

Report to the Members – November 2015

My last report had me at the Peninsula VVAA Memorial Service, held at HMAS *Cerberus* giving a rendition on the service performed by the RAN during the Vietnam War. The service was quite well attended by Vietnam Veterans from many units involved, however one particular gentleman got a bit upset when he claimed I had not mentioned Army Small Ships. His comments were soon cut short by none other than the presiding chaplain, who stated quite categorically that Army Small Ships had indeed been mentioned.

Water contamination on naval ships due to exposure to Agent Orange and the processes used to produce potable water during the Vietnam era, continues to be an area of constant personal concern. I have had several calls from local and interstate members, and many others, regarding certain aspects of this problem which the Repatriation Medical Authority seem reluctant to do anything constructive about, even though - in my view - the evidence of a relationship, in certain specific medical conditions, is self-evident. The National Academy of Sciences – Institute of Medicine in the United States has been around for over 150 years. They have a worldwide reputation, and they use data from around the world, - including Australian Vietnam Veteran data - to come to their considered conclusions.

The Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) have recently called for input in their Notices of Investigation, with an emphasis on the substance Benzene. And while these investigations relate to other serious illnesses, nothing constructive has been done about water contamination and related illnesses since 2006.

I know I have done this before, but here we go again. If one takes the time to break down the component parts of the 2002 ENTOMX study titled: Examination of the Potential Exposure of Royal Australian Navy Personnel to Polychlorinated Dibenzodioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans via Drinking Water, one will note the connector 'benzo'. According to the Macquarie Dictionary, and I quote verbatim here: **benzo** – a combining form meaning relating to or derived from benzene, or designating the presence of benzoic acid.

As members would by now be well aware I am an active member of the Vietnam Veterans Education Team. I find this an excellent way to explain to school and other institutional audiences the many and diversified roles the RAN played during the Vietnam War. Where HMAS *Sydney* is concerned, I emphasise her role as a troop transport and put the question, how does the audience think most of the troops got to Vietnam in the first place, and how did they get home again? This is but one example. There are many others.

The Eastern Ed Team has attended 5 schools in August, 2 in September and 1 in October. The tapering off is due to term holidays and swat vac. School audiences are usually years 10 or 11, and presentation times can range from an hour, half a day, or

all day depending on the numbers to be catered for. The Easter Ed Team recently visited Monash University, Faculty of Education, at the invitation of the Senior Lecturer I/C student history teachers, completing their B Ed. We gave a presentation which was scheduled to go for half an hour. One hour later we were still going mainly due to student interaction and genuine interest.

As part of my contribution to the Ed Team, I have researched and produced 45 display boards of their Operations in Vietnam which include Op. Crimp, Long Tan, Coral/Balmoral, Bihn Ba, Tet Offensive, Op. Coburg, Op. Bribie, Op. Long Khan, Op. Ballarat, and many others. The same has been done for the RAN with 25 display boards denoting service by HMAS *Sydney*, HMAS *Perth*, HMAS *Hobart*, HMAS *Vendetta*, the escort ships to HMAS *Sydney*, EMU *Squadron*, CDT3, and HMA ships *Jeparit* and *Boonaroo*. The RAN boards are still a work in progress.

I have recently had a query from an RSL advocate in Queensland regarding Borneo service of an RAN member while serving in HMAS *Sydney*, and whether or not he qualified. For future reference HMAS *Sydney* qualified under Schedule 2, item 6, Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei. The VRB website is quite comprehensive regarding HMA ships. This and other related information is readily available on our website.

On 17 September, in company with John (Blue) Ferguson and Hadyn (Slim) Whitfield, I attended Shipp Division Graduation. The Association's prize for Leadership Potential went to Recruit Marine Technician Jordan Butler, 24, from GyMEA, NSW. I received a short note from Commander Clelland, OIC Recruit School, which says in part: 'The support of the HMAS *Sydney* & VLSV Assoc. demonstrates to the graduating recruits that they are joining a distinguished (Senior) Service with a proud history. The attendance of the VLSV Assoc. members Mr John Ferguson and Mr Hadyn Whitfield, was a special and welcome addition to our distinguished audience and I sincerely hope they enjoyed a short trip down memory lane.'



As an aside to the attendance at Shipp Division, I have also made contact with Commander Max Speedy, a member of the second contingent of FAA EMU Squadron who served with Noel Shipp in Vietnam. A handy contact.

Regards to all for the forthcoming festive season.

Dr John Carroll