

President's Report 4 of 2018

Ships List for US 'Blue Water' Vietnam Veteran Sailors. This list defines the areas the U.S. DVA currently consider as being affected by defoliant spraying in Vietnam. It also lists those U.S. Ships which entered the areas where they will accept, under their rulings, claims citing exposure to defoliants as a causative factor to their illness. This list also defines *Gahn Rai Bay* as Open Water, not Coastal. Vung Tau Harbour is an integral part of *Gahn Rai Bay*.

How this would affect the status of HMAS *Sydney's* anchorage, and that of her escort(s), which varied from 2000-3500 yards offshore, would surely be open to some conjecture. If the Australian DVA accepts this listing as a benchmark, and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs initiates legislation to have these limitations implemented, HMA Ships which served on the 'Gun-Line', and did not steam into coastal or riverine waters, would not be eligible to make claims for illnesses related to exposure to defoliants, and neither would HMAS *Melbourne*.

U.S. Congress Passes 'Blue Water' Vietnam Veterans Entitlements. On 25 June 2018, the US Congress passed H.R. 299: 'Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017' with a unanimous vote of 382 to zero. This now has to go to the U.S. Senate for ratification, and then to the President for him to sign it into law.

Why have I mentioned all of the above? Simply because over the years that I have been running with this issue, I have come to realise that if any obstacle, either real or imagined, can be put in the way of our members getting a good hearing, or a fair and equitable deal, the DVA, via the RMA, will oblige.

For example, the 2002 study into Water Contamination titled '*The Examination of the Potential Exposure of RAN Personnel to Polychlorinated Dibenzodioxins and Polychlorinated Dibenzofurans via Drinking Water*', which was carried out at the University of Queensland by Professor Michael Moore, Dr Caroline Gaus, and others, has been ignored to some extent, and criticised as having not been peer reviewed, where in actual fact, it has been, and is recorded as having been peer reviewed at three separate world-wide scientific symposiums.

Mr Alan Tudge & Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Mr Darren Chester. The simple question raised at a recent symposium with my local MP and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, regarding the water contamination issue, and the seven ROPs from 15 ROPs, which are purported to be applicable to this issue, has gone unanswered. I have not even received the courtesy of a notification of receipt of the question, which was recorded by one of his staff on the day.

With the signing of the Blue Water Vietnam Veterans Act into law in the United States this will, hopefully, take these aspects out of contention with the Australian DVA, and by association, the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA)

Susan Belanger and John Wells. I have received enquiries from both Susan Belanger, a Veterans Advocate, and John Wells, a retired USN Commander who is now a practicing Lawyer, representing US Blue Water Vietnam Veteran Sailors. The prime reason for these two contacting me was to obtain a copy of *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, and could I please help them locate Professor

Moore and Dr Caroline Gaus. In both instances, I was able to point them in the right direction as to their best options. The book is still available as an E Book. As members may or may not be aware the book has sold out, thanks mainly to the support you the members gave it. All Royalties have since been passed on to the E J Whitten Foundation, for research into Prostate Cancer at Monash University.

John Wells, Attorney at Law. John is a former USN Commander with quite a history in looking out for the interests of former USN Personnel who served in what the US authorities' term 'Blue Water Ships'. His wife is a Notary Public who has interviewed the two prime researchers, Professor Michael Moore, and Dr Caroline Gaus, in Australia, back in June/July 2006. Her report of interview makes for very interesting reading. Both researchers were critical of the lack of follow-up, a study of this type requires.

Problems with U.S. DVA. While the U.S. DVA has asked Congress to disregard the Australian study, it has never successfully performed a study of its own to counter the Australian one, despite the fact that it has been dealing with this very same issue since the late 1970s. In 1981, an Act of Congress directed the U.S. DVA to give the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) \$70.4 million to perform an Agent Orange study. The Government Accountability Office later found that the CDC had squandered most of the funds on unnecessary costs, and poor if not questionable contract administration practices. The CDC did however, manage to conduct a 'validation study' of sorts, which merely confirmed that military records could not establish Agent Orange exposure because of their inherent inaccuracy. So when the US Congress tried to force the U.S. DVA to perform a study of its own, the outcome was completely useless.

Although it was made clear, Agent Orange exposure is **not a science problem**, but rather a **record-keeping problem**. There is no question scientifically about what Agent Orange does to the human body. It is classified in the same category as arsenic, asbestos and gamma radiation, and has been a world-wide banned substance for some considerable time.

Terry Makings. As most members would be aware, Terry Makings is the current National President of the Naval Association of Australia (NAA). A former Commander (E) RAN (Rtd), who has taken over the reins from my classmate, Russell Pettis, with whom I had a very worthwhile, working, and constructive relationship regarding the water contamination issue, and other related matters. The above three paragraphs concerning the enquiries made by Susan Belanger and John Wells came via the initial contact they made with Terry. Terry has also asked that he be 'kept informed and would I pass on the same information to him', which I have done. I have also asked Russell Pettis to pass on all the material he and I put together on this very vexed issue, to Terry. Hopefully, we may be able to continue this important work with the assistance of the current National President of the NAA.

