

## A FEW WORDS TO MARK OUR TENTH ANNIVERSARY

During the war in South Vietnam units comprised men who were recruited from all over Australia. Thus, often shortly after RTA (Return to Australia), when we left the services to AGAIN be re-scattered throughout Australia. As a consequence we rarely had service mates that lived anywhere near each other. This was particularly true for the Natio's such as myself. We went back into the community to our previous jobs.

Thus in the years after the war, contact was reduced to a minimum and our mates became fond memories. The bonds that were formed serving our nation were stretched and often broken - but not forgotten.

However, 15 years after the end of the war, the Welcome Home Parade in 1987 changed this for many veterans. Unit Re-unions were organised all over Australia and mates started coming back together again. The years disappeared as camaraderie and fellowship took over - for those brief periods every two years or so.

However in early 2003 the Southern Highlands Vietnam Veterans Association was formed - 15 years after The Welcome Home Parade and 30 years after the war.

Its genesis came from the DVA's Heart Health Program that was run at the Moss Vale Gym. A few of us started talking and it was suggested that we form our own association. Some were already members of the Vietnam Veterans Association of NSW but this was based in Sydney. We wanted to do own thing - so we did.

Sandra Freer has delved into the records and established some facts:

\* 10th June, 2003 we held our first meeting at the Mittagong R.S.L. Club at 7.30 p.m. and took the decision to form an Association.

\* Sunday, 29th June, 2003 - an informal gathering and BBQ at the Vietnam Memorial, Cherry Tree Walk, Bowral at 11 a.m.

\* Tuesday, 15th July, 2003 first meeting at Moss Vale Services Club at 7.00 p.m.

\* First office bearers -

President	David Babbage
Vice President	Tony Mitchell
Secretary	Norm Austin
Treasurer	Mat Holzl

Committee - Tom Lyons, Brian Freer, Phill Moscott, John Morton, Rick McCarthy and Norm Anderson.

\* Approximately 22 of original members are still financial members of the Association. Which now consists of about 45 active members.

Our veteran members served in the Army, Navy and Airforce, in a huge variety of roll, across a very wide range of ranks. But we have something in common. We all served our nation, with pride and honor - during the war in South Vietnam.

The organisation has enabled us to find new mates and establish friendships that take the place of those we established at war. I think this helps to fill the gap created by the 30 years of separation.

Our wives and partners also have something in common - a Vietnam or war Veteran. However, I know that they are now able to support each other in the support of their men.

Over these ten years we have established our own way of doing things. Highlights of which are:

We have established Our Annual Vietnam Veteran's Day Service as an important and regular community event.

We represent our Association at ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies.

We are recognised In the Southern Highlands as the main Ex Service Organisation supporting Vietnam Veterans and Peacemakers and Peacekeepers.

We are represented on the NSW Vietnam Veterans Association

We meet monthly for Dinners and Lunches at which we enjoy ourselves and revive friendships and make new ones.

We encourage wives and partners to participate.

We support our members and their partners with pensions and other matters DVA.

We provide welfare services to our members and other veterans.

We undertake school visits to support their history curriculum. Here we mostly talk about the personal impacts of war.

We walk regularly.

We are the Aquavets.

We celebrate Christmas - sometimes twice yearly.

We support the VIP (Veterans' Indispensable Partners) Ladies Gourmet Club -

We have a Constitution and are incorporated.

And we are modern - we have a web site.

Over the next ten years I am sure that we will continue with this type of thing and

probably some new ventures. We will continue to share friendships and look after each other. We will continue to remember our fallen mates. But we will continue to have fun.

Norm Austin