



ESB-VIC



Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Victorian Branch Inc.

NEWS BULLETIN

JUNE 2025



VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA VICTORIAN BRANCH INC.

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VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

10:30 > 11:30 18th AUGUST 2025

MELBOURNE SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE

Honour the Dead but Fight Like Hell for the Living



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Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living



Membership and Executive

Membership numbers continue to hold up despite a sad increase in the number of members passing away. Sue and Lindsay McQueen have stood down as membership managers after many years of faithful service. Sue continues to be involved at the Bendigo Veterans Centre. Peter Bright, a former branch secretary, has rejoined the committee as membership manager. It was pleasing to have the Mitchell sub-branch rejoin the branch after a three-year hiatus.

Branch Closure Plan

The plan was amended to include detailed information about the management and distribution of Welfare Patriotic Funds. The plan was again used efficiently during the closure of one sub-branch during the year.

Interaction with Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) and Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC)

As an approved charity, the branch, through the treasurer, is responsible to both CAV and ACNC for the correct management and use of Welfare Patriotic Funds, and the submission of annual sub-branch reports to both agencies. Audits across the branch and reports to CAV and ACNC were completed by mid-March 2024. A treasurers' workshop was conducted before a state council meeting early in the year.

Welfare: Wills and Powers of Attorney (POA)

All members and partners were offered a subsidy towards the cost of having a will prepared or updated and subsidies towards the cost of having POA's prepared. The program ran for approximately 18 months, concluding in December 2024.

Welfare: Information Packs

All members received a welfare pack containing a range of information, with a focus on health, safety, and considerations before moving to a retirement village or assisted care situation.

Plaque Project

Plaques continue to be placed at the homes of sub-branches to acknowledge their existence. Closed sub-branch locations will be addressed in 2025. It is also intended to place plaques at other locations of importance to the Vietnam war effort such as Puckapunyal.

Branch Plaque and Tree

The Victorian Premier and State Minister for Veterans unveiled a plaque commemorating the service and sacrifice of Victorian Vietnam veterans in the gardens of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance on Vietnam Veterans Day 2024. The plaque was placed beside a native gum tree chosen by the branch.

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Seymour Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk Expenditure

The branch committed \$30K for urgent work at the walk which has deteriorated significantly due to a lack of regular maintenance and budgeted funding for upkeep of the grounds and equipment. Funds were used to clean the paved donations area, pressure clean major exhibits, treat tree fungal disease, and urgent repairs to the security system.

Education Team Closure

After over two decades of educating Victorian school students, community groups, and some forays across the Victorian border, the Victorian Branch Education Team ceased activities mid-year. The Education Team vehicle was given to the museum in August. Before the COVID lockdowns, the Education Team often received donations, with most of the donations placed in the branch education fund. The fund is used to provide some financial assistance to help with the education costs of veteran family children.

Long Tan Bursary and Tertiary Grant

The branch paid the first installment for a Long Tan Bursary (total approx. \$15K) for a Victorian student and provided a \$1K assistance grant to a second student.

Conway Cross

The Branch undertook a project to preserve and display a WW1 wooden cross. The cross was unveiled at the Montmorency-Eltham RSL on Remembrance Day 2024.

Coral-Balmoral Outdoor Area Rehabilitation

The branch received approval to use a state government grant originally provided for Vietnam veteran welfare to rehabilitate a garden area at the Heidelberg Hospital Coral-Balmoral facility. The garden is available for all patients and staff.

Museum School Visit Program

The free school visit program continued during the year.

Veteran Interviews

Twelve veteran interviews were recorded by a professional A/V company. The finished product will be provided to the museum for inclusion in an interactive display.

Website Upgrade-FSB Vic.

Significant improvements have been made to the branch website and the branch newsletter, FSB Vic. revamped and produced quarterly on the website.

VETERAN INTEREST

Response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

DVA website [[CLICK HERE](#)]



RSL Headquarters ANZAC House

RSL Victoria President

DR Robert Webster OAM resigns.

Dr Mark Schroffel PHD MBA will be elected unopposed
at this year's RSL Victoria State Conference.

RSL VIC website [[CLICK HERE](#)]

Construction commenced on RAAF Base Darwin Mid-Term Refresh Project

DEFENCE website [[CLICK HERE](#)]

Veteran Heart Health Program

Keep fit and improve your wellbeing.

Check out the website [[CLICK HERE](#)]

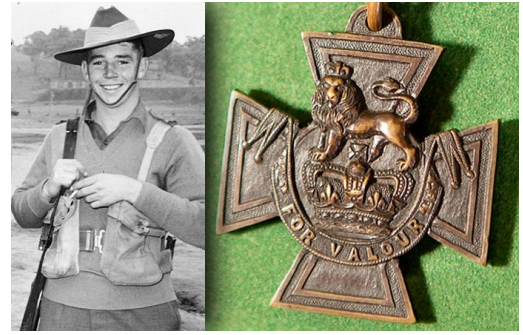
Private Richard Norden VC

For most conspicuous acts of gallantry in action in the presence of the enemy in the 'AO Surfers' Area of Operations in Bien Hoa province, Vietnam, on the 14th of May 1968 during the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral.

