

Veterans Support Centre



1st Edition Feb 2022

Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers & Peacemakers Association (NSW)
Hastings Manning Macleay Branch Inc.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS ON SOLDIERS

- There were no open fronts in the Vietnam war for soldiers to be treated. Vietnam had an immense psychological impact on the troops, with many suffering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- The selective nature of the National Service Program meant that soldiers suffered depression and often turned to drug abuse or alcoholism. This coupled with a lack of a 'welcome home' from the public upon their return made many veterans feel their service to the nation went unnoticed and unrecognised.



HEROES ALL



ey

Image by Tracey

There are NO COSTS to access the services such as Pensions, Welfare and advice provided by Veterans Support Centre, Port Macquarie

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Mental health - Who do I contact if I, or someone I know, needs help now?



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Every veteran, ex-Service person who deploys or not, or is injured, deserves a lifestyle and better treatment than is currently available.

Every veteran should be able to successfully attain their rights to pensions with a simple expedient system through DVA. Yet we still have veterans unaware of their rights and entitlements about what they may be entitled to and where and how to apply or file a claim.

Through your will, you have the power to make a difference. Any gift you bequest to our Sub-Branch, HMMVPPAA, no matter how small, can and will assist a fellow veteran by assisting us to continue our services.

DVA Media Releases and Ministerial Speeches

A large number of DVA Media Releases and other publications are available for your information.

A copy of the full text and other less topical releases may be obtained by visiting

<http://minister.dva.gov.au/media.releases.htm>

You can also subscribe to receive all releases to your computer

or Email a request to us at hmmvppaa@bigpond.com

or Phone us on 6581 5230

or visit our office at **Veterans Support Centre** if you require assistance

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Hello to you all and a Happy New Year with peace and happiness to you and your loved ones,

We all like to look forward with hope and a positive attitude so let us all wish for a kinder year and more of a normal way of living.

'Thank you' is made up of 2 short words which we often don't use enough. I want to say a big THANK YOU to 2 veterans who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep the Veterans Support Centre operating for the benefit of all veterans and especially our members -



Jill Opie, Editor

BILL WAGNER - thank you for fighting to keep VSC going, for your ongoing role as President and the work and time that involves and for your ongoing search to find us a suitable place for the future so that our veterans can keep the high level of mateship and support that they need.

BILL STARRENBURG - thank you for the years of cooking bbqs to support the Thursday lunches, Vets Health week and social outings, the Thank You bbq for DRA after the floods and so many more. You also bring a cheerful attitude to all of these events and my only criticism is that you were going to be unkind to my veggie burger coming up with so many funny/unkind suggestions of what to do with it !!!

To all of our members, to our committee and volunteers, to the veterans everywhere, I wish you a Happy and Peaceful 2022 and hope that you stay as well as you can.

It is time to renew your membership for the calendar year of 2022, \$30 to the office here in Port Macquarie means that we keep a portion of that to help with the running of the VSC. Cash renewals can be brought into the office, (tea/coffee at no charge) money orders etc, cheques made out to **The Treasurer VPPAA Inc**. There is a form to complete on the back of the address label that came with this Newsletter for you to use and also update all of your details if necessary. It is important that we have your contact details so that we can ring and see how you are during the year. It proved a great way of helping the veterans who suffered from the flooding last year and we all appreciate a friendly "Hi mate, how are you?" call.

If you need help, Mike (Compensation Advocate) will help with claims and guidance on how best to present your claim, Peter (Well being Support Officer) for any welfare needs and the office staff each weekday 1000 - 1400 will help with any other enquiry. Ring the office to make an appointment with Mike or Peter.

Take care and keep in touch, Jill

As always - The opinions in this Editorial opening are my personal opinions and may not align with those of others, including Vietnam Veterans, VPPAA, ADF, our supporters and followers.

Front cover sources - thewest.com.au, pinterest, abc.net.au, slideshare.net, ourheroesdontjustbelonginthepast.sbs, Vietnam-airsoft, awesomeinvetions, australianwomenwarriors

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The DVA website has Fact Sheets about a huge range of benefits that may be available to you or your partner.

One important fact sheet is **IS45 - Partner Service Pension** and tells of when a partner may be eligible for a pension income based on your qualifying service. It is income and asset tested for those on low income.

If you need help accessing DVA's website, call the VSC for help



The **WPPAA** is dedicated to the welfare of all Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers, ex-service and serving personnel and their families. If you, or someone you know, is ill and you suspect the illness may be a result of military service, please do not hesitate to consult one of our trained volunteers.

We are here to help you and there is no cost associated with our services.



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Store 119 Horton St Port Macquarie Super Store Phone:

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Shop 8, 100 Ocean Drive, Lighthouse Plaza Port Macquarie

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Shop 3-5, 88 Bold St Haven Plaza Corner of Bold St & Tunis St, Laurieton

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Shop 1, Lakewood Shopping Centre Corner of Ocean Dr & Sirius Drive Lakewood.

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General Business– Your Office

Our office is open weekdays - phone or call in 10am - 2pm

Committee Meetings:

President and Committee may determine a date and time as suits the covid rules at the time.

Annual General Meeting Minutes and Financial Statements are available at the office.

Thank you:

To all donors, supporters and advertisers: Your continued support helps us to keep our doors open for veterans, serving and ex-serving personnel who need our help. Members are encouraged to support businesses whose advertisements appear in this newsletter.

Contributions Welcome:

Please send any letters, stories, questions, comments, poems, jokes, photos etc to The Editor, Contact Front, PO Box 5330, Port Macquarie NSW 2444. All such submissions are subject to copyright laws, may be edited and remain the property of VPPAA Sub-Branch unless otherwise agreed. All submissions received will be considered for publication, but will not necessarily be accepted. No correspondence regarding acceptance or otherwise will be entered into.

PLEASE if you go into hospital, ring us or have someone ring us and let us know.

Even though we do a ring around at least 3 times a year, we have members go into hospital and we don't know. Even if it is an out of town hospitalisation like Sydney we can organise a visit.

THURSDAYS - subject to covid restrictions

Join us on Thursday mornings at the Veterans Support Centre from about 10am for an informal get -together. Find out what's happening with veteran's issues, catch up with old and new friends or just have a chat over a cup of coffee or tea.

These informal mornings are followed by **OUR FAMOUS \$5 LUNCH**



**Take a
break**



Thanks are long overdue to Bill (above) who cooks the Thursday lunches (see above for time and come along. He has also cooked for many other activities including a "Thank You" to DRA (Disaster Relief Australia) for their help and hard work during the floods of 2021, Vets Health Week, joint events with Soldier On and so many more. **THANK YOU, BILL,** your commitment is so appreciated.

VETERANS HEALTH WEEK 2021

‘GET MOVING’

Some changes had to be made to our original plan but the day turned out to be better for the changes -

Location – was to be North Brother picnic and bbq area, North Brother mountain, but due to car park and road damage repairs still underway after the floods, it had to be changed to Settlement Point, Port Macquarie, the reserve and picnic BBQ area.

Date – we had some restrictions due to covid and the planning had fallen behind as we also had a lockdown. We had to reschedule to the second week of November and had a tentative date of 4th November. This allowed us to plan, notify all of our members and get organized.

The walking tracks around the reserve would allow members to either gently stroll, walk comfortably or (in a few cases) make a faster pace. There was a mix of physical and mental wellbeing information and we were delighted that Peter Clark of Healthier You business, one of our long time supporters, was able to come along and talk to the group.

One other benefit of this move is that all of our veterans and partners were able to meet at the same time as the covid rules (wef 1st Nov) allow up to 50 and we hope for 35 attendees. We were delighted to also have younger veterans along who are members of Soldier On.

Here are some photos for those who were unable to join us.

Right - Bill Wagner talks with Peter Clark of ‘Healthier You’ who came along as our guest to meet and chat with the veterans.



Below - These photos show Bill Wagner, our President and veterans Bob Holley and John Armstrong (on the far right) having a discussion about the success of their wind break construction. The wind was so strong that they nearly did a Mary Poppins and blew away still attached to the tarps!



VETERANS HEALTH WEEK 2021

'GET MOVING'



Left - Bill Starrenburg was our chef for the day, cooking up a great bbq of steaks, eggs and accompaniments. There was a range of salad items and fresh rolls, all washed down with plenty of tea, coffee and water. The wind was so strong that the gas for boiling the water kept blowing out and made for a bit of a challenge

Bill was helped and advised by (left) Barry Lynch and (right) David Barnes. There was also a robust discussion about what to do with the vegetarian burgers ranging from 'bin it' to 'drip steak juice on it for flavour' and some unprintable ideas - I really enjoyed it guys, cooked beautifully thanks!! (Ed)



Above - some of the veterans and families; Below - left - Lyn Hancock (our Office Manager) and partner Roger relax with a cuppa, right - Peter Dorman (our Treasurer) with Mrs Armstrong and Mrs Holley



All-female MH-60R Seahawk helicopter flight crew takes to skies in an Australian first



Lieutenant Hannah Best, Lieutenant Rhiannon Thomson and Leading Seaman Clare Lassam, from 725 Squadron, made history. (Supplied: ADF)



Lieutenant Rhiannon Thomson said there was more gender crossover in Defence roles. (Supplied: ADF)

A Nowra-based crew has made Australian history by becoming the first all-female flight team to operate an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter.

