Report to Members – April/May 2015

Most members will be well aware that the Association has made representations to the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) regarding four (4) Statements of Principle (SOP) which we felt needed to be revised and updated to reflect the water contamination factor. Members will also have noted the responses received from the RMA with reference to these submissions. These appear on our website [www.hmassydney.com/](http://www.hmassydney.com/) and will hopefully appear in hard copy in the soon to be published Grey Funnel Line (GFL).

Each submission was thoroughly researched, compiled in chronological order, vetted by several persons with scientific expertise and relevant knowledge, updated where necessary, and where the studies referred to could be located, (95%) these were then downloaded and included as an integral part of the submission. Nothing was left to chance.

Since then I have become aware, through a former shipmate of mine, of another disease/syndrome, namely Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML). A recent large scale study of over 180,000 Vietnam Veterans, tends to suggest that CML, and death from CML, may be attributed to exposure to Agent Orange. Needless to say the current SOP for Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia, No: 47 of 2014, makes no mention of Agent Orange exposure as one of the factors related to relevant service.

I guess what I’m trying to suggest to members here is - if you are diagnosed with an illness which you feel may be attributed to your service in Vietnamese waters - you owe it to yourself and your family to check to see whether it is one of the diseases DVA recognise may be attributed to Agent Orange exposure. If it isn’t, then there is a fair chance it will be recognised in the United States. They currently have 15 SOP equivalents to our seven, so there is every chance that there will be studies galore out there which may help you progress a case - with the help of a good advocate - when making a claim with the DVA.

On a much lighter note, one or two of you have contacted me recently and asked where I was on ANZAC Day. I did give broad hint in my last report when I made the comment, ‘that the ABC has eyes everywhere’. At the request of the state RSL, I have undertaken to do the commentary of the Anzac Day parade for ABC Television for 2014 and 2015 which may explain my absence from your ranks. As comment, as a whole you didn’t come up too bad this year, a bit of an improvement on last.

As part of the Anzac Day parade we also had the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. It is passing strange how the vast majority of the Australian populace still thinks of this historical occasion as a purely Army exercise. Scant regard is given to HMA submarine *AE2* and her gallant ship’s company, who broached the Dardanelles hours before the landings on Gallipoli on that fateful 25 April, with orders to ‘run amok’, which they did for almost five days, until, due to battle damage, they were forced to scuttle their tiny vessel and spend the rest of the war as POWs.

There are many who purport to know their history, but still maintain that the Royal Australian Navy Bridging Train (RANBT) was an AIF Unit. Just to add insult to injury, the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance has the RANBT Plaque, at their memorial tree, under the AIF Rising Sun, instead of the RAN Badge as it should be. They were led by RAN officers, they wore distinctive Navy cap and rank badges, they were known as a Royal Australian Navy Unit. After the last troops left Gallipoli, the RANBT is credited as being the last unit to leave. *First In, Last Out, The Navy at Gallipoli* by Tom Frame and Greg Swinden, refers to all of the above.

For those members who belong to RSLs, NAA and to the various VVAA, I will be seeking your assistance in the near future in gaining support from our fellow servicemen, regarding recognition of two of our former shipmates who died in transit to Vietnam and have never been properly recognised. The reasons given by the relevant Minister and their advisors for this predicament include; ‘they never reached the operational area’, even though the ship(s) on which they both served were allotted for service. More concise details will follow in due course.

As the half-year rapidly approaches, members need to give serious thought to the future of the Association as a whole. We the committee are of the view that none of us are getting any younger, and that we need to put in place effective procedures for the future should this Association become unviable. To achieve this, we need input from you the members. I encourage you to attend the next AGM on Sunday 26 July 2015, and be prepared to constructively put your point of view. Further information will be circulated closer to the day.

News just to hand from the RMA - dated 06th May - indicates that they do not intend to investigate the SOPs of Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia, or Diabetes Mellitus, ‘as it (RMA) considered that the request does not identify sufficient relevant information to support the grounds on which the reviews are sought.’ However, the RMA is undertaking investigations in regard to Ischemic Heart disease and Parkinson disease. ‘Your submissions in relation to dioxin and the Vietnam factor relating to *being on board a vessel and consuming potable water supplied on that vessel, when the water supply had been produced by evaporative distillation of estuarine waters*, will be considered by the RMA along with other information received during the course of the investigations.

I am stating here to you the members, that the United States National Academy of Sciences - Institute of Medicine, maintains that there is **sufficient evidence** of an association between exposure to Agent Orange and Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia, and has done since 2003. The National Academy of Sciences - Institute of Medicine has been in existence for over 150 years, so they are not an institution to be ignored. Their biannual publication is specifically written on the subject under the title, *Veterans & Agent Orange*, andhas been updated and reviewed since 1994. The latest volume (Update 2012) was published in 2014. An independent review of the latest volume was overseen by Professor Kristine Gebbie of Flinders University, South Australia. To date, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, there does not appear to be an equivalent Australian publication.

Much the same could be said about Diabetes. The only proviso being that there is **limited or suggestive** evidence of an association between exposure to Agent Orange and Diabetes, and has done since 2001.

Much also seems to be made by the RMA of one element, that of ‘consuming potable water’. I personally would have thought that exposure to Agent Orange, by whatever means, would have had a relationship to the illnesses in question. No - unless the studies specifically mention potable water, water contamination, or similar, in my view that they tend to get ignored, despite their relevance.

As Abe Lincoln once said, ‘Let no feeling of discouragement prey upon you and in the end you are sure to succeed.’ We continue on.

Regards to all

Dr John R Carroll

09th May 2015