On 14 May 1968, during Operation Toan Thang, 5th Platoon B Company were ambushed, coming under heavy automatic weapon fire from a squad of North Vietnamese Army regular soldiers in established positions. The initial contact left the forward scout and section commander wounded, cut off from the remainder of the leading section, which itself was cut off from the rest of the platoon by heavy and accurate enemy fire.

Of his own accord, Private Norden (a member of the leading section) called for covering fire and made his way forward to rescue his wounded brothers-in-arms. Under heavy fire and crossing ground with little to no cover, he managed to retrieve the section commander, killing one North Vietnamese Army soldier in the process. Having expended his ammunition, Private Norden used his enemy's automatic weapon against further North Vietnamese Army combatants. Under intense enemy fire he half-dragged, half-carried the severely wounded section commander to safety – saving his life.

Despite being seriously wounded in the initial skirmish, Private Norden continued his advance to retrieve the scout. He again came under fire from a North Vietnamese Army



soldier who was using the scout as a human shield. He killed the soldier, and upon reaching the scout, saw he was dead.

Private Norden returned to the section to resupply and collect grenades before advancing for a third time to clear the area and recover the body of the scout. His three courageous solo attacks into the enemy's position secured the area.

Private Norden, showing a complete disregard for his personal safety through his daring and selfless acts and commitment to duty, single-handedly retrieving and saving the life of a severely wounded fellow soldier. His continued bold actions, while wounded, allowed the recovery of the body of the forward scout, and, most likely, ensured his platoon members avoided any potential further deaths.

NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS MUSEUM

Bob Elworthy AM and John Methven OAM will represent the NVVM at the US VVA convention in New Orleans in August. Through John Methven, who attended a conference some years ago, the VVA provided an invitation to attend their conference. An information booth at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel conference centre has been provided and will be used to display NVVM material including plans for the new building, information brochures including donation and contact information. The museum will be promoted on the VVA as the Spiritual Home for all Vietnam veterans with an invitation for the VVA to increase US displays.

The invitation to attend the VVA convention is regarded as a great honour.

ONGOING SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

In 2024 the NVVM Chairman implemented free entry to the Museum for all Australian veterans and will continue this initiative for 2025.

2024 represents a year of positive progression.

With permit approval for the new Museum build now secured, stage one of the project, which involves capital works for the entry road into the new Museum site, can begin.



Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living

THE RETURN OF THE RAAF TO VIETNAM - 1975

AFA VV MEMBER GEOFF ROSE

In December 1972, the last of Australia's combat troops left Vietnam and Australia's 'Vietnam War' ended with the Governor General's proclamation on 11 Jan 73. Only an Army platoon comprising an officer and 25 other ranks remained to guard the Australian Embassy and over the following few months, the size of the Embassy Guard was reduced, and the platoon was disbanded on 30 Jun 73 - leaving the Embassy without any official protection.

The Paris Peace Accords, signed on 27 Jan 73 (a couple of weeks after the Australian Governor General's proclamation), failed to bring an end to the conflict and the war continued for over another 2 years - until the unconditional surrender of the Government of South Vietnam (GVN), on 30 Apr 75.

A month before the surrender, on 29 Mar 75, the Australian Government responded to an urgent request, from the GVN, for assistance to evacuate civilian refugees from Da Nang, which was under a massive attack from North Vietnamese forces. The RAAF was immediately mobilised, and six Hercules transports departed Richmond heading for Butterworth, where another Hercules was already on alert, along with two Dakotas from Transport Support Flight (TSF) Butterworth.

Unfortunately, Da Nang fell to the enemy before the RAAF could assist. The first mission, at the request of the Deputy Prime Minister of the GVN, was to transfer civilian refugees and Red Cross supplies from Phan Rang, which was directly in the path of advancing communist forces, to an established Red Cross camp at Can Tho. On 01 April, one aircraft was dispatched to assess the situation. On approaching Phan Rang, the captain decided

conditions on the ground were too dangerous for landing and returned to Saigon. Next day, all the Hercules were airborne and dispatched, to try again.

The atmosphere on the ground at Phan Rang was tense, and even with only one parachute door open, there were times when Loadmasters found it very difficult to control who was clambering aboard (many ARVN personnel forced their way on to the aircraft). At one stage, after two rockets landed nearby, there was full panic, and a soldier fired his rifle into the air to stop the rush towards an aircraft. He was standing at the back of the aircraft and three bullets penetrated the ramp and rear door. Without serious damage, the aircraft returned, unpressurised, to Butterworth.