Pilot Lieutenant Rhiannon Thomson, aviation warfare officer Royal Navy Lieutenant Hannah Best and sensor operator Leading Seaman Clare Lassam, from 725 Squadron, flew the routine shift from HMAS Albatross.

Lieutenant Thomson said it was a coincidence the team were rostered together. "It was nice to get out with my peers and do what we do every day," she said. "We just don't always get to do it with an all-female crew because we are in such small numbers."

It has taken years for the Australian first, with MH-60R helicopters rolled out in 2014.

Push to recruit and retain more women

Women make up 19.2 per cent of the Defence Force — each arm has a 2023 workforce target:

- Navy — 25 per cent
- Air Force — 25 per cent
- Army — 15 per cent.

Each of them has also put in place extensive marketing strategies to encourage more women to join.

The 2018-19 Women In The ADF report also outlined the retention of women as a priority. The report stated women were serving less time than men and were retained at a lower rate following paid maternity or parental leave.

Lieutenant Thomson said when she began her training as a pilot in 2016, there were no female role models to look up to but it did not put her off her dream job. She said gender should not be a barrier to a Defence career or in any other role. "I think just through history it has been subconsciously programmed into us all, the types of roles men and women might go on to do. We are seeing more gender crossover in roles, but I think it is important to take the gender out of it and just encourage anyone to go and do what they want to do," she said.

She said she would encourage any young woman wanting to become a pilot to think about a career in the Defence Force.

Defence hopes STEM roles will grow. Last year, Defence received an Athena SWAN bronze award for its commitment to advancing the careers of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields. It also committed to the STEM decadal plan, a shared vision for the STEM sector to attract, retain and advance women in these careers.

Defence has agreed to publicly align its gender equity actions with the plan as well as increase the number of women on Defence boards. Despite this, it also indicated in its annual report that recruiting women for these roles remained a challenge.

Former peacekeeper Ben Farinazzo, 22 years on, reunites with Timor-Leste man he helped deliver



L to R - Ben Farinazzo and baby Ben in East Timor in 1999; Baby Benjamin moments after being born; Ben Farinazzo says nothing could prepare him for helping deliver baby Ben.

On a stormy night 22 years ago, Ben Farinazzo's job as a peacekeeper in Timor-Leste took an unexpected twist. After being told some locals were looking for him, Mr Farinazzo found three people standing by the front gate of their camp. He was greeted by a man and two women, one of whom was heavily pregnant.

"Her name was Umbelina and her husband and mother had accompanied her from the hills in the intense rain, as she was about to have her baby," he wrote on social media this week. They had been hiding for more than a month, surviving on boiled tree roots."

Mr Farinazzo was part of the Australian peacekeeping mission to Timor-Leste, then known as East Timor, after violence broke out following a nationwide vote in favour of independence from Indonesia.

What happened next that night was something that even Mr Farinazzo admits no army training could have prepared him for. "Eventually a healthy baby boy arrived and the storm stopped," he said. It was a strong reminder that despite the terrible conditions, that life could and must go on. A beautiful little baby boy, born on a cold, concrete floor of a burnt-out classroom in the middle of a raging storm — a symbol of hope, new life and new beginnings".

The family was so grateful for his help, they asked Mr Farinazzo to name him but he politely declined.

"They smiled and asked if they could name him after me, a moment I will never forget," he said.

Before he came back to Australia, Mr Farinazzo visited the family "to make sure they were alright", giving them a care package as well.

Even after his return from Timor-Leste, the retired captain found himself wondering what had happened to "Baby Benjamin" and his family.

"I often think about him and his family. I wonder if he is still alive and what his life is like," he told the Australian War Memorial in 2019.

Little did he know the power of social media would mean he would one day see Baby Benjamin again.

Post goes viral in Timor-Leste

Mr Farinazzo posts every year on September 20 to mark the anniversary of International Force East Timor (INTERFET) — the day Australian peacekeepers landed in Dili.

He told the ABC usually his posts don't gather that much traction, but something different happened this year. He said he saw it was starting to be shared widely among accounts in Timor-Leste. Then, on Thursday night, Mr Farinazzo received a message that shocked him. "I was with my wife saying, 'No, no, no, no,'" he told the ABC. "I couldn't believe it."

Baby Benjamin had reached out. "The emotions at that moment were and still are so hard to describe," Mr Farinazzo said. "He is well and so are his parents. He is studying engineering at the national university in Timor-Leste in Dili."

Mr Farinazzo said he ended up video calling with Baby Benjamin, who told him his mother and father send their regards and hadn't forgotten him either.

"He's never seen photos of the day he was born, so I showed him the ones I have," he said.

As for an in-person meet-up, Mr Farinazzo said he was looking forward to the day, COVID-9 border restrictions permitting, they could meet face to face.

Right - "Baby" Benjamin, now 22, is now studying engineering in Dili.

Article by Political reporter Georgia Hitch and Defence Correspondent Andrew Greene





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Project Assistance from Disaster Relief Australia

42 for 42 is an ongoing project that our South Queensland DRT (Disaster Relief Team) has had the privilege to be a part of.

Our members there have been helping finish the 42 for 42 Afghanistan Memorial Garden which will pay tribute to everyone who served during Operation Slipper. 42 for 42 is a not-for-profit organisation which was founded by ex-Army veterans whose aim is to help struggling veterans and their families by building a memorial dedicated to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Well done team for all your hard work and for supporting our fellow veteran community.

Memorial Garden

The 42 for 42 Afghanistan Memorial Garden is to pay tribute to everyone that served during Operation Slipper, remembering the veterans who were killed in Afghanistan and those that continue to succumb to their injuries, both mentally and physically, to this day.

The Plaques

Each of the 41 that were killed has their own cast bronze plaque and another 42nd plaque is dedicated to all those that were killed in training or have taken their own lives due to issues from their service.

We also pay tribute to the often unsung four-legged heroes from the War in Afghanistan, our explosive detection and special operations dogs that were killed on deployment.

There will be park benches around the garden that will each be dedicated to the 4 recipients of the Victoria Cross for Australia and the fifth bench for Kuga, a dog that received the Dicken Medal (awarded for conspicuous gallantry by an animal serving with the armed forces).

The plaques are being made in Western Australia by Talbot and Walsh who have been fantastic supporters of 42 for 42 and have dedicated many hours to design, cast and finish each plaque by hand.



Memorial Garden Mural by Lee Harnden



Source - article and pictures - DRA fb page

World War II veteran joins Chelsea Pensioners



Left - Australian Army soldier Corporal A, from the 1st Commando Regiment, talks with Second World War British Army veteran Mr John Morris in the garden of his home in Merrylands, Sydney.

After decades living in Australia, a World War II Special Air Service (SAS) and Battle of Britain veteran was escorted home to England last month by an Australian Army soldier from 1st Commando Regiment to join the Chelsea Pensioners, a program run by the illustrious Chelsea Hospital for British Army veterans.

Nicknamed “Cat” Morris for his ability to cheat death, Mr John Morris enlisted when he was 16, joining an anti-aircraft regiment as a gun layer to defend British cities against Nazi bombers.

When his regiment deployed to North Africa, Mr Morris first escaped death aboard a landing craft after his ship was torpedoed. He contracted Hepatitis-A from drinking contaminated water in Algeria, an illness that led him to the SAS Raiding Support Group (RSR) when officers asked for volunteers at his hospital.

The newly-formed special forces unit operated behind enemy lines across Yugoslavia and Greece, providing heavy-weapon support and training to local militias to overthrow Nazi occupation, as Allied forces advanced into Europe.

Mr Morris said he was excited to get selected, despite its dangerous reputation. “I don’t know if I was scared because when you’re young you don’t think you’re going to die,” Mr Morris said.

After the Allied invasion of Italy, the RSR launched operations across the Adriatic Sea. It was around the time of an operation to retake the Albanian coastal town of Saranda – a thoroughfare for German troops travelling from occupied Greece – that he contracted malaria.

“It was very unusual because it was the middle of winter, I must have got the germ while I was in Africa and it lay dormant,” he said.

Even seemingly innocuous tasks could become a matter of life or death behind enemy lines, as Mr Morris discovered prior to Christmas 1944, when a trip to pick up holiday mail ended in a close call.

“By the time we got to Dubrovnik we had a few rakis, so we weren’t quite sober and we lost our way coming back,” Mr Morris said. “We drove through a German-held village and the Germans were outside drinking schnapps, and my mate said, ‘John, fire over their bloody heads. Don’t shoot to kill, it’s Christmas Eve!’ I had the twin Brownings on the Jeep, so I let off a couple of rounds over their heads and we found our way back with the Christmas mail. I didn’t get any mail funnily enough, everyone else got something.”

When Mt Vesuvius erupted earlier in 1944, destroying 88 US aircraft at Pompei airfield, John was in the nearby Naples hospital and avoided death again.

In 1963, he spent six hours adrift near Casablanca, clinging to flotsam after fire destroyed the cruise ship TSMS Lakonia; 128 people died..

“I didn’t have a life jacket and I pulled a chap onto the flotsam with me, saving his life,” he said. “I found out later he was the hairdresser on the ship and the fire had started in his salon.”

Sometime after the Lakonia tragedy, Mr Morris’ marriage broke down and he moved to Australia, working as a mechanic, then with the Encyclopaedia Britannica and meet his long-term partner.

“I’m unhappy to go – we’ve looked after each other for 32 years but we can’t look after each other anymore,” the 99-year old said.

