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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello members - It's been well over a year since I was elected as President after an impressive 10yr stand by Warren Thomas.

As a Sub Branch, financially and with our membership numbers, we are still sitting quite strong. We have 340 financial members, with new members joining regularly. Our General Meetings held on the first Monday of the month are averaging 35-40 members attending.

Our Night Chapter Meetings are held every 3 months, catering for members still serving or working but all members are welcome. We are averaging around 20 members attending the Night Chapters. I must say the atmosphere and comradeship I see lately makes me proud to be the President of such a welcoming friendly Sub Branch. So spread the word.

2018 started off with a change of the guard in our office. Irene Higley retired after nearly 11yrs dedicated service to our Sub Branch. The Committee past and present celebrated her time with a dinner, presenting her with a lovely jewellery necklace and a nice bottle of scotch. She was over the moon and will be sadly missed.

Lucky for us we found a well-deserved replacement that Irene was able to train and teach the ins and outs of the Sub Branch before she stepped aside. Kristy Nichols took over on the 25th January 2018 and has already put her stamp on things and runs the office with the same work ethics Irene

***MAIN HEADLINES, ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE:***

Irene retires / Coral-Balmoral 50th Anniversary / ANZAC Day 2018 / No more Tuesday Gen. Meetings / WW1 Armistice Centenary event / Vietnam Veterans Reception at Govt. House / Vietnam Veterans Day commemoration/presentation. (14 pages in this issue)

had, maintaining the welcoming and caring spirit you are all used to when ringing or attending the office.

Our AGM back in March was more a formality as our committee is still standing strong. The only major change was Andrew Humphrey, one of our SMDC delegates, taking over as Memorabilia Officer from Stan Grimshaw SVP. Stan has filled this position for many years but needed to step aside as his hands were full being SVP and Publicity Officer as well.

Our Sub Branch still maintains its commemorative duties. A few months ago our Anzac Day met with success, and we also commemorated Vietnam Veterans' Day on Saturday 18th August in Monro Park. The major commemorative planned for this year is the 100th Anniversary of the end of WW1 "Armistice Day" or more commonly known these days as Remembrance Day. Continuing with the theme of commemorating the "Centenary of Anzacs", we will be holding an "Armistice Centenary Cocktail Evening" at the Cronulla RSL Memorial Club, open to everyone and similar to the "ANZAC Centenary Cocktail Evening" we held in 2015. (*See item elsewhere in this issue*). Of course, we will be conducting a special service on the 11th November at 11am in Monro Park.

As the custodians of such commemorative days as these, we owe it to you and the public to produce and run a sombre but fitting service without any mistakes. We aim to produce a service that all can be proud of, and we will continue to ensure that happens, each time.

Our Welfare support is going strong, led by our JVP Greg Crumblin and Treasurer Jenny Weir. But sadly, just as we hit half way through the year already we have attended many funerals of members dear to our heart. You will be proud to know Tony Di Betta, our main SMDC delegate, who also runs the RSL part of the funerals, always conducts himself with the utmost professionalism fitting for our members send off.

Please ensure you let your families know the limits to our welfare support. In particular, we do not assist in placement of members in Nursing Homes, nor do we deal with DVA on your behalf other than to progress pension entitlements. If there is no family to assist, we will do what we can. Preparation for health events are an important matter as we all get older, and along with making a current Will, there are other things that you should give your family guidance on. Do it whilst you have a say!

Lastly I would like to talk about the 2018 RSL NSW State Congress held in Albury from the 21-23 May. Our Sub branch was well represented by myself, Greg Crumblin JVP and Tony Di Betta SMDC Delegate. Over the 3 days a lot of information was discussed and questions were asked and answered honestly by the President of the NSW RSL James Brown and his committee. The main thing that came out of Congress is that RSL NSW is working hard to re-build, restructure itself, regain the trust of the Australian and Military Community, and get back to its core goal and purpose of "Respecting, supporting and remembering our veterans and their families".

I hope to see you at a meeting soon or even at the club, but as this will be the last newsletter for this year, I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a healthy, Happy New Year.

