affairs Channel aired extracts from the ADFA Conference

## *Information Warfare: Shaping the Stories of Australians at War.*

A number of journalists including Chris Masters were critical of the current arrangements for getting stories out of Afghanistan.

The journalists believe that it is their job to deliver stories with which the Australian public can empathise, but are hampered by the limitations of working with Special Forces in an environment where they have to protect SF identities and find the cryptic military jargon difficult and sometimes impossible to decipher.

Dr Jacqui Ewart from Griffith University spoke on the reporting in respect of the Special Forces soldiers charged with war crimes, one with involuntary man-slaughter. She pointed out the heavy reliance on the ANZAC myth by News Ltd to engender support for its journalistic position.

She claims that the terminology has evolved over time, with the description of the Afghan leader moving from “*suspected insurgent*” to “*local insurgent*”, narrowing the room for doubt in the mind of the reader, even though (and she did not actually make this point) the attack allegedly took place at the wrong compound. The angst-laden headlines she says, frame the readers’ expectations and the iterative use of the word “diggers” guides their emotions.

It was a brief but instructive glimpse into the world of the print media. My initial thought was that she was a very poor speaker, especially for a university senior lecturer. Then I remembered some of the uni lectures I have endured and realised that she was merely typical of the breed.

### **7 RAR soldiers unhappy with temporary accommodation in Edinburgh.**

Edinburgh RAAF base is undergoing a \$750m refurbishment to coincide with the relocation of 7 RAR from Darwin. Accommodation for about 400 single soldiers is incomplete however, and the diggers will be housed in temporary quarters.

Fueling their ire is the internet portrayal of the quarters not as they actually are, but as they will be when finished. In the meantime, they’ll be in rooms which they claim with good justification aren’t big enough to swing a cat.

Minister Snowden, responsible for Defence Science and Personnel as well as Veterans Affairs and Indigenous Health, says that he

hasn’t inspected the base for some time, but acknowledged that proper housing had a big bearing on retention rates. About 550 7 RAR personnel are to move into Edinburgh in the last week of January.

### **I-phone battle app.**

CAPT Jonathan Springer (US Army) has put \$US26K of his own money into developing an i-phone app which enables soldiers to map, plot and scan battlefield way-points, direct artillery and call in helicopter support.

Springer, a battalion fire support officer said that the inspiration came to him in a dream.

No-one seems to have discussed the problems inherent in the TacticalNav application sending real-time tactical information over an unsecured network or considered the ways in which a captured phone might be used to compromise artillery or helicopter support.

In fact, given that the app can be downloaded and used by anyone, there’s nothing stopping the Taliban using it too.

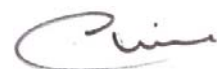
### **Commission of Inquiry into HMAS SUCCESS.**

The 5400 page Part One of the Inquiry into activities on HMAS SUCCESS has been released to the Minister and CDF but is yet to be released publicly. Defence Minister Stephen Smith has said that it does not make for good reading.

There has been considerable speculation over the content of the report. Journalist Ian McPhedron who specialises in Defence, veteran and ex-Service matters claims that the Gyles report is highly critical of CO CMDR Simon Brown and senior officers at Fleet HQ on Garden Island.

Criticism of Brown centres on his lack of awareness of what was going on under his nose and his subsequent over-reaction. His superiors are taken to task for their knee-jerk reaction to what were clearly systemic issues.

Defence Chief Angus Houston is reported to have directed the three Service Chiefs to implement programs to better manage the careers of women in uniform and achieve higher participation rates for women.



Clive Mitchell-Taylor – VVAA NSW President