A campaign to raise funds to repatriate Mr Morris, led by former British SAS Warrant Officer Matt Hellyer, helped secure a place with the Chelsea Pensioners, where he will live in “five star” accommodation with other veterans. He was escorted home to London by Cpl A [protected identity] from the 1st Commando Regiment in Sydney, after a request from the British Army. Cpl A met with Mr Morris several times in the weeks leading up to his repatriation and escorted him home on the flight.

“I’ll be very happy there but very sad to leave Australia because I love it here,” Mr Morris said. “I’ve had a few escapes in my life but I think I’ve got somebody up above looking after me.”

Vietnam veteran becomes bush postman as community post office stays closed

Bouncing down roads in a mud-splattered ute is a 75-year-old Vietnam veteran, amongst stacked parcels and letters. Local character Wally Wales recently became a postman doing the so-called bush run around Ungarie in south-west New South Wales. "Like the American Postal Service says, 'The mail must get through!' I think the mail from Ungarie has got to get through too," he said.

Three times a week, Wally gets up at 6:30am and makes his way to the temporary Ungarie War Memorial Hall to sort the mail. About two hours later, he fills the cluttered cabin of his well-used ute with boxes surprisingly stacked with lots of mail, considering the town's population is less than 400.

"At 11:30am I set off on the mail run after sorting all of my stuff into the positions, so I could have it in these boxes and it would be in the right positions to put it into the mailbox, just so I don't lose count of who or what or how many letters," Mr Wales said. Then he and the redback spider he keeps in the bottom left corner of the windscreen "to catch the mozzies" begin their journey.

The 'bush run'

The parcels threaten to jump out of their boxes as Wally expertly dodges potholes, pushes through pools of rainwater, and waves to locals who happen to drive past.

Mr Wales has a "work smarter, not harder" mentality, often pulling up in front of unusual looking letter-boxes, sticking his arm out the window and sliding the mail through the slit. "I know just about everyone out there. I've worked for just about most of them at one stage or another," he said. "I've always been self-employed and this is virtually the same thing. I'm told what to do, not how to do it. All I've got to do is get enough money to pay the bills. I've got a house and I've got my truck, and as long as I can pay the food bill and electricity, I'm happy. I was earlier this year a school bus operator. Prior to that I was a farm worker, and just whatever other farm jobs I could get. Before that I had nine months in Vietnam."

Service in Vietnam

Mr Wales served in the 3 Cavalry Regiment from the Christmas of 1969 to just before Christmas in 1970.

"Mines that were put in the ground to catch the centurion tanks were the biggest problem," he said. "You'd drive along without knowing where these underground mines were placed and if you hit a big one then the carrier — which weighed about 11 tonnes — would do three or four cartwheels in the air. There's not a lot of hope for the people. If you only hit a little one you might blow off a track. You'd have to clear an area around the vehicle before you got out and took off the damaged portion of the track and replaced it before you went on."



Mr Wales never expected he would become a postman delivering mail "to the bush", but then again, driving is in his DNA. In August, the town's much-loved postmaster Jeff De Rosario died suddenly. The post office was closed, and since then the community has kept the mail service going — albeit in a very different capacity. But as Christmas creeps closer, mail deliveries are increasing.

"It's coming up to Christmas and really everyone needs our mail service and we're just volunteers and we're just doing it," Mr Wales said. "I have the cabin of the ute chock-a-block full, but as it's getting closer to Christmas I'm going to have to have sides on the back of the ute to put all the parcels in. I only had 30 parcels today and all up for the week I've delivered about 60 parcels."

Until someone qualified can take charge, banking services will be suspended, forcing people to travel half an hour south-east to West Wyalong. But Community postal agent Ms Barrett said she was thankful to have people like Mr Wales on board for the meantime. "He's quite happily stepped into the role to help with the mail deliveries when he's never done it before," she said. "He's a bit of a larrikin really. He's been very very kind to a lot of people around the area. He cooks meals for a lot of the bachelors around town."

Left - Wally's time in the Vietnam War was memorialised in a mural at Ungarie RSL Park,

Smaller pictures - Wally Wales has become a postman in a bid to keep mail service alive in his town and Wally travels along dirt roads to deliver mail to residents in and around Ungarie

Source - ABC Riverina by Shannon Corvo



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Nui Le on September 21, 1971

Fifty years ago Australian and New Zealand troops fought their last major battle in Vietnam. Sgt Dave Morley recaps the battle and talks to veterans about their actions on that day.

The last major battle fought by Australian and New Zealand troops in Vietnam took place at Nui Le on September 21, 1971. It resulted in five diggers killed and more than two dozen wounded.

B and D Coys 4RAR/NZ fought 2 and 3 Bns of the North Vietnam Army's (NVA) battle-hardened 33 Regt in northern Phuoc Tuy Province during Operation Ivanhoe, a reconnaissance-in-force operation.

Pte Kevin 'Fred' Casson, the last surviving rifleman in his section, crawled forward into a fire-lane where casualties were lying and checked each of them was dead.

He recovered an M60 machine-gun from under one of the bodies, gathered belts of linked ammunition and crawled back to his platoon.

He was awarded an MID for his bravery and in 1999, an MG.

While NVA losses were unknown, because they generally removed their dead from the battlefield, 14 bodies were found in the vicinity of the battle.

Three 105mm guns from 104 Fd Bty, firing at extreme range, were credited with saving D Coy from being overrun. The battery fired 2074 rounds during the battle.

During the operation, APC crews from A Sqn, 3 Cav Regt, also engaged in contacts with the NVA, resulting in a number of diggers wounded.

1 Armd Regt's Centurion Mk 5 tanks, which were a major influence on the success of 1ATF's operations around Phuoc Tuy, especially in clearing bunker systems, were withdrawn shortly before the Battle of Nui Le.

The tanks' last major engagement of the Vietnam War was in support of D Coy, 4RAR, as part of Operation Iron Fox, over July 29-31, which was an advance-and-destroy operation to attack a bunker complex located by elements of 2 Sqn SAS and housing 1 Bn, 274 Main Force VC Regt.

Inexplicably, there was no mention of the battle or its casualties in *Army News* editions at the time.

CAPT GREG GILBERT - "I EXPECTED WE WOULD DIE"



Surrounded and on the verge of being overrun, a 2500-year-old equation and guesswork by forward observer Capt Greg Gilbert helped save D Coy, 4RAR, from oblivion.

On the night of the battle, he was formed up with D Coy in all round defence in an area about 35m across, surrounded by an NVA regiment.

But Capt Gilbert didn't know their exact location.

"I had just got my map out to work out where we were when we were attacked with a high volume of small-arms fire," he said.

It was approaching pitch black under the jungle canopy and he couldn't see anything on his map.

"The only lights were the green tracer rounds passing not far above my head, which was pressed hard into the dirt," Capt Gilbert said.

"If I'd put on a torch to see my map, it would have quite literally been the last thing I did."

To have any chance of survival, Capt Gilbert knew they needed to break up the enemy attack with artillery.

Capt Gilbert tried calling across to the company commander, 5m away, but his voice drew fire.

"I tried to remember the grid reference of the start point, which was from where we had winched out some dead and wounded," he said.

"I knew the rough direction we had moved after withdrawing from our earlier attack on the bunker system and had counted my paces, so I knew about how far we had travelled."

With bullets flying over his head, he worked out distances using Pythagoras theorem.

The route they travelled was the hypotenuse and he worked out the other two sides as the difference in eastings and northings from his guessed starting position.

Calculating in his head, Capt Gilbert came up with a grid reference for where he thought they were.

"Based on that, I called in the artillery fire. Luckily it didn't land on us," he said.

Having no idea of direction, he used the points of a compass to adjust fire in as close as he could.

"That was about 25-30m when we started to get the shrapnel from the exploding shells falling on us," he said.

"It had to be that close to counter the NVA tactic of 'grabbing us by the belt', so close artillery couldn't be called in.

"Once it was in that close, using the cardinal points, north, south, east and west, I moved the fire around our perimeter."

Because of the battlefield geography, commands were relayed to the guns via a helicopter above with a double-radio set up.

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Nui Le on September 21, 1971

Capt Gilbert was initially prepared for D Coy to be wiped out after being surrounded.

"I expected we would die and I had made my peace. I thought we would be overrun. The artillery saved us," he said.

As rounds came in at danger close, Capt Gilbert was impressed by the skills of the 104 Bty gunners.

"The smallest error could have the rounds on us," he said.

"Not only were they accurate in their laying, but they kept up a high rate of fire, which would have been exhausting."

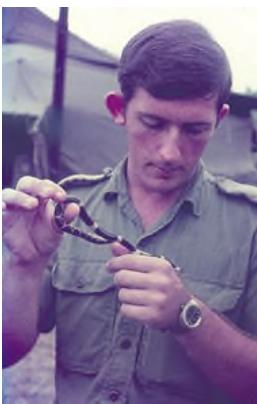
While most of D Coy survived the battle, some didn't.

"I knew one of those killed, reasonably well, and I can't think of the battle without remembering those who died," Capt Gilbert said.

He left the Army in early 1986 as a lieutenant-colonel, but there was more to follow from his role at Nui Le. In 2018, he was awarded a DSM.

"I was very proud to be recognised, even after so long a time," he said.