Cory Rinaldi

CORRECTION TO THE LAST ISSUE

In the last issue of the Newsletter, under the heading of “Vietnam Veterans’ Day Service” (page 7), reference was made to the presentation by Tony Di Betta. In paragraph 2 of that item it notes *HMAS Vampire* was the ship fired upon in Cam Rahn Bay. This should have read *HMAS Hobart*. Tony was then a member of *HMAS Vampire*, which escorted *HMAS Sydney* to Vietnam on her first trip, and not as crew aboard *HMAS Hobart*. The Editor apologises for this error to Tony and any who may have been affected as a result. The website edition was amended and replaced accordingly, and members advised at our December 2017 general meeting.

IRENE RETIRES

Some things don’t change but others have to! There has been a change with our Sub-Branch Office manager.

After almost 11 years of keeping us all in line, Irene Higley retired back in March. Funny, we never considered her as the ‘retiring’ type, but that was in terms of personality, and that hasn’t changed. Irene called ‘time out’ though and is now officially retired.

Her replacement is Kristy Nichols.

It’s now Kristy answering the phone and actioning things. She’s a local Shire person too, came through the interviews very well of course, with skills in accounts, office management, customer service, and also importantly, is people-orientated.

Irene won’t disappear though. She intends being nearby to our sub-Branch ‘family’ on a volunteer basis now and again. We just hope she forgets to pass on to Kristy how to handle us ‘rough and ready renegades’ that drop in to the sub-Branch office now and again. But Kristy is settling in well so next time you call in or call the sub-Branch office, it’s Kristy at the other end.

Irene and our new Office Manager, Kristy Nichols.



50th Anniversary of Coral-Balmoral Battle

(Report by Geoff Schuberg)

President Cory Rinaldi and several members of our sub-Branch attended the Coral-Balmoral Service at the invitation of Ingleburn RSL sub-Branch President Ray James, on Wednesday 16 May. This was the 50th anniversary of the battle for Coral and Balmoral Fire Support Bases from 12 May to 6 June 1968, (a 26-day battle) in which some of our members took part.

The service was held in the Ingleburn sub-Branch Memorial Garden and was well attended by VIP’s, other sub-Branches, and representatives from the Australian, New Zealand and American governments, community groups and local Council.

Our group with Dr. Brendan Nelson.



The guest speaker was Brendon Nelson, Curator of the Australian War Memorial, who delivered a wonderful talk on the involvement, hardship and suffering of Australian, New Zealand, South and North Vietnamese troops during the battle. Together with the talk by Brendon Nelson, a highlight of the day was a presentation by the Yellow Jacket Ladies (female relatives of the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam) who presented all Vietnam veterans attending the service with a gift pack of wine and chocolates.

A tag had been placed on each bottle of wine which read, *"Dear Sir/Madam, as refugees and their descendants from the Vietnam War, we are forever thankful to the Australian men and women who sacrificed their hearts to people like us. Sincerely, the Yellow Jacket Ladies"*.

A most enjoyable experience.

ANZAC DAY 2018

A cool morning! But no rain, thankfully. As appears now usual, a very good crowd in attendance, with the park overflowing on to the footpaths. But it wasn't without "glitches".

The police didn't arrive until almost too late (due to a delay getting through other RSL's services), so our Senior VP Stan Grimshaw, along with a couple of helpful Sutherland Shire Council staff, acted as traffic controllers until the march got under-way.

This year we accepted the chance to utilise the Cronulla High School quartet to sing the hymns, and they were excellent, despite suffering the major glitch. Unfortunately, part of the sound system speakers decided it was time to have "hissy fits" and let it be known several times during the service. But as we once did, they soldiered on magnificently. Overall however, in regards to sound services, that supplier will not be used again and already the search has begun for a reliable replacement. Sound issues aside, the day ran smoothly, although our guest speaker (see below) also suffered the same fate now and again, but also coped very well.

Jeff McClenaughan presented our Anzac Address. Jeff is ex-Army from the Vietnam era, his father Brian (ex-RAAF and Bomber Command) was a long-time member of our sub-Branch, and who had presented our Address back in 1992. Perhaps 'big boots' to fill, but Jeff did him proud. His presentation follows.

ANZAC Day Dawn Service address, by Jeff McClenaughan

It is a great honour for me to be asked to deliver the dawn service address on this Anzac Day here in Cronulla. I stand here in my father's shoes, as he gave this address in 1992, and like him I wonder what I can add to the long list of outstanding orators that have stood here over the years.



