



Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Victorian Branch Inc.

NEWS BULLETIN

MARCH 2025

E-Team Van finds new home.



With the closure of E-Team operations within VVAA Victorian Branch the E-Team Van has begun a new life at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum (NVVM) Phillip Island.

It is good to see the NVVM will now be able to use the Van for Museum purposes and continue to “sell” the Vietnam story.

Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living

ESB-VIC



VVAA Victorian State Branch—Executive

ABN: 34 750 672 219



State President	Bob ELWORTHY AM	Mob: 0402 106 262
State Vice President	Brendan KINCADE OAM JP	Mob: 0414 948 305
State Secretary	George SKELL	Mob: 0410 275 651
State Assistant Secretary	Sue McQUEEN OAM	5444 1871 Mob: 0400 821 457
State Treasurer		
Editor FSB-Vic	Maurie BENSON	Mob: 0417 588 886
Webmaster		
State Assistant Treasurer	Peter BRIGHT	Mob: 0437 936 391
Membership Manager		
State Branch Welfare Officer	Michael NORTH	Mob: 0400 661 707
State Branch Executive Member	Lindsay McQUEEN	<i>Refer State Asst Sec.</i>
Education Team	Ray WESTON	0447 386 635

VVAA Victorian Branch—State Office

Address: VVAA Victorian Branch
Anzac House
L3/4 Collins St
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Phone: (03) 9655 5588

Fax: (03) 9655 5582

Secretary: secretary@vvaavic.org.au

Office: office@vvaavic.org.au

Newsletter: editor@vvaavic.org.au

Web Site: www.vvaavic.org.au

Office Hours: *Refer Secretary - Office no longer manned.*

MEMBERSHIP MAIL:

Membership Manager
30 Bernard St
MELTON STH VIC 3338

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Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living



I am sure everybody will join me in congratulating and thanking Sue and Lindsay McQueen for their years of dedication to the branch as the keepers of our membership records. No small feat and vitally important to our ability to provide targeted welfare support to the membership. Peter Bright, has stepped up as the new membership manager; it is great to have Peter

back on the state executive.

You will recall that the Branch funded a memorial to WW1 digger Harry Conway at the Montmorency-Eltham RSL. The memorial, featuring Harry's wooden cross from his grave in France continues to attract significant interest.

Hannah Loughhead, the recipient of our AVCAT tertiary scholarship is achieving excellent results in her Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) studies, achieving High Distinctions and Distinctions, as well as holding down part-time employment. Hannah said *"I am extremely grateful for the scholarship which has helped me settle into University studies without the worry of money for other things. The scholarship helps with petrol money to travel to Uni and for other study-related items. The payments were particularly helpful when I was on a school study placement and thus unable to do any part-time work. Thank you and all the best for 2025, Hannah"*. Hannah is a very impressive young woman and we wish her all the best with her studies.

The Education Team has closed its invaluable education effort after decades of taking your story to schools and communities across the state and occasionally over the border. Every member of the E-Team can be justifiably proud of their contribution to the education of students and their contribution to the Branch finances by passing on donations received from schools. The

donations have been used to provide education support to Vietnam Veteran dependents. The E-Team vehicle has been donated to the museum.

Former State President Peter Liefman OAM reported about his long association with VetRide as he steps away from an official role with VetRide. Congratulations to Peter and all involved with VetRide which has proven to be a great vehicle for bringing all veterans together through the interest in cycling.

Veteran interviews were conducted in Bendigo and the professional A-V company is currently formatting and preparing the interview package for delivery to the branch. The aim is to package the interviews so that they can be viewed by visitors to the museum.

Congratulations to those members who took advantage of the Wills and POA preparation subsidies offered as part of member welfare initiatives during 2024. The subsidy complimented the Welfare Pack delivered last year; a follow-up to the pack is being considered. Sadly, we have probably all been to a funeral or two for mates who have passed on, too many, and increasingly so. This is a wakeup call for all of us; our age and our health issues make it all the more urgent that everyone of us make sure that our personal affairs are in order.