"And it was great that I was able to be given it by my 1968 Duntroon classmate Peter Cosgrove, who was Governor-General at the time."



2LT HUGH POLSON - "NO TIME FOR SLEEP"

When members of D Coy, 4RAR, found themselves surrounded and on the verge of being overrun by the NVA's crack 33 Regt, it was accurate and timely artillery fire that saved the day.

2Lt Hugh Polson was a section commander with 12 Fd Regt's 104 Fd Bty in Vietnam from February to December 1971.

During the Battle of Nui Le he commanded three 105mm howitzer gun lines and had overall responsibility for accuracy and safety.

"104 Fd Bty was deployed as two three-gun sections – we were at FSB Debbie, not far from HQ 4RAR at Courtney Hill," he said.

"The 105mm M2A2 howitzer was a very robust piece of equipment and could withstand the rigours of firing at maximum charge over an extended period without affecting their accuracy."

This meant 2Lt Polson had no concerns about rounds going astray during the battle.

"Our procedures, including independent checks, were quite stringent, but having said that, it was always foremost in my mind," he said.

"When gunfire is brought in close to our own troops, we adopt special procedures.

"This is done on order from the FO, in this case Capt Greg Gilbert, and is called 'Danger Close'."

The gunners had a fair idea D Coy, 4RAR, was in serious trouble, but they didn't have a lot of detail.

"The very nature of artillery communications is such that we had direct communications with the 'frontline' and this generally is not cluttered with the heat-of-battle communications one finds on the infantry nets," Mr Polson said.

"Standard procedure for gunners is that we continually feed information to them about the battle as it comes to hand.

"The gun position officer, Lt Bryan Stevens, kept all informed over the speaker system on each gun when not issuing firing data."

At the time of the battle, the majority of ammunition resupply came on trucks, but because of dirt bunds around the gun position, it could not be delivered directly.

"Everyone not required in essential duties was involved in unloading ammunition and manhandling it on to the gun position," he said.

"The ammunition was boxed with two complete rounds – each weighing some 50kg."

2Lt Polson said there was no time for sleep for his men on the night of the battle.

"Each gun was commanded by a sergeant who would normally rest one gunner at a time," he said.

"Resting would normally involve manning one of a number of machine-gun posts around the FSB because we still had to protect ourselves at all times from ground attack, which was a major concern."

Mr Polson was a graduate of OCS Portsea and joined the ARA in 1968, discharging in 1993 as a major.

Nui Le on September 21, 1971



CPL WARREN DOWELL - SO MUCH NOISE

Operation Ivanhoe veterans tell their stories to **Sgt Dave Morley**.

As a young section commander in the last major battle involving Australians in the Vietnam War, relaying orders was a challenge for Cpl Warren Dowell.

"There was so much noise, it was very hard for anybody to actually hear orders above the sounds of battle," he said.

Cpl Dowell joined the ARA at 17 and found himself a section commander at 19.

He celebrated his 20th birthday in South Vietnam during his May 1971 to March 1972 tour.

After 11 Pl suffered four KIAs at the start of the Battle of Nui Le, and several WIAs, Cpl Dowell found himself acting as a section commander in 11 Pl.

"As night approached, OC D Coy Maj Jerry Taylor decided to break contact and move what was left of D Coy back 300m to form a secure harbour for the night," Cpl Dowell said.

He said 10 Pl moved off first but, after a short time, they ran into another bunker system, which was RHQ, 33 NVA Regt.

"So while they were fighting to D Coy's rear, 11 and 12 Pls were trying to extract themselves from the bunker system," he said. "The NVA was all around us, but we did get back into a semblance of all-round defence. It wasn't the classic all-round defence, but the platoons were linked up, which was excellent because being all together lifted our spirits. But we were in contact all around and the NVA had OPs in trees and were directing fire onto us."

According to Cpl Dowell, enemy fire slackened off around midnight and things began to go quiet.

"There were wounded within our position that had to stay with us because we couldn't get them out," he said.

"At that stage, we didn't think the enemy had pulled back as they'd showed during the day they'd wanted to have a go. The thought in my mind was that the NVA wanted to knock us over to prove they'd pushed the Australians out."

Cpl Dowell said the hardest thing he had to do was go back into the bunker system with D Coy and V Coy (NZ) the next day to retrieve their KIAs.

"We had to leave them there during the battle; we would have taken more casualties if we'd tried to get them out," he said. "As you can appreciate, in a hot, tropical environment, bodies tend to decompose quickly, but we had to get our fellas out, so we went back and got them."

Cpl Dowell left the Army in 1990 after 20 years' service. His final posting was the School of Infantry, where his career as an infantryman started.



PTE KEVIN WARKE - YOUNG GUN GETS HIS ADVENTURE

At 17 years of age, Pte Kevin Warke joined the Army looking for "a big adventure". Shortly after, he got more adventure in a few days than many diggers get in a lifetime.

Pte Warke said the worst experience he engaged in, in Vietnam, happened on September 19, two days before the Battle of Nui Le.

Tragically, it was a firefight between friendly forces.

"D Coy was strengthened with reinforcements on the afternoon of September 18, and two of the reos, national servicemen Ptes Max Rhodes and Owen Pettingill, came to 2 Sect," he said. "On the morning of September 19, the three platoons left D Coy HQ to patrol the AO, and at about 9.30am, 10 Pl halted for a navigation check and a smoke."

"2 Sect was at the tail-end and, just moments from stepping off, we were engaged by, as it turned out, friendly fire to our rear from the lead section of 11 Pl.

"As a result of this brief engagement, both Owen and Max were hit. Owen sustained a GSW to his upper leg and Max Rhodes a fatal GSW to his head."

Pte Warke said the saving grace for 11 Pl was 10 Pl's scout, Pte Dave Browne who, while going to ground, straddled the barrel of his M60, preventing him from opening fire on 11 Pl.

"Thankfully the platoon sigs were able to get the order out to cease fire very quickly," he said.

On the morning of September 21, before the frontal attack by 11 Pl later in the day, 12 Pl was heavily engaged with regular soldiers of 33 NVA Regt.

As a result of their actions, 11 and 12 Pl were quite low on ammunition, whereas 10 Pl had not been engaged by direct enemy fire.

Both 10 and 12 Pls were flank/rear protection for 11 Pl and HQ D Coy during the Nui Le bunker assault.

Pte Warke said they had engaged bunkers before and he thought they would be okay during the battle.

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Nui Le on September 21, 1971

"The fact we knew the enemy this time was NVA regulars didn't faze me. Our training and prior performances were excellent," he said.

"I think we all felt vulnerable that night as, by then, we all knew that D Coy was greatly outnumbered and that a night attack by the enemy was odds-on to occur.

"Luckily for us there were only minor problems after dark resulting in one enemy killed and 2Lt McKay, the platoon commander of 11 PI, wounded."

According to Pte Warke, when it became obvious they had to withdraw from the immediate battle area, they had to act quickly in order to maintain their defence.

"This withdrawal consisted of the entire company setting off in single file. 2 Sect, 10 PI leading, followed by 11 PI, CHQ, and then 12 PI," he said.

"As this was happening artillery and alternating air strikes were coming in. 12 PI was constantly followed and engaged by the enemy during the withdrawal and occupation of our night harbour.

"2 Sect at no time during the withdrawal and night harbour was directly engaged by the enemy."

Pte Warke didn't see or hear enemy during this time, but several members of 2 Sect did hear enemy to their flank during the withdrawal phase.

"I felt the only good moment for 2 Sect was after dark, when we all managed to spend a very long night together in a large old shell hole," he said.

The extraction back to Nui Dat by Huey the following day remains a vivid memory for Pte Warke.

"I was feeling tired, the adrenalin was obviously wearing off and I was just staring at the landscape below," he said.

"Next thing I know, the air-gunner tapped me on the arm and asked if I wanted to listen to Radio Australia on the headphones.

"I can't describe the lift it gave me and I wish I could meet up with that RAAFie to give him a hug and shake his hand."

WO2 Warke left the Army in 2006 as OPSWO at 1JSU, Bulimba Barracks, Brisbane, after 30 years' service.

"I am so proud to have served with the best rifle company in 4RAR/NZ Anzac Battalion," he said.

"We were the only Australian rifle company with 4RAR's second tour to suffer fatalities from enemy action."

LCPL IAN DOUGLASS - NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT SAVING LIVES, JUST THE TASK IN HAND

(PHOTO - Pte Mick O'Brien ARA, Pte Glen Smithers ARA, LCpl Ian Douglass NS)



A DIGGER who was acting as corporal only a few days before the battle, while his section commander was on R&R, was instrumental in getting survivors of 6 PI back to the relative safety of CHQ B Coy.

LCpl Ian Douglass arrived in South Vietnam on May 13, 1971.

He led 6 PI and their walking wounded back to CHQ. "When we were made aware of 6 PI's position, we headed off ASAP," he said. "We were going that fast we were

nearly running – a big no-no under normal circumstances.

We had a number of contacts along the way, but because of the urgency to get to 6 PI, we broke contact and kept going. I've never thought about me saving lives, rather, it was that I was able to complete the task given to me. Considering I had not long been promoted to lance corporal and only been acting corporal for a few days, I was glad to have made a contribution to us all surviving the day."

LCpl Douglass' section took up position at a part of the perimeter and he was 2-3m to the rear in the middle of the section.

"We were placed there as defence while the worst of the wounded were winched up to the choppers," he said.