Jeff McClenaughan

In particular, my old mate Eric Barton, Distinguished Flying Cross; Legionne d'Honneur, who gave such a memorable address here in 2013. I know he is sitting here right now making sure that I deliver this 'on time and on target'.

You may well ask who is this man that dares to join this august group of war veterans that have delivered so many stirring speeches over the years here in Munro Park as the sun rises over the ocean at Cronulla. I did not go to war, I did not serve overseas, I served my time as a national serviceman in the army based at the Jungle Training Centre in Canungra, Queensland.

I am the son of a WW2 veteran and I have a passion for keeping his memory and those of his mates alive, and furthering the ideals that they fought for and the importance this day held for them in remembering those that fell, and there were many. I hope I can convey to you some of the respect and admiration I have for these men and what they endured. This address is intended as a tribute to their memory and an epitaph for those who did not return.

My father, Brian McClenaughan, Distinguished Flying Cross and bar, was born and bred in Cronulla, a long-time member of Cronulla RSL sub branch, Cronulla Golf Club and a life member of Cronulla surf club. He also flew with the Royal Air Force Pathfinder Force as part of Bomber Command during world war 2, having survived 58 missions over Europe as a bomb-aimer/navigator/primary marker. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little of what the Pathfinders were all about.

In the early days of WW2, Britain stood alone against the jackboot of Hitler and his 3rd Reich, and was in very real danger of being invaded. The only way that the allies could take the fight to Germany was by way of utilising the resources of the Royal Air Force Bomber Command to conduct bombing raids on selected targets in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe.

The aircraft were old and not up to the job. Navigation was extremely crude, relying solely on a compass bearing and dead reckoning. As a result it was not uncommon in the early days for crews to drop their bombs as far as 10 miles from the actual target. Not only did aircrews have difficulty finding their targets they even had trouble finding their way home. Many aircraft were lost due to fog over England on their return or because they simply ran out of fuel trying to find their way back to base. The losses in manpower, morale and machinery were grievous and could not be sustained.

In 1942 a bold decision was made to form an elite group to locate and mark the targets as an aiming point for the main bomber force to drop their bombs. This group was called the Path Finder Force, and an Australian, Group Captain Don Bennet, was given the job of forming the squadrons and training the men. Don Bennet was a master navigator and a very experienced pilot, having

survived being shot down over Norway and making his way, on foot, back to England. He went on to become the youngest Air Vice Marshal in the Royal Air Force.

Initially the crews were poached from other squadrons within Bomber Command. Only the best and most experienced men were chosen. The new crews were trained extensively in precise navigation and timing, using the latest technological developments in radio direction finders such as Gee and OBOE, and of course Radar. They also received the best aircraft available at the time, such as the Lancaster and Mosquito.

Bomber Command had chosen to conduct their bombing raids during the hours of darkness to give their crews the best chance of survival. The Pathfinders job was to locate and mark the targets with a variety of coloured flares so the main bomber force had an accurate aiming point. Turning points on the route to the target were also marked by flares. Don Bennet formulated the idea of using a "Master Bomber" or "Master of Ceremonies" as it was often called, to remain over the target to direct the crews of Pathfinders positioned within the main bomber stream to re-mark the target during the raid to ensure the bombing remained on target. The most experienced crews were chosen for this job with a second crew allocated as a back-up in case the first crew were lost. A very dangerous task as it meant both aircraft had to stay over the target for the entire raid. My father's crew did this on a number of occasions.

The ability of the Pathfinder crews to "press on" was legendary, to get to the target "on time" was paramount, to "be on time and on target" became a catch cry for the Pathfinders. There are many documented cases of crews losing an engine after take-off but choosing to continue on to the target and return to base on 3 engines. No such thing as risk assessment or job safety analysis in those days, they just got on with it. The crews came from all over the Commonwealth and were integrated into Royal Air Force squadrons. Bombing accuracy improved enormously and Bomber Command went on to become the most powerful striking force the world had seen to that time, wreaking havoc across enemy held territory and its factories. Nowhere was this more evident than the accurate marking and bombing of German positions on the front line in support of allied troops after the D-Day landings.

Of the 32 Victoria Crosses awarded to airmen in Britain, 21 went to Bomber Command and 3 went to Pathfinder Pilots, all posthumously. I was very fortunate to have known my father's pilot for the last 7 missions they did over Europe. His name was Ken McIntyre and after the war he turned to the church and became ordained as a minister, he actually officiated at both my father's and my mother's funerals. Ken is no longer with us.