There was consternation about rumours of Open Arms staff reductions. We reacted swiftly and the Repatriation Commission Secretary reassured me that changes related to the discontinuation of short-term contracts in favour of offering the opportunity for staff on short contracts to take up full-time Public Service employment positions with Open Arms. Poor communication of the plan within the department was the problem.

There is still an opportunity for Sub-Branches to submit a plan for a plaque if not already done so. Plans must be sent to the executive for approval, funding, and production.

Our 2025 AGM is approaching fast. The Treasurer will provide copies of the audited accounts to delegates well in advance of the meeting.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Happy Easter to all our members and families.

WELFARE PACKS

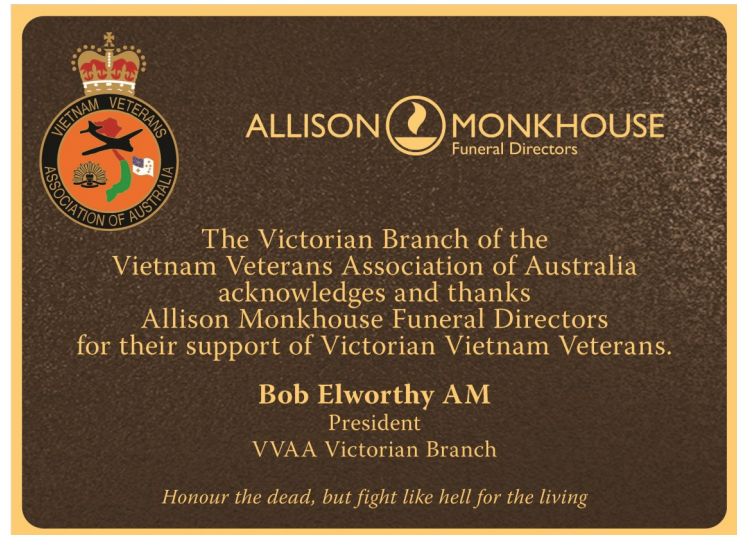
By now you will have received your **Welfare Packs** - we hope the information will be of assistance—encourage family members to be aware of content.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us.





L > R: Kevin Reardon GM Allison/Monkhouse Funeral Directors, Brendan Kincade OAM JP Vice President VVAA Victorian Branch.



VVAA Victorian Branch has funded a number of Historical Markers—Plaques—throughout Victoria over the past year or so, particularly at VVAA Vic Branch Sub Branches. We have also recently provided a Plaque to Allison Monkhouse Funeral Directors who have a long standing association with VVAA Vic Branch.

The Plaques are produced in high standard by A1 Plaques, Braeside Victoria.

This Plaque has been located in the Allison Monkhouse Knox Chapel.

VVAA MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP

From time to time someone will ask “*What do I get for my membership?*”

Membership is the fabric that binds us all as Vietnam Veterans and ensures we continue to stand up for Veteran rights and entitlements. We have been doing that for the past 50 years and continue to do so today – albeit we are all getting a bit long in the tooth.

- * Some will be happy with Sub Branch membership and the social aspects that comes with it.
- * Some will stand up for Executive positions with more of an interest in the organisation/administrative aspects of being a member of VVAA.
- * Some will be happy to join our Headquarters Branch and not opt for further involvement.

Whichever option is for you it ensures we remain strong as the VVAA Victorian Branch.

Our Membership is essential for us to continue operating as a major Vietnam Veteran Welfare ESO in Australia.

Please remember that the VVAA Vic Branch Membership year runs calendar year Jan > Dec.

2025 Membership Renewals are now due.

Contact your Sub Branch Secretary or the State Membership Manager (see Page 2 of this Bulletin).