"Given the enormity of the day and the extreme darkness and winding through the jungle, we were extremely lucky that no friendlies were shot that night. When we reached our destination, we all dropped where we stood, no harbouring up or machine guns posted. The next morning it looked a total shambles."

LCpl Douglass returned to Australia on November 27, 1971.

Some years later, LCpl Douglass met a former Army helicopter pilot at a hotel in Maryborough.

"He asked had I been at Nui Le and when I told him I had, he said, 'You blokes don't know how lucky you were'," he said.

LCpl Douglass said he volunteered for national service after a mate from his hometown of Maryborough, Victoria, was killed in Vietnam.

"His casket was taken down the main street, so I thought I'd go off and do something worthwhile and at the same time get out of Maryborough," he said. I was working in the bank at the time and didn't like working inside, and I happened to be working with an Army Reserve soldier. Like many before me, there was a sense of adventure, which changed quickly after our first contact."

Nui Le on September 21, 1971

PTE ROBERT FAUSTMANN - GOOD SOLDIERS AND GOOD MATES

An Ara soldier who fought at Nui Le lost his citizenship and finished up stateless for his efforts.

Pte Robert Faustmann, arrived from Austria with his English rather wanting.

He went bush and drove graders and back hoes around outback NSW, where his English improved.

"When I thought my English might suffice, I answered an advertisement for joining the Army," he said.

"Since it was clear I wanted to go to Vietnam – I was young and in good shape – I was sent to Kapooka.

"Then I was sent to the School of Infantry at Ingleburn, where I learnt 4RAR was the next to go to Phuoc Tuy Province, so I ended up at Townsville with 11 PI, Delta 4."

Pte Faustmann recalled 11 PI led the walk-in at Nui Le where he was No. 2 on the gun with NS Pte Ray Walker.

"Our GPMG was the only one to answer two NVA machine guns cross-firing from two bunkers. Our other two guns were silent and the gunners dead," he said. "Ray and I were left where we went to ground with very little cover, practically none. "But the chaps opposite us did not want to die either and stayed low, so their huge amount of rounds hit a small tree about a foot over our heads. Then they tried to get us with an RPG. It exploded when it hit the top of the tree, amazingly doing no harm, just a loud explosion and pieces of wood."

Pte Faustmann said he and Pte Walker were almost deaf from their machine gun.

"My main task was cleaning the ammunition belts using a shaving brush. I only fired two shots at a blurred silhouette running some 20-30m across our front. That did the job," he said. "Cpl Warren Dowell brought us sandbags with ammunition and lots of smoke grenades. It was our second job to throw smoke grenades to mark our foremost position for the gun-ships."

According to Pte Faustmann, there were two moments they both found remarkable after the fight.

"When bullets from a mini-gun stopped maybe a metre from us – they would have cut us in two – and when a Phantom released his drum of napalm, which passed over our heads and did its job right on top of the bunker next to us," he said. "Surprisingly we felt only a fair bit of heat. But no more fire came from the bunkers."

Pte Faustmann had other distinct memories of the battle. Medic Cpl 'Doc' O'Sullivan taking care of the wounded and covering them with his body, 'according to the book'," he said. "Then there was my mate 'Beetles' limping, but no need to worry, an AK-47 bullet had taken the heel off his GP boot.

"Another mate, whose SLR was shooting only single shots, because it had taken a bullet through the gas system."

Pte Faustmann returned to Australia in March, 1972.

"I applied for a discharge, which was granted. The war was over and I had never been enamoured by spit and polish," he said. "I went back home to Austria, where I was deprived of my Austrian citizenship. Since I had not been an Australian citizen, I was stateless for a few years. I am still proud to have been in the ADF; you can take from the fact I have spent three Anzac Days at Villers Bretonneux and Bullecourt in France, with my tie and medals. My 4RAR mates were good soldiers and good mates in the best sense of Australian history."

CAPT GREG GILBERT - INTENSITY OF FIRING COULD BE HEARD 1KM AWAY

State-of-the-art technology allowed 4RAR RSO Capt Greg Shannon to relay fire missions from besieged D Coy's FO Capt Greg Gilbert to waiting 104 Fd Bty gunners.

Capt Shannon was flying above the battle in a Bell OH-58 Kiowa flown by 161 Recce Flt pilot 2Lt John Sonneveld, who was later awarded a DFC for his efforts that day.

According to Capt Shannon, the Kiowa was the direct support helicopter operating from HQ 4RAR, located on Courtenay Hill, just adjacent to the plantation and the village of Cam My.

"I didn't have to speak, indeed I didn't want to distract the guys on the ground," Capt Shannon said.

"The helicopter's two FM VHF radios were in sync, so all I had to do was dial up compatible frequencies.

"Because of the jungle canopy you couldn't see the battle being fought below, but the intensity of the firing could be heard a kilometre away.

"It was somewhat disconcerting knowing that HQ 33 NVA Regt had 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns and these were fired at US offensive aircraft earlier in the day.

"Our 'possum' pilots used to fly and manoeuvre at tree-top/tree-canopy level as much as possible because there was less chance of them being acquired by a weapon on the ground."

'Possum' was the prefix to 161 Recce Flt's call-sign.

While Capt Shannon spent two or three hours in the air that day helping the pilot with reconnaissance, he wasn't aware of any NVA fire being directed at his helo.

"I wasn't involved with any resups, although we did do a couple of ammo drops," he said.

Capt Shannon transferred from the Citizen Military Forces (now ARes) to the ARA in 1968 as an infantry lieutenant, and was posted to 4RAR before they returned from their first tour of Vietnam.

He retired from the Army in 1990 as a lieutenant-colonel posted to the Land Warfare Centre at Canungra.

Nui Le on September 21, 1971



PTE DENNIS MCCLOSKEY - CHERISH THE FRIENDSHIPS

Before Nui Le, where he was seriously wounded, Pte Dennis McCloskey had already taken part in five operations resulting in several enemy KIAs.

Pte McCloskey started his national service in July 1970, finishing in January 1972.

He served in Vietnam with 6 Pl, B Coy, 4RAR, from May 13 to December 5, 1971.

He said before Operation Ivanhoe, he took part in Operations Iron Maiden, Overlord, Hermit Park, Iron Fox and North Ward.

"By this stage we were experienced," he said.

"B Coy came into contact with a uniformed enemy at 4.15pm on September 21, with me being one of the first to experience a front-on contact, only metres away.

"I received a gunshot wound to the left chest, shrapnel wounds to my right leg, left buttock and multiple metal fragments through my body, which I still carry, and my right hand carries shrapnel from which fragments went through my rifle magazine.

"I had an M-16, which I was very happy with, but it was no use after being hit by shrapnel."

After being wounded, Pte

McCloskey said he had to sit through friendly fire in the form of napalm as well as gunship attacks on the enemy, which lasted what seemed like an eternity.

"On being airlifted out, we were fired on by the enemy, which certainly caused a lot of anxiety," he said.

"I was airlifted directly to Vung Tau hospital and shared a ward with all the other casualties.

"Unfortunately, I was asked to return to duty, despite the level of my physical wounds. PTSD was never used in those days."

Pte McCloskey said he still found it hard to relate to others, but had been able to carry the experience.

"I'll always cherish the friendships of blokes like ARA LCpl Michael McBride and fellow nasho Pte Frank Turner of 5 Pl, B Coy, 4RAR," he said.



PTE ROGER LOVELESS - I SAW MY LIFE RUSH PAST

"It was a day I'll never forget in a hurry" was how National Serviceman Pte Roger Loveless described the Battle of Nui Le in a letter home to his parents.

In the former 6 Pl, B Coy, 4RAR sig's letter, written three days after the battle, Pte Loveless tells his parents he's still in one piece and fighting on regardless.

"I suppose news of the battalion's activities and losses have reached the papers by now and will have caused you to worry," he wrote.

"On the 21st, we were ambushed and mortared and lucky noone was killed, but we've lost three-quarters of the platoon as 15 men were dusted off to 1 Aust Fd,

all with shrapnel and gunshot wounds.

"None are really serious but they're all very shaken and lucky.

"I'm quite alright and was only grazed on the arm by a piece of shrap that landed in front of me."

Pte Loveless' letter continues, detailing how his platoon was following a fresh track and had already had two contacts "yielding two VC dead and two wounded".

"They opened up on two sides and we fought them off with a great deal of fire, but then a mortar base plate fired and they walked six or eight 60mm rounds onto our position," he wrote.

"It was really frightening and everyone was hugging the ground and I saw my life just rush past.

"We were very lucky and quickly had our 79's 40mm HE rounds peppering the suspected area, plus artillery ranging in."

Pte Loveless ended his action-packed letter asking how the painting was going on at his parents' place.

"The house should look beaut when I get home in 26 days' time," he wrote.

"I can hardly wait - a dry bed and all the food and fluid you want."

Pte Loveless' father was a Lancaster pilot with No. 207 Sqn, RAF, during WWII.

Nui Le on September 21, 1971



2LT GARY MCKAY - IF I WAS ASLEEP I WOULD PROBABLY NEVER WAKE UP

After only 30 minutes, 2Lt Gary McKay knew his platoon was in serious strife.

His three machine gun crews were either dead or pinned down and 11PI, D Coy 4RAR was outnumbered five-to-one.

The national service officer recalled the “mind-shattering” intensity of the battle.