A few years ago I received a phone call from Ken and he asked me if I had dad's log book, I did, so he asked me to get it and look for an entry on the 14th April 1945, a raid on Potsdam. He asked if dad had written anything, to which I replied that he had, he had made a note "fin hit by another Lancaster". Ken then said to me "I'll tell you about that". On leaving the target after dropping their markers he said that a huge shadow passed over them as another Lancaster passed very close. He said it felt like the other plane had made contact down the rear of his aircraft so he called up the tail gunner and asked if everything was alright. The tail gunner replied all was ok.

Ken knew something was not right as the plane was not flying correctly and he had some difficulty getting back to base. On landing they all went down the back of the plane and they noticed that the top section of one of the tail fins had been bent right over, the other Lancaster had indeed been very close. Ken asked the tail gunner "why didn't you say something", to which the tail gunner replied, "I didn't want to worry you Skip". As a side note here, dad's crew had had a run of different pilots since their regular pilot had been re-posted, some of whom had not instilled them with much confidence. As this was their 55th mission the crew were decidedly edgy and probably a little unsure of their new pilot.

Ken went quiet for a bit on the phone, and then he said to me “of course you realise that if that other Lancaster had been another foot lower I wouldn’t be here talking to you now”. It took a couple of seconds for that to sink in, then I realised that neither would I. Neither would my brother and sisters, my son, nieces, nephews, grandkids. A very sobering thought and it made me realise just how lucky we are and I thought of all the family’s that never were, deprived of the chance to live, laugh and love. Night after night these men challenged that 1 foot of air space and faced the realisation that death, or the Grim Reaper as they liked to call it, was constantly stalking them and the odds were against their survival, and yet they just pressed on.

A glimpse of what ANZAC Day means – East Timor and Iraq vet Cory Rinaldi chats with WW2 bomber pilot Eric Barton at our Service.



In one single disastrous Bomber Command raid on Nuremberg on 30 March 1944 more airmen were lost than all the pilots lost in the entire Battle of Britain, and yet still they pressed on. More than 1 out of every 3 aircrew in Bomber Command were killed, and yet still they pressed on. The equivalent of a full squadron of men were lost every 20 raids, and yet still they pressed on.

The qualities these men displayed have inspired the dedicated men and women of today’s Air Force to carry on the same traditions of bravery, comradeship, selfless devotion to duty, pride in their special competence, honour of service to their country, and unfailing belief that freedom, democracy, and the rule of law *are* worth fighting for. This is evidenced by the awarding each year of the Pathfinder Force trophies for excellence to the most outstanding Airman/Ground Support Officer and Squadron of the year within Air Mobility Group at RAAF Richmond. These awards, which are keenly sought after by Royal Australian Air Force crews, were initiated by the Pathfinders to inspire qualities of personal initiative and excellence of performance that characterised the aircrews of the Royal Air Force Pathfinder Force in Britain during World War 2.

We must never forget the sacrifices that these men, and all the men and women of our defence forces have made over the years, and continue to make today as they place themselves in harms way to protect the way of life we now enjoy, and to deliver us a life free of oppression and tyranny.

As the sun now pierces the morning sky, we must again rekindle our resolve to honour their memory by living the best life we can, with compassion and humility to our fellow man, and to help ensure we never again re-visit those dark days of world war. Well Eric, I think I am on time, and I hope I am on target. Thank you.

A HEADS-UP

A short note as a ‘heads-up’ for our October General Meeting: Being processed now, our Office Manager Kristy advises we have 32 new applications for membership under way. If all goes well, expect these applications to be presented for your voting that day. All are currently serving Army, and are with differing sections.

LAST POST

Albert Millington	08/02/2017 (*)	Thomas Bracken	30/10/2017 (*)
John Brown	07/01/2018	John Woolridge	14/03/2018
Allan Cameron	15/03/2018	Russell Humphries	18/03/2018
Frederick Moore	06/04/2018	Katherine Eling	28/04/2018
Noel Swansson	10/05/2018	Yvonne Syphers	25/06/2018
Norman Spry	02/07/2018		

(* Received very late advice of their passing)

NEW MEMBERS

Geoffrey Pearson – Army - transfer from Miranda
 Brian Allen Nobbs – Navy - Rejoin sub-Branch
 Peter Bruce Whitton – Army - transfer from Miranda
 Raymond Woods – Army.