1975 — OPERATION BABYLIFT



South Vietnam's population was moving all at once. As their forebears had done in times of war, they fled an approaching enemy, seeking safety to the south and hoping for a way out. Thousands of orphans were caught in the mad rush of people vying for a means of escape.

In early April 1975, the United States and Australia began evacuating the Vietnamese children in a series of flights known as *Operation Babylift*.

On 4 April, 2 days after the United States announced Babylift, RAAF Australian Hercules crews stood on the tarmac of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport chatting with a giant American Galaxy crew. After all their passengers were on board, the Americans took off, followed by the first Hercules.

On the Australian plane, loaded with babies – the older ones 5 to a litter and the smallest infants in cardboard boxes on the floor, all with water bottles between their lips to ease the pain of changing air pressure – all went well, and they headed west to Bangkok.

But on Galaxy, disaster struck. With 243 children, their escorts, medical staff and aircrew on board, the plane's cargo door blew off soon after take-off. The pilots tried to return to the runway, but 2 km from the airport, the stricken aircraft hit the ground, bounced over the Saigon River and exploded. There were few survivors. The dead included 143 babies and 2 Adelaide women, Lee Makk and Margaret Moses, who had volunteered to help with the children.

A few hours later, the 2 Hercules landed at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport and disembarked 194 children, 3 doctors and 20 nurses who had tended the infants. Oth-

er RAAF Hercules brought some 80 Australian civilians, mostly embassy officials and their families, out of Saigon.

More than 200 people – air and ground crew, equipment and administration personnel, nurses and other medical staff – flew on operations during the RAAF's final involvement in the Vietnam War. Some flew into the Laotian capital, Vientiane. Like Cambodia, Laos had been dragged into the war only to share in a crushing defeat.

By the end of April 1975, the 3 countries which had compromised the territory of the former French Indochina – Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia – were under communist control.

The last Australian military personnel to leave Vietnam, 13 years after the first had arrived, were 4 Air Defence Guards:

Sergeant [John Hansen](#)

Corporal [Ian Dainer](#)

Leading Aircraftman [Trevor Nye](#)

Leading Aircraftman [Mick Sheean](#).

Left behind when the last evacuation aircraft took off from Tan Son Nhut, they had neither support, supplies nor means of communication. Carrying a pistol and 4 rounds of ammunition each, they had no idea how long it might be before rescue came.

Fortunately, a Hercules had been detailed to circle off South Vietnam's coast to collect anyone who had been left behind. The relief felt by the 4 Australians when the RAAF transport came into view can only be imagined.

13 December 2024

DVA Claims processing data – November 2024

On 2 December 2024, the Government provided its response to the [Royal Commission's Final Report](#), which was tabled on 9 September. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) continues to process outstanding claims as quickly as possible, to deliver much needed help to veterans and families sooner.

As part of our commitment to routinely, publicly, and meaningfully reporting on claims processing progress, each month DVA releases updated data via the [claims processing page](#).

A snapshot of November 2024:

- DVA received **8,600** claims in November bringing the total for the financial year to date (FYTD) to 42,774 claims - 22.4 per cent higher than the same period last year.
- DVA made **8,479** determinations and has finalised 42,272 claims in the FYTD, 0.2 per cent more than the equivalent period last year.
- 75,031** claims were with an officer for processing and **6,148** claims were yet to be allocated for processing.

The average time taken to process a MRCA IL claim was **300 days** in the 2024-25 FYTD (1 July 2024 to 30 November 2024), compared to 397 days in the corresponding 2023-24 FYTD.

SEE DVA SITE: <https://www.dva.gov.au/news/latest-stories/claims-processing-data-november-2024>

Government response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Final Report

SEE DVA RESPONSE: <https://www.dva.gov.au/news/latest-stories/government-response-royal-commission-defence-and-veteran-suicides-final-report>

Sir Peter Cosgrove AK CVO MC (Retd) reflects on the Vietnam War

Sir Peter began his Army career as an officer cadet at the Royal Military College – Duntroon in 1965.