“We are talking about an engagement distance about the length of a cricket pitch or, at most, 25m,” he said.

“The noise was unlike anything we had encountered in our previous six months in Vietnam.

“It was so deafening. I was unable to shout orders to my section commanders only 10m away.”

2Lt McKay was seriously wounded and lost four diggers in the battle that started with operations trying to find and destroy elements of the NVA's 33 Regt.

“These guys were no pushovers and, as we found out earlier in the month, if they thought they had a chance of winning a firefight they would hang around and have a crack,” he said.

“As my bullets slammed into their bodies, they fell bum first onto the ground, much like a puppeteer's marionettes whose strings had been severed.

“I constantly fired my personal weapon and, at one stage, a machine gun I'd recovered from my dead gun crew.

“I was also throwing hand grenades at enemy soldiers only 15m away.”

By the end of the day, they were forced to withdraw. 2Lt McKay's platoon sergeant, Sgt Daryl Jenkin, had been wounded and evacuated.

He also had to leave three dead soldiers on the battlefield.

“Trying to recover their bullet-torn bodies would have only resulted in more casualties,” 2Lt McKay said.

The platoon, as part of a 100-strong company, reorganised about 500m south.

“But by last light, we were back in heavy contact and surrounded on three sides by large numbers of seemingly very angry enemy,” he said.

“It was during this next firefight that I was shooting at a soldier who was firing at me every time I tried to yell orders to my men to consolidate our defences.”

He heard a bang and thought it was an RPG hitting the tree he was using for cover.

The “bang” had in fact been the shock wave of being hit by several bullets.

The enemy soldier hunting 2Lt McKay finally got him with two bullets in his shoulder. The impact pushed him back along the ground about 10m.

“Only after Cpl Mick O'Sullivan, the platoon medic, dragged me back from the perimeter and started looking at my wounds in failing light, did we realise I had one bullet resting under my left nipple and the other round had skipped off my shoulder blade and torn a long ugly gash in my back,” he said.

2Lt McKay was now slowly bleeding to death and his left shoulder joint was shattered.

“It was a long night. I had decided that if I fell asleep, I would probably never wake up, so I stayed conscious the whole night, sitting up with Mick pressing wound dressings into the gaping hole in my back to stem the blood flow,” he said.

Thanks to the medic, he survived the night and was winched out by the RAAF the next morning at about 9am.

2Lt McKay was unceremoniously dragged inside the hovering chopper by the crew chief, who set about administering a drip to rehydrate him.

He was flown to the Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau and the “vampire pad”, where the dust-off helicopters brought the wounded.

“I told the waiting medics I'd be okay to walk into triage being the tough, bronzed Anzac I thought I was, only to have my legs fold under me as soon as my feet touched the pad,” he said.

“Like alert slip fieldsmen, they grabbed me and carefully cradled me onto a stretcher and carried my very tired body into the reception and triage area.

“I was now on the concrete floor of the hospital still on the stretcher. I was asked myriad questions about pain, what drugs I had been given like morphine and so on.

“I'd been given nothing because we'd used all of the morphine on one of my men who later died on a chopper on his way to the hospital.”

A male nurse came along and, using a large pair of scissors, cut off 2Lt McKay's jungle green trousers and boots.

“I had no shirt because that had been ripped up the back when Mick the medic was trying to find why I was bleeding so much,” he said.

“I'd gone from the horrendously loud din of battle, where explosions were rending the air every quarter of a minute or so and artillery was smashing into trees to our direct front. Napalm had been dropped only 75m from our forward position.

“I had shot and killed enemy soldiers whose young faces I could see quite clearly.”

CONTD NEXT PAGE

Nui Le on September 21, 1971

While much of the previous day was spent crawling around on his guts in the jungle, moving from one firing position to another to avoid being pinned down by overwhelming enemy fire, 2Lt McKay now lay on the floor of a spectacularly clean hospital.

"I was with people who had showered that morning, male nurses in ironed greens and nursing sisters in their crisp, starched grey uniforms looking all the world like Florence Nightingale or angels or both," he said.

"It was surreal, almost feeling like another world – a sanctuary from the madness of killing.

"I was too badly wounded to stay in Vietnam, so I was sent back to Australia for further repairs."

2Lt McKay spent the next 12 months in and out of hospital – mostly in – as his shoulder was destroyed by several bullets and needed massive repair.

For his actions in the Battle of Nui Le, he was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry.

He stayed in the Army, rising to CO 8/9RAR for two years during 1989-90 and retired in 1995.

' Only after ... the platoon medic dragged me back from the perimeter ... did we realise I had one bullet resting under my left nipple and the other round had skipped off my shoulder blade and torn a long ugly gash in my back.



PTE JIM ARMSTRONG - I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL OVER & I'D SEEN MY LAST SUNRISE

The saying goes: no comms, no bombs.

In the 14-hour battle of Nui Le, signaller Pte Jim Armstrong coordinated so much ordnance he experienced noise he never thought possible.

"Whoever was closest to the OC passed on requirements to the aircraft," the CHQ signaller said. "If you were outside 2m you could only see their lips move."

The Canadian-born digger with an Australian-born WWII British Army mother and Royal Canadian Air Force father, was already Green Beret qualified with 1RNSWR (Cdo) when he volunteered for National Service in 1970.

He was posted to 4RAR and flew to South Vietnam to join the 12 PI, D Coy advance party.

"Having done a sig course with the commandos, I was handed a 25 Set – lucky me – and after a few ops, I was posted to CHQ, D Coy," he said.

During the battle of Nui Le, he would see the destructive capabilities of Cobra and Bushranger gunships while coordinating dust-off choppers to evacuate casualties.

Pte Armstrong said there were three sigs in CHQ who did "everything, anything, depending who was nearest the boss, or the medic. All our comms were with Bn HQ on Courtney Hill, or CO 4RAR Lt-Col Jim Hughes up in his chopper, but we did have a relay in play later that night to allow our medic Cpl Mick Sullivan to stem the loss of blood from 2Lt McKay's shoulder wound," he said.

"Calling in dust-off choppers, and seeing wounded and dead or dying was hard, but we didn't have a lot of time to think about it then. Later I was selfishly glad it wasn't me. While it was a shit day for D Coy, we in CHQ, while not many metres behind, weren't going through what the platoons were, especially 11 PI."

During the day, he thought the company would get through, until dusk fell and the NVA followed them up into another bunker system.

"It all started up again, and the fact we were desperately low on ammo with no chance of another re-supply or air support, I thought it was all over and I'd seen my last sunrise," Pte Armstrong said. "It was here that 104 Bty's danger close artillery – guided by forward observer Capt Greg Gilbert – "saved their butt".

"I have since read there were 2074 rounds fired that day. Our ears could probably confirm that," he said.

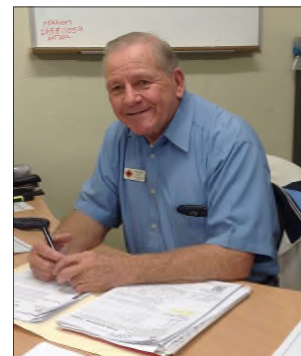


Above L to R - A patrol group from 10PI, D Coy, 4RAR/NZ walk along a track through a rubber plantation during Operation Ivanhoe; A troop of M113A1 APCs OF 3 Sqn, 3 Cav Regt pass through the same, an 81mm mortar set up waiting to be placed in a mortar pit at FSB Maree, which is being established for Operation Ivanhoe

Source - This article is compiled by Sgt Dave Morley, published in Army News and reprinted here with Dept of Defence permission for your information and interest

Welfare Officer's Report

I am here to help with any welfare issues you may have, information and guidance as well as transport and care matters. Please call the office for an appointment or call on Tuesdays 100 to 1400 to talk directly to me. Take care, **Peter**



**Welfare Officer
Peter Millen**



Compensation Advocate's Report

Please remember you can always talk to me, Mike, Compensation Advocate at the Veteran Support Centre about any issues or questions regarding your claims. I can help with wording and details to help the claim get through the application process. Call to make an appointment or ring to talk to directly on Tuesdays from 1000 - 1400. **Mike**

**Compensation Advocate
Mike Opie**

Membership Officer's Report

This is just a short report to bring you up to date regarding membership matters, so far for 2021.

As at 6 October 2021 we have 90 financial members. Membership numbers are down by approximately 15, compared to this time last year.

NOTE that for every membership payment of \$30.00 made here at your local sub-branch, **\$12.50 is retained by your sub-branch for local use.** To those who have renewed their membership for this year, thank you! Please stay covid safe and well.

Trevor Morrow, Membership Officer

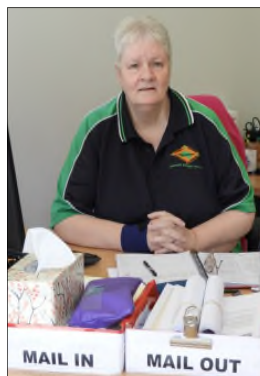


**Membership Officer
Trevor Morrow**

**Treasurer
Peter Dorman**



**Lyn Hancock
Office Manager**



MEDIA RELEASE BY THE HON ANDREW GEE MP

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of the Australian involvement in the Vietnam War

Planning is underway for a range of significant events around the country to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War in 2023.

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam conflict will be an important opportunity for Australians to express the pride, gratitude and respect of the nation.

The centrepiece will be a national commemorative service at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial on ANZAC Parade in Canberra.

