

Report to Members February - March 2016

David George Dwyer:

On 26th January 2016, David was awarded the Medal to the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day Honours listings: *For service to the welfare of naval veterans and their families*. Having known David since our service together in HMAS Sydney early 1972, where he worked in the CPOs cafeteria - and also carried out the duties of both the baker and the butcher - I can state quite categorically, he has never been work shy. This is reflected in the service he has given to this Association over the 30 plus years of our existence. As such, this award is due recognition for his dedication.

Rear Admiral Neal Ralph AO DFC RAN Rtd:

Neal Ralph was OIC First Contingent RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam, former Executive officer HMAS Sydney, 1969-70, and is currently the Patron of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia. However, on 04 February 2016 he was confronted by an intruder in his own home. In his own words *he tried to get past me in the doorway but I picked up a chair and whacked him*. At 83, he acquitted himself quite well. Going by a newspaper report, the situation could have been much worse, had the intruder been more aggressive.

Laura Benney:

On 04 Feb February, one of our younger members, Laura Benney, was presented with a Spirit of Anzac Award by the State Minister for Veterans Affairs, John Eren. This award enables Laura to tour both Gallipoli and the Western Front, and, in her words, *puts her studies into perspective*. On behalf of the Association I have offered our congratulations to Laura on her achievement. Well done Laura.

Commodore J L W (Red) Merson OAM RAN Rtd:

James Lawrence Wilfred (Red) Merson was CO HMAS Sydney, 1971-72. He passed away peacefully on 10 February, aged 94, (1922-2016). Red was well known and highly thought of within the RAN. Very supportive of many causes affecting former and current serving sailors when serving as President of the Naval Association of Australia.

Jim Eagles R57083 - AAT Decision:

On 16 March, Jim has again written further to his claim for Ischemic Heart Disease (ISD) and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) - which was noted in my last report - where the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) had upheld his claims in December 2015, but up until early March, he had heard nothing from the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). Jim writes: *After taking your advice I emailed my local MP. A few days later I had a reply from his office stating they had contacted DVA about my claims and I would hear from DVA within 2 weeks. Only one hour after the MP's office rang, DVA rang and said they had processed my claim and it would be in the mail that afternoon. One claim would be back-dated to October 2013 and the other to March 2014.*

Jim also writes: *I was able to make comparisons between the information in your detailed work and the reference sources on the usage rates, amounts used, mixing two toxic banned herbicides and aerial spraying as well and compare them against the EPR regulations from N Qld for the spraying of cane fields, spray drift and the contamination of the Great Barrier Reef. There were many parallels, with Vietnam being by far the most horrendous of the two.*

Anyway, I am most satisfied with the result and thank you again for your help and excellent publication, without it there would have been no claims at all.

Statement of Principles - Diabetes Mellitus No: 89 of 2011: (2014)

Members are advised that the SOP for Diabetes Mellitus has been amended. Contaminated potable water did not get mentioned. However Factor 6 (vii) of the amended SOP makes for interesting reading where it states: *(vii) inhaling, ingesting or having cutaneous contact with a chemical agent contaminated by 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin (TCDD), for a cumulative period of at least 500 hours, within a consecutive period of ten years before the clinical onset of diabetes mellitus, where the first exposure occurred at least five years before the clinical onset of diabetes mellitus, and where that exposure has ceased, the clinical onset of diabetes mellitus occurred with 25 years of cessation*

In my view, the word ingest (or ingesting) taken from the *Macquarie Dictionary*, means *to put in or take into the body*. This would cover several related situations such as eating food cooked in contaminated water, drinking contaminated water, inhaling steam condensed from contaminated water, and related activities of daily life at sea. I also note that 500 hours - or 20.83' days - is now the hypothetical figure for exposure - regardless of body size or overall physiology.

It has been demonstrated quite conclusively in the National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology (NRCET) 2002 Study titled: *Examination of the Potential Exposure of RAN Personnel to Polychlorinated Dibenzodioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans via Drinking Water*, that the process used in ships for converting estuarine water - contaminated with defoliants - into potable water, failed to rid this water of these substances. In fact the process made the level of dioxins in the water much worse due to copper components - which were essential parts of the distillation units - being a known catalyst for dioxin formulation.

The same questions need to be asked yet again. What was the concentration of dioxin? How much dioxin did the service person consume? The 500 hour time period gives absolutely no idea of the level of exposure, and therefore should not form part of the stipulation. The United States National Academy of Sciences - Institute of Medicine stance of no time limit when serving in Vietnam, and no specified level of exposure is warranted, because they realise that it is impossible to measure the level of exposure, and the time spent with any surety, unless it was zero. The only real stipulation by the U.S. authorities is, that the illness or disease is rated - through medical evaluation - as being at least ten per cent disabling.

Out of Sight-Out of Mind:

Since publication in mid-2013 this book has been made available to members of the Association at a reduced rate. Over 600 copies have been purchased by association members, and others. In more recent times, our Hon Secretary has been fielding further enquiries as to the continuing availability of this book. To this end the Committee has authorised the purchase of a further 30 plus copies. Members need to be aware that the original print run was only about 2000, and from what the publisher tells me, there aren't all that many copies left.

ANZAC Day:

As noted in my last report, this year is the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, even though the battle itself happened on 18th August 1966. As such, the RSL have bequeathed this ANZAC Day as the day when Vietnam Veterans lead. As protocol also plays a part, the RAN leads the contingent. As this is an occasion which will never be repeated in our lifetime, might I suggest that all members who are able, make the effort to take part.

Vet Ride:

The VVAA recently held Vet Ride from Seymour to Canberra, where one or two of our members participated. One worthy of note was Noel Mclean, a member in good standing of this Association. Noel is also the President of Bayswater RSL, and a member of Outer Eastern Metro VVAA. Just goes to show, when you want something done, or need someone for an occasion - ask a busy person.

VVAA Education Team:

Members of the Team followed Vet Ride all the way to Canberra, stopping off at regular intervals of 100-150 km to rest the riders and put on displays for various RSLs along the way. Two of the Ed Team then visited a secondary college in Canberra (when we had originally been expecting four). Upshot of the tour was a request from a Secondary college on an excursion to Canberra, for the Ed Team to give a presentation at their caravan site. The students were from Mount Eliza.

Memorial Plaque - Dedication Service - Sunday 08 May 2016.

Members are advised that the Committee has sanctioned the commissioning of a Bronze Memorial Plaque in remembrance of the eight members of the RAN who never returned from service in Vietnam. This plaque will be a permanent fixture on the Memorial Wall at the Frankston Naval Memorial Club at Langwarrin South. More details of the Dedication Service will no doubt follow closer to the day.

Regards to all.

Dr John Carroll

02 April 2016