Later in the day, one aircraft was prevented from taking off, as two petrol tankers had been driven across the runway. Over the radio, the crew were told they could depart, only if they promised to return for more people. Flg Off Geoff Harmer, the Captain, said they would be back. That was the RAAF's last departure from Phan Rang. Up to 1800 refugees had been transferred to Can Tho. The next day, Phan Rang fell to the communists.

On 04 Apr 75, all the Hercules aircraft departed Butterworth for positioning in Saigon and the group officially became Headquarters Richmond Detachment S (HQRIC DET S) – 'S' an abbreviation for Saigon. Although designated a Humanitarian Relief Mission, the RAAF had returned to, and was operating in, the Vietnam War Zone.

Included in the detachment were 10 RAAF Air Defence Guards (ADGs) who were deployed to Saigon in early April and whose

THE RETURN OF THE RAAF TO VIETNAM - 1975 - *cont'd.*

initial duties were to guard the aircraft, protect all RAAF personnel and assist as and when required. With the fighting intensifying and drawing closer to Saigon, four of the ADGs, Sgt John Hansen, Cpl Ian Dainer, LAC Trevor Nye and LAC Mick Sheean were assigned to guard the Australian Embassy. (They remained at the Embassy until final closure and evacuation of our ambassador and staff, ironically, on ANZAC Day, 1975 - they were aboard the last RAAF Hercules to depart from the Vietnam War).

Tasking in the Humanitarian Relief Mission involved the transfer of orphan babies and children, as part of 'Operation Babylift'. The first two RAAF flights from Saigon to Bangkok departed on 04 Apr 75. 4th April was also the day a USAF C5A Galaxy, being the first US 'Baby-lift' flight, was damaged shortly after take-off and crashed during its return, just four miles short of Tan Son Nhut airfield. The first RAAF aircraft had already departed, but the crew and personnel preparing the second stood in shock, as they witnessed the chaotic scene of several helicopters, in 'a race-track circuit' flying to the burning crash-site and returning with the injured. Some 138 of the 314 people on board did not survive the crash. Two Welfare Workers, Margaret Moses and Lee Makk, were aboard and sadly, became the last two Australians to die in the Vietnam War.

Meanwhile, on the ground, no-one knew what had brought down the Galaxy - was it preflight sabotage, or a Surface-to-Air missile? The RAAF crew completed a most thorough pre-flight inspection of their aircraft and surroundings. After a tense departure they settled down to a routine flight to Bangkok, where Embassy staff and medical personnel were there to greet and transfer the precious 'cargo' to a waiting QANTAS B747 which then flew the passengers to a new life in Australia.

The RAAF completed another 'Baby-lift' on 17 Apr and in total, 281 orphans were saved.

HQRIC Det S operations consisted mainly of transporting food, supplies and equipment, from Saigon to An Thoi airport, on Phu Quoc Island, just south of the Cambodian border. At An Thoi, there was a POW camp which was being transformed to accommodate the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing by sea, from the rapidly advancing communist forces.

On 17 April, due to increasing insecurity in SGN, it was decided to transfer the detachment to Bangkok's Don Muang Airport, from where the Hercules would operate into Vietnam as required. Three aircraft were nearing routine servicing requirements so returned to Richmond over the next couple of days. HQRIC Det S continued operations until final withdrawal on 25 April.

Members of HQRIC Det S and TSFBUT, have been officially recognised and were appropriately awarded the Australian Active Service Medal with Clasp 'VIETNAM '1975' and the Returned from Active Service Badge. Also, the Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans and DVA entitlements were extended to include those RAAF personnel who served in the Active War Zone of South Vietnam, up to 29 Apr 75.

Between 29 Mar and 28 Apr 75, some 200 RAAF personnel, originating from 36, 37 and 486 Squadrons, Medical Staff from No 4 RAAF Hospital, members from TSFBUT and Base Squadron Butterworth, were attached to Det 'S'. During the period, the Detachment operated up to eight Hercules transports and was assisted with two Dakotas from TSFBUT.

Editor's note:

VVAA Victorian Branch gratefully acknowledges AFA and Geoff Rose for allowing reproduction of this article about the tumultuous finale to the Vietnam War and the contribution RAAF personnel made in repatriating so many Vietnamese to safety.

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY 2025



VIETNAM VETERANS DAY MELBOURNE SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE MONDAY 18th AUGUST 2025

10:30 AM > 11:30 PM

For the past 35 years the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Victorian Branch Inc. (VVAA Vic Inc.) has hosted Vietnam Veterans Day Commemoration activities at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. We continue to do so, albeit on a reduced scale.

This year, 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.

The Everyman's tea/coffee van will be onsite at the Shrine for refreshments.

PROGRAM:

- ◆ 1000 hrs - Assemble on Shrine Upper Forecourt.
- ◆ 1030 hrs - Wreaths laid at RAAF and Vietnam Trees.
- ◆ 1100 hrs - Main Service.
- ◆ 1130 hrs - Conclusion.



Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance,
Vietnam Veterans Day.

18th August 2016