Further announcements on the details of specific commemorations and the consultation process will be made on the Dept of Veterans Affairs website in due course. dva.gov.au

President's Report

Welcome to the new year. Hope all members managed to catch up with family and fiends and enjoy good ties together. From what I gather when talking to some members, with all the travel restrictions in place and self isolating, this took some doing. Keeping safe is the main concern at present.

The Pension and Welfare Team are hard at it again with appointments from early in the new year. It would appear that there is still a lot of work needed in assisting young and old veterans alike. If you require any sort of help, the Team is more than willing to help. Members, please, if you know of any younger veterans or indeed any veteran at all that is not travelling their best, please let us know as we can arrange for someone to visit and talk.

The office is up and running again this year due to the generosity of members and our tight fisted Treasure. There is still a long way to go with locating permanent residence but we are forever hopeful that somewhere there is a light at the end of this tunnel.

Granville is organising a conference in March, which will enable all Sub-Branchees to come together, as this has not happened for a number of years due to health regulations. This is a good opportunity for all Sub Branches to assist each other with any problems that may be occurring.

At present there are no other major issues concerning our Branch. I will definitely keep membes advised of any situation when it arises.

On a lighter note, Rotary Book Sale is on again in March. Members assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Bill Wagner
President

HONOUR THE DEAD BUT FIGHT LIKE HELL FOR THE LIVING



President - Bill Wagner



Vale

Lindsay Thomson

Veterans were sad to hear that Lindsay Thomson has passed away. He was a strong leader of NAMBUS, helping to get the bus, displays and personal stories of the Vietnam War to local high schools each year. The President and members as well as the local NAMBUS crew send their deepest sympathies to his family and loved ones.

Thank you for your service and RIP mate

Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) for veterans

Following a National Cabinet decision on Wednesday 5 January 2022, the Prime Minister announced that Commonwealth Concession Card holders will be given free access to Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs).

All DVA Gold, White and Orange Card holders are eligible to receive up to 10 free RATs over a three month period. In addition, DVA clients who do not hold a Gold, White or Orange Card may access free tests if they have a:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Care card
- Health Care Card
- Low Income Health Card

Free RATs are provided by pharmacists, using your DVA card.

Please note, that if individuals are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms they **should not** attend a pharmacist and instead visit a testing site for free testing. Nearest testing clinics can be found here:

In NSW: [COVID-19 testing clinics | NSW Government](#)

In ACT: [Where to get tested in the ACT - COVID-19](#)

Defence Force Income Support Allowance (DFISA)

There has been concerns reported last week by veterans and their families via social media relating to payment changes with the recent cessation of the Defence Force Income Support Allowance (DFISA).

From 1 January 2022, the Disability Compensation Payment (formerly known as Disability Pension) became exempt from the income test under the *Social Security Act 1991*. Centrelink payments such as the Age Pension will increase as a result, removing the need for DFISA. In addition, Rent Assistance became available or increased for some veterans.

Those who had previously received DFISA found that on the first payday of 2022, 13 January, part of the DFISA payment was reduced. On payday 27 January, there will be no DFISA paid. However, social security payments from Centrelink will increase accordingly.

The part payment on 13 January is because the effective date of 1 January falls in the middle of a pay period. As Centrelink paydays differ for each person, they do not align with DVA veteran paydays. Veterans can check pay day amounts in their Centrelink online account and their DVA MyService account.

Veterans and their partners do not need to do anything, as the payments will be made automatically.

Unfortunately, some of the letters advising of the changes to veterans were delayed, meaning some veterans did not receive a personal explanation as to why their DFISA payment had been reduced prior to 13 January. We apologise for any distress this may have caused.

Further information can be found on the DFISA page of the DVA website under [What's New](#).

ADF supports Australia Day in Sydney

Australian Defence Force personnel joined Australia Day crowds in Sydney to help celebrate our national day. For the crew of HMAS *Parramatta* the day took on a greater significance when the ship replaced HMAS *Adelaide* as the backdrop for the 'Salute to Australia' on Sydney Harbour.

HMAS *Adelaide*, whose motto is 'United for the common good', left Brisbane last week loaded with humanitarian stores as part of the Australian Government response to Tonga following the volcanic eruption on January 15.

Commander David Murphy, Commanding Officer of HMAS *Parramatta*, said it was an honour for the ship's company to join Sydney's Australia Day festivities.

"Australia Day is a great day to be in Sydney Harbour and see the community celebrating together," Commander Murphy said.

"The crew and I are very proud to step in on behalf of HMAS *Adelaide*, given her important mission to support our Tongan friends in the Pacific."



Left - Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS *Parramatta* sails past Australia Day crowds in Sydney.

Photo: Leading Seaman Matthew Lyaill.



Right - A Royal Australian Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopter carries the Australian national flag past HMAS *Canberra* during Australia Day celebrations in Sydney, NSW.

Photo by Able Seaman Benjamin Ricketts.

On the last note of *Advance Australia Fair* all eyes were lifted to the skies as a Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft provided a spectacular display.

The stealth fighter was flown by No. 2 Operational Conversion Unit pilot Flight Lieutenant Ross Bowman, who said it was a privilege to be part of the activities.

"Sydney Harbour is a great place to fly over and Australia Day provides a unique opportunity to do a display where I am actually looking up at Sydney Harbour Bridge," Flight Lieutenant Bowman said.

"Australia Day always brings in the crowds so it was good to be a part of today's celebrations."

The ADF Parachuting School's Red Berets parachute display team brought the day to a close, jumping over Sydney Harbour and landing in the waters near the Sydney Opera House as the crowds enjoyed a concert.

Source - By Lieutenant Nancy Cotton, Dept of Defence

Taiwanese Foreign Minister warns his country is preparing for war with China, asks Australia for help

Taiwan's Foreign Minister warns his nation is preparing for war with China and urges Australia to increase intelligence sharing and security cooperation as Beijing intensifies a campaign of military intimidation. Dozens of aircraft from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have flown sorties into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) since Friday, prompting the self-ruled island to scramble its own military jets. Speaking to the ABC's China Tonight program, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu declared that if the PLA were to launch an actual strike, his democratic state would be ready to repel it.

"The defence of Taiwan is in our own hands, and we are absolutely committed to that," Mr Wu has told the ABC's Stan Grant in an interview to be broadcast on Monday evening.

"If China is going to launch a war against Taiwan we will fight to the end, and that is our commitment.

"I'm sure that if China is going to launch an attack against Taiwan, I think they are going to suffer tremendously as well."

The minister from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party believes other like-minded countries such as Australia should now come to the aid of his besieged nation by developing closer ties.

"We would like to engage in security or intelligence exchanges with other like-minded partners, Australia included, so Taiwan is better prepared to deal with the war situation.

"And so far, our relations with Australia [are] very good and that is what we appreciate", Mr Wu added.



Left - China sent fighter jets into Taiwan's airspace recently.(AP: Taiwan Ministry of Defence)

Right - Taiwan says it will not acquire nuclear submarines.
(Supplied: Defence)

Australia does not formally recognise Taiwan diplomatically, but the federal government regularly calls for a "peaceful resolution" of differences between China and the small independent nation through dialogue and without the threat or use of force or coercion.

A communique issued after last month's AUSMIN meetings between Australia and the United States declared that "both sides stated their intent to strengthen ties with Taiwan, which is a leading democracy and a critical partner for both countries".

As well as closer security ties, the Taiwanese Foreign Minister thanked Australia for supporting its bid to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact, now known as the CPTPP, which China also wants to enter.

"As far as I know, Australia has been one of those most vocal members in supporting Taiwan's participation in CPTPP.

"We have been discussing with each other privately for quite some time and we understand the Australian support and we appreciate the Australian support."

Earlier this year, America's most senior diplomat in Canberra also confirmed Australia and the United States were discussing contingency plans in case a military conflict erupts over Taiwan.

Last year, Frances Adamson, the then-head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, warned she was more concerned about a "crisis" in the Taiwan strait than at any other point in her diplomatic career.

Taiwan has also welcomed the recent establishment of the AUKUS strategic partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as the growing activity between the Quad allies, the US, India, Australia and Japan.

"We are pleased to see that the like-minded partners of Taiwan — the United States and the UK and Australia — are working closer with each other to acquire more advanced defence articles so that we can defend Indo-Pacific.

"Australia is a great country, and I'm very glad to see that Australia is going to shoulder more responsibility to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific," Mr Wu said.

The Taiwanese Foreign Minister said that unlike Australia, his nation would not be trying to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, because it has a "different war strategy".

"We need to go asymmetric, and we need to have a different type of philosophy in defeating China if there's going to be a war — so nuclear-powered submarines is not something that we are seeking".

Defence analyst Professor Clinton Fernandes from the University of New South Wales warns it would be difficult for the US and allies to prevent any invasion attempt by China.

Defence analyst Professor Clinton Fernandes from the University of New South Wales warns it would be difficult for the US and allies to prevent any invasion attempt by China.

Professor Fernandes doesn't believe China will launch any military strike on Taiwan before next year's Beijing Winter Olympics but warns something more coercive is likely ahead of Taiwan's presidential elections in 2024. "The defence of Taiwan is predicated on a Chinese invasion – but if China's main effort is not an invasion but a blockade, then what? Taiwan doesn't have a Plan B – that's the big problem."