‘All of us were breaking our necks to get away on operational service,’ he says. ‘You wanted to test yourself out. Looking back, it was a fairly immature attitude, but understandable. When we graduated in 1968, a lot of us, soon, found ourselves in Vietnam.’

Sir Peter served in Vietnam from August 1969 to July 1970 and was awarded the Military Cross for an engagement he took part in. He discusses how fighting in Vietnam was very demanding.

‘The vegetation, the terrain is so constricted that it requires enormous skill,’ he says. ‘Self discipline [is essential] ... You tend to work in a way that is almost totally silent ... until combat. And then the silence becomes an overwhelming cacophony – explosions, small arms, people shouting ... you go from apprehension to the realisation of mortal danger.’

Sir Peter went on to become Chief of the

Defence Force and Governor-General of Australia.

‘I went on to a very long career after Vietnam,’ he says. ‘But everything I did rested on that experience. And I always enjoyed the opportunity to further be responsible for Australian men and women in uniform as I got more senior.’

‘On the 50th anniversary we look back on the entire experience, back to 1962 until January the 11th 1973 when the Whitlam government through the Governor-General proclaimed that this was the end of our combat operations ... all that’s perfectly legitimate. But the demonstrations, the abuse from time to time, heaped upon the men and women who’d [served], who’d seen their comrades die, this was most unfortunate.’

‘Sixty thousand went off to that war. 523 were killed directly ... about 35,000 remain alive today. I like to think that on the 18th of August, Australians will pause and say “thank you”.’

VetRide—their story.

VetRide Incorporated

ABN 26314203861

A Registered Charity with the Australian Charities
and Not-for-Profits Commission



VVAA Vic Branch State Council Meeting, Bendigo Saturday 22 February 2025

VetRide is shortform for veterans riding, and the organisation began as a VVAA spinoff idea, arising from some cyclists in what was the West Gippsland VVAA sub-branch.

In 2011 the idea surfaced of a multi-day distance ride and I approached Bob to see if he thought that there might be interest from those in other sub-branches.

Our inaugural committee was made up of Gary Elliott, Maurie Benson and myself, and as we went along, we had help from Alma, Karli the daughter of a Vietnam veteran and the riders in our group.

We garnered sufficient interest to begin planning an event and identified the need to establish legal standing so as to enable us to attend to the necessary cycling specific demands, ranging from the ability to purchase equipment to the creation of an insurance related cycling event risk management strategy.

Being able to operate under the auspices of the State Branch enabled us to do these things and our inaugural 'Tour of Duty' event in 2012 was a 4 day 400k ride from Echuca to Melton.

VetRide has also partnered with other cycling organisations including the Australian Defence Cycling Club, Pollie Pedal*, Soldier On, RSL Active, Ride2Recovery, and Bicycle Network for the Around the Bay and 9 day Great Vic. Rides. *Its founder and ex PM Tony Abbott also agreed to become our Patron.

In 2016 for the 50th anniversary of Long Tan, we set our sights on a ride to the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Canberra. The 100 riders required 9 vehicles and 30 staff, and it would not have been possible without the generous support of the VVAA Victorian Branch and that of several other organisations and individuals. The presence of Long Tan veteran Dave Sabben within the peloton, added much meaning to the event.

Following the success of the Canberra ride the organisation had grown to the point of warranting separate status,

with VetRide then becoming incorporated, and including the obtaining of Charitable and Deductible Gift Recipient status.

In terms of infrastructure, we have been able to obtain some grant funding to build a bike trailer and a portable kitchen with onboard Barista coffee machine, and otherwise we have been able to make use of a Perentie as lead vehicle thanks to Chris Byne and Tom Graze, a bus thanks to the Greensborough RSL, and for the trip to Canberra we were able to obtain the use of a much needed truck, thanks to NVVM Chair Kingsley Munday.