HMAS Sydney 2 Plaque - Hobart. In 2001, Bob Gibbs put together a Plaque to commemorate the 46 Tasmanians who served in HMAS *Sydney 2*. Over the intervening years, the Sun's ultra violet rays have faded the photograph of HMAS *Sydney 2*, to the point that it was almost illegible. Hobart being closer to the hole in the Ozone Layer has been cited as the cause of this deterioration. Having made further contact with the current custodian of the Plaque, Stan Davis, whose father

served in *Sydney 2*, we have had this problem rectified. It's not exactly the same as the original, but it is still readily recognisable as HMAS *Sydney 2*, circa 1938, when she was flagship for the Hobart Regatta.



Operational Stress Management. An article was passed to me recently which describes service at sea, where there has been little research carried out on this sensitive issue. Remembering, that as individuals, we react to our environment in different ways. Just to reinforce this in some people's minds, I have taken the time to transcribe the following, which may briefly explain why some individuals may have reacted to external circumstances beyond their control, especially when serving at sea.

The Department of Defence Surgeon General describes the unique circumstances experienced by naval personnel during maritime operations, as consisting of 'isolated, cramped conditions, including a complete lack of privacy during working and leisure periods, sleep deprivation due to intensive watch cycles, ambient noise, temperature variations, vibrations, inadequate ventilation, constant movement, with the possibility of nausea, and the listlessness that comes with chronic seasickness, Maritime combat also provides unique circumstances, including little warning of danger due to the speed of supersonic missiles and aircraft, or the surprise of underwater attack by mines or submarines. These phenomena are viewed by psychologists as cumulative effects,

unique to the naval environment, and are conditions that can exacerbate the experience of trauma.' (*Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force Experience, 2004*)

Shipp Division 3 October 2018. On Wednesday 3 October, Haydn Whitfield, and I, plus two of my colleagues from the Vietnam Veterans' Education Team, Bob Edgell and Jim Dewar, arrived at HMAS *Cerberus* to give another of our Presentations to *Shipp Division*. After being well fed and watered, we set up our displays and proceeded. This experience was like all the other ones with many questions coming from the audience, which tends to indicate genuine interest in what we, as a team, had to offer. I am always on the lookout for willing volunteers to assist with these Presentations. The preparation work has been done with regards to displays and educational material, however your personal experiences from 50+ years ago are uniquely yours and are what the Recruits need to hear to carry them forward in their chosen vocation.

Shipp Division Graduation 11 October 2018. On Thursday 11 October, Jim Dewar, and I, plus Gary Taylor, met up at HMAS *Cerberus*, Recruit School for the passing-out of *Shipp Division*. As we have come to expect, the Division as a whole was well turned-out, and they are a credit to their instructors, who get them there in the first instance, and themselves for staying the course. The following received special mention and were awarded the following.

Most Improved Physical Fitness: **RCTBM Chevelle Marshall**

Sport Person of the Intake: **RCTMTSM Ben Goodwin**

Academic Excellence: (2) **RCTMT Stella Mitchell & RCTET Austin Paragas**

Top Shot: **RCTBM Jaime-Lee Oakes**

Leadership Potential: **RCTML-C Tynelle Catalano**

WO-N Excellence Award: **RCTCSO Andrew McGlinchey**

Recruit of the Intake: **RCTMT Brendon Randall**

HMAS Sydney 3 Commemoration Plaque. The Committee of this Association has decided to approach the Shrine of Remembrance Commemoration Committee to request that HMAS *Sydney 3* be commemorated in the grounds of the Shrine. In doing so, we have spent some time preparing a submission and inspecting sites where we think it would be an appropriate place to erect a new Plinth for this Plaque. Most of you, the members, would have served in HMAS *Sydney 3* at one time or another, anywhere up to 50+ years ago. As time marches on, we need to pause and reflect on our service, because you can guarantee no one else will do it for us. From an accuracy perspective, we need to have an input so that anything that appears on this Plaque is true and correct. Unlike one or two others I could readily refer you to!

Obvious choices of site would be either alongside the Plaque commemorating HMAS *Sydney 1*, or alongside the Plaque commemorating HMAS *Sydney 2*. The site of the HMAS *Sydney 1* Plaque requires some attention by an arborist, where there are branches at eye height, which no one appears to be prepared to trim back. At the site of the HMAS *Sydney 2* Plaque, some 50 or so meters away, the Plinth is cracked and broken, and the Plaque appears to be corroded on the bottom right-hand edge, mainly due to it being in direct contact with the ground. I have enclosed a photograph of this, as a picture is worth a thousand words. The Committee has also taken this up with the Shrine authorities, as a service for those who are no longer with us.



Apologies to those without access to email. It must seem like an eternity since you last received the very informative '*Grey Funnel Line*' However, please bear with us, as one of our number has not been all that well in the recent past. Take this short absence as an indication that none of us are getting any younger, and as we head into our late sixth early seventh decade, the mind may be strong, but the body is not quite what it used to be. I speak from personal experience, and I know I have many who share the same view.

Regards to you all,

Dr John Carroll

15 October 2018.