"The military centre of gravity is China's air defence system in the south, it has the ability to deny the United States control of the air – if the United States cannot control the air, it cannot win either at land or at sea."

Source - Exclusive by defence correspondent Andrew Greene and Stan Grant

WHY WE ARE NOW PART OF AUKUS

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister of Australia

The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

President of the United States of America

As leaders of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, guided by our enduring ideals and shared commitment to the international rules-based order, we resolve to deepen diplomatic, security, and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including by working with partners, to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. As part of this effort, we are announcing the creation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership called "AUKUS" – Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Through AUKUS, our governments will strengthen the ability of each to support our security and defence interests, building on our longstanding and ongoing bilateral ties. We will promote deeper information and technology sharing. We will foster deeper integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains. And in particular, we will significantly deepen cooperation on a range of security and defence capabilities.

As the first initiative under AUKUS, recognizing our common tradition as maritime democracies, we commit to a shared ambition to support Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. Today, we embark on a trilateral effort of 18 months to seek an optimal pathway to deliver this capability. We will leverage expertise from the United States and the United Kingdom, building on the two countries' submarine programs to bring an Australian capability into service at the earliest achievable date.

The development of Australia's nuclear-powered submarines would be a joint endeavour between the three nations, with a focus on interoperability, commonality, and mutual benefit. Australia is committed to adhering to the highest standards for safeguards, transparency, verification, and accountancy measures to ensure the non-proliferation, safety, and security of nuclear material and technology. Australia remains committed to fulfilling all of its obligations as a non-nuclear weapons state, including with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Our three nations are deeply committed to upholding our leadership on global non-proliferation.

Recognizing our deep defence ties, built over decades, today we also embark on further trilateral collaboration under AUKUS to enhance our joint capabilities and interoperability. These initial efforts will focus on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities.

The endeavour we launch today will help sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. For more than 70 years, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have worked together, along with other important allies and partners, to protect our shared values and promote security and prosperity. Today, with the formation of AUKUS, we recommit ourselves to this vision.

Source - Joint leaders statement on AUKAUS, Sept 2021, PM's office

VETERANS

Wellness Programs

Entitled Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) clients may be referred for clinically necessary Exercise Physiology treatment by their General Practitioner on a valid D904 referral form.

GOLD CARD HOLDERS are entitled to clinically necessary treatment covered by DVA's health care arrangements for all health conditions.

WHITE CARD HOLDERS are entitled to clinically necessary treatment for an accepted disability ie: an injury or disease accepted by DVA as service related.

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Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Brisbane Hearings

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide held its first hearing block in Brisbane between 29 November – 10 December 2021. Over the course of two weeks, the Commissioners heard from 67 witnesses, advocates and representatives as well as a host of representatives from support agencies and other organisations.

As Chair of the Commission, Nick Kaldas APM made a commitment to the Defence and veteran community.

“We recognise that we are asking people to share their deeply personal stories – once again – and that this will be difficult for many, so, we will continue to provide support to those who come forward,” he said.

“At all times, this Royal Commission will strive to seek and hear evidence in a trauma-informed way. We will do everything we can to avoid further harm.”

The focus of the Brisbane hearings was on the stories of people with a lived experience of Defence and veteran suicide and suicidality.

The Commissioners have acknowledged the courage of lived-experience witnesses who came forward to tell or re-tell their story, and want the community to know that counselling is available for anyone who would like to engage with the Royal Commission.

Engaging with the Royal Commission

The Commission would like to hear from more people with lived-experiences to help inform the work of the inquiry and reminds people there are options for how they can contribute.

Information about the [submission process](#), appearing as a witness and applying for a [private session](#) is available on the [Royal Commission website](#).

More public hearings will be held throughout 2022, with Hearing Block 2 starting in Sydney on 14 February 2022.

All hearings are recorded and livestreamed to the Royal Commission website, and recordings of the hearings can be accessed through the Royal Commission [YouTube channel](#).

The Commission also has a [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn page](#). We really encourage you to share our content with your network, if you think it is appropriate, and to engage with us on our social media pages.

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What is the DVA Heart Health Program

The Heart Health Program is a free, year-long program. It can help you improve your physical health through:

- practical exercise
- nutritional education
- lifestyle management

The goal of the program is to help get you started with a daily routine of exercise and balanced nutrition.

The program is delivered by [Corporate Health Management \(CHM\)](#).

Who can access it

You can access the Heart Health Program if both of the following apply:

- you are a returned veteran or peacekeeper
- you have not yet taken part in the program

An [eligibility checker](#) is available on the [Heart Health Program website](#).

You will need medical clearance from your general practitioner (GP) before you can begin.

You can find information about [managing injuries and maintaining health](#) on our website.

What the program includes

There are 2 forms of the Heart Health Program:

- the Heart Health Group Program
- the Individual Heart Health Program (for those veterans who are unable to participate in a group program)

Both forms run over 12 months (52 weeks). The program includes weekly tailored exercise sessions and 12 health education seminars over the course of the year.

Both programs include:

- access to a team of health and fitness experts to support you
- custom food diary reviews by a nutritionist
- a participant manual
- an achievement certificate upon completion

We cannot pay the travel costs to attend program sessions.

The Heart Health Group Program

You will meet regularly at a gym with a group of about 10 to 15 participants for activity sessions and educational seminars, which are run by experienced health and exercise professionals.

The group program includes:

- weekly group exercise sessions
- Monthly health education workshops

The Individual Heart Health Program

The individual program is delivered through phone, web and mail. You will be supported through the program by your GP and a health coach.

The individual program includes:

- fortnightly phone sessions with your health coach
- access to monthly health education modules
- a personalised exercise program
- exercise resources
- Fortnightly health articles

How you access

To take part in the Heart Health Program, call Corporate Health Management (CHM) on [1300 246 262](#).

You can find program locations on the [Heart Health Program website](#). The website has [forms](#) you may need throughout your participation in the program.

What other help is available

[Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling](#)

A health and wellbeing portal that provides resources for you and your family.

[Veteran Health Check](#)

A health check with your GP that can help optimise physical and mental health and wellbeing and connect you with support after you transition from the ADF.

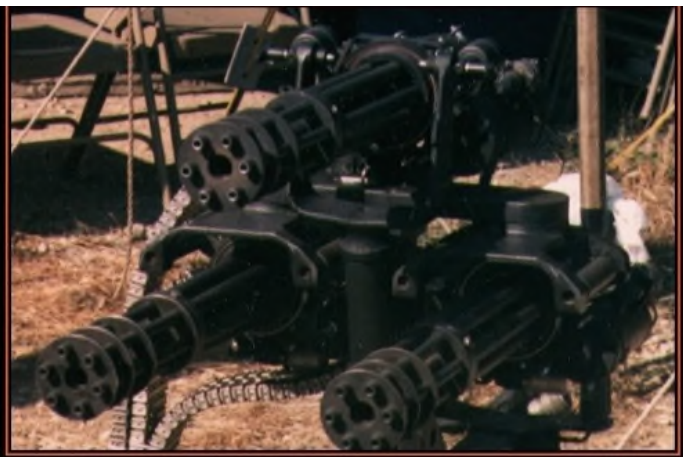
[Free mental health care for veterans](#)

We can cover the cost of treatment for all mental health conditions without having to prove the conditions relate to your ADF service.



VETERANS

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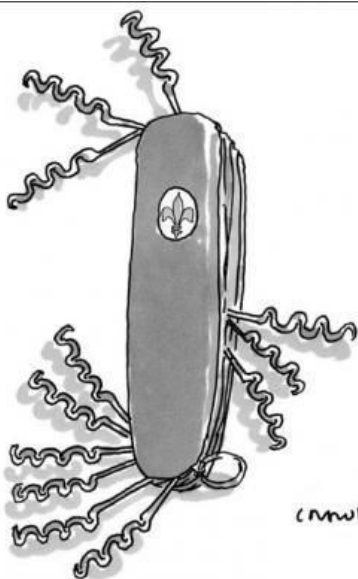
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What my mom thinks I do.



What society thinks I do.



What my instructor thinks I
do.



What I think I do.



What I actually do.



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Airforce



Navy



Marines

The more I get to know people, the more I understand why Noah only let animals on the boat.



US Navy sailors:

19 year olds who don't require a "safe space"

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May contain offensive/adult/sexist etc etc etc

Sources - all pinterest military joke pages and Aunty Acid from David Barnes



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Advertising in hard copy will be full colour. Advertisements on our website and e-Newsletter will be in colour unless the advertisement is provided to the editor in black and white. Copy submitted for publication is to be proof approved quality, ready to print. Relevant donations prior to publication are required. Donations cover four editions of our Newsletter and includes being on the mailing list for these editions and/or advertising on the website if selected. The current rate for advertisements to appear in 4 editions of the Newsletter is under review as is the current rate of advertising on the website (*please contact Veterans Support Centre, details below*).

Please send your details and copy to:

The Editor, Contact Front, PO Box 5330 PORT MACQUARIE N S W 2444

If you require clarification of arrangements, phone (02) 6581 5230 or

(02) 6581 5509 Monday to Friday 10am to 2 pm, or call in to Unit 22, 35 Merrigal Road, Port Macquarie. You may be asked to leave a message, and then we will contact you with a view to resolving your query.

The Association reserves the right to refuse any advertisement and no correspondence will be entered into. Advertisements may be modified for printing purposes only.

Please have your Artwork Available to us 3 weeks before printing Deadlines.