Our database of riders is now approaching 250 including the VetRide Queensland group who are based in Brisbane, however after more than a decade the time is upon us for transition to younger management. As at our 2024 AGM I am very pleased to have handed the Presidential baton to Darren Thomas, someone with a Warrant Officer's experience and significant service, including multiple tours in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Over the last couple of years, we have also begun making more direct contact with recent and current serving members, and thanks to those on our committee who are still in the ADF, we have been able to access communication within the Defence net and presence at facilities such as their bi-annual Transition Seminars. At these events networking is possible with many other like-minded organisations, e.g. Invictus and the Womens Veterans Network.

Over the years we have benefitted from some terrific help by many, a great deal of care having been given to our riders and the essential crews who travel with them. That assistance has come from the efforts of many from your sub-branches and the members who have stepped forward and provided us with some amazing hands-on support.

As a result, many have told us that the simple act of taking part has had a significant positive impact upon their well-being, and these days our officially permitted 'Ride Anzac' flying poppy jerseys continue to carry the message.

It works and it is part of your legacy.

Peter Liefman OAM
for and on behalf of VetRide

Vietnam War commemorative medallion and certificate

Last updated:

29 July 2024

To acknowledge the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) produced a Commemorative Medallion and Certificate of Commemoration.

The medallion and certificate were made available to every Australian veteran, or their widow or other family member, who served in the Vietnam War. Please note that only one medallion is available per Vietnam War veteran. While Australia can never repay the debt we owe to the 60,000 who served in Vietnam, this medallion and certificate are a small but meaningful way to honour their service and to recognise the sacrifice of those who never returned home.

The obverse design features the Commonwealth Coat of Arms with 'Vietnam War' inscribed at the top and 'Australia Remembers' at the bottom. The reverse side features words of thanks at the bottom with the years 1962-73 inscribed at the top to represent the years in which Australia

was involved in the Vietnam War. The medallion also features depictions of a UH-1 Iroquois 'Huey' Helicopter, HMAS *Sydney* (III) 'Vung Tau Ferry' and an Australian soldier holding an SLR.

The medallion was presented in a display case and included a card that explains the design and contains a brief expression of thanks.

The design of the commemorative certificate complements the medallion. The design includes the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, 'Australia Remembers' wording and includes the signature of both the Governor-General and the Prime Minister.

The certificate was contained within its own folder that to allow for independent display, framing and mounting.

The website which accepts applications has closed. If you have any general enquiries or wish to follow up on an existing application please email Commemorative.Events@dva.gov.au and a member of the team will get back to you as soon as possible.

DONATIONS

NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS MUSEUM (NVVM)

Following closure of the VVAA ACT Branch, members generously voted to donate their surplus funds to support the Vietnam Veterans National Museum Phillip Island (NVVM).

Support for the NVVM can come about in a number of ways:

- * become a **Member of the Museum**
- * purchasing from the **Museum Shop**
- * and providing **donations**.

Thanks VVAA ACT Branch Members.



New memorial wall commemorates the fallen of RAAF Station Maryborough

A message from the Maryborough Military Aviation Museum Association

In September 2024, a new Memorial Wall to 569 servicemen who died in the Second World War was officially unveiled at the former Royal Australian Air Force Station Maryborough in Queensland.

For further information [CLICK](#) the Link below:

<https://www.dva.gov.au/news/latest-stories/new-memorial-wall-commemorates-fallen-raaf-station-maryborough>



Vietnam Veterans Day 2025 Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance

In 2025 we remember the Fall of Saigon in 1975 and the role of RAAF personnel who took part in operation *Babylift* which saw so many children repatriated to safety.

Wreaths will be laid at the RAAF

and Vietnam Trees prior to the Main Service which begins at 1100 hrs.

Refer to VVAA Victorian Branch website <https://vvaavic.org.au/>

for further information.