Welcome to you all. See you at one of our meetings or functions soon.

Do you meet a serving ADF member, or an ex-service person now and again, who might like to join our Sub-Branch? Or someone who has done national service but may never have served overseas? They too are eligible to join the Sub Branch. Give them our phone number, or website address:

www.cronullarslsubbranch.com.au

ARMISTICE CENTENARY/COCKTAIL EVENING

11th November 2018 will be the centenary of the end of World War One. Sometimes referred to as the “war to end all wars”, it didn’t, unfortunately.

It lasted 4 years and was costly, not just in monetary value but in lives – over 60,000 Australians (men and women) gave their all. On our memorial in Monro Park are 83 names of men who left the then very small village of Cronulla to serve their country. Not all returned.

In November this year, as we do each year, we will commemorate them. At 11a.m. on Sunday 11th November, the sub-Branch will conduct our annual service in Monro Park. You are invited to attend.

You are also invited to attend a special event, to be held on **Wednesday evening 7th November** in the RSL, to commemorate and reflect on the end of that first World War. It is an ‘open’ event, to all RSL members and the public generally. It will be a ticketed event (via the RSL) and will be advertised beforehand. It will be of similar

format to the 100th Anniversary of Anzac Day cocktail night we held in 2015, but not quite. Peace, and the lead-up to it, is a little different.

Some WW1 memorabilia will be on display, snippets of WW1 history of Australia's involvement will occur, you will hear bagpipes, a short commemorative by a guest speaker, and the Last Post played by a bugler. You will be given a free drink on arrival and canapés will arrive throughout the evening. In between that, you'll be listening to a music trio playing relaxing and period music. Note that it needs to be entry by booked ticket.

Tickets can be booked via the RSL reception, with the cost of \$55 per person. Dress for the Ladies is cocktail dress, for men suit (with miniature medals as applicable) to be worn. Arrival from 6.30pm with proceedings beginning at 7pm. It will finish by/at 11pm. It is a commemorative evening of course, and because of them (and many others since), you're here to enjoy it this day. It's the conclusion of 100 years since the end of World War One. Don't miss it.

NO MORE TUESDAY GENERAL MEETINGS!

In days gone by, if our General Meeting day/date fell on a Public Holiday (e.g. October's Labour Day), we held the meeting the next day, a Tuesday. We noticed that attendance on these Tuesdays was way down.

After discussion with some of you over time, we found many of you had other commitments on a Tuesday, whereas Mondays tended to be available for you. Subsequently, the Committee came to the decision that we'll utilise the Monday following the public holiday. Please note that this has been advised at previous General Meetings and was agreed. The first such affect is our October meeting, so take note. See page 14.

So, meetings will now always be a Monday. Also note that for the last few years our March General Meeting has been a week later than the 'normal' Monday that month. March is always our AGM, and our auditors need that extra time to finalise our financials, as they have their annual break during January, and that extra time is to ensure the Annual Report gets out in time.

RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF VIETNAM WAR VETERANS

On Saturday 11th August, David and Pat Cripps, Paul and Shelley Zaat and Geoff and Pam Schuberg attended at Government House Sydney, at the invitation of the Honourable Gladys Berejiklian, Premier of NSW, in the presence of His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd), Governor of NSW and Mrs Linda Hurley, for a reception in Honour of Vietnam War Veterans'.

About 200 Vietnam Veterans' and their wives/partners were in attendance. The MC for the afternoon was David Elliot MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs who introduced the guest speaker. This was Ray James, Vice President of RSL NSW. In

Paul and Shelley Zaat, Pat and David Cripps and Geoff and Pam Schuberg at the reception at Sydney's Government House.



brilliant sunshine all guests enjoyed finger food, refreshments and fellowship in the confines of Government House and its gardens.

It was very fortunate that 3 members of our sub-Branch were lucky enough to be drawn from a ballot of Vietnam Veterans' who had expressed an interest in attending the annual function.

From Geoff Schuberg.

HEARD OF THE MEMORABILIA GROUP SUB-CLUB?

If you're interest in historical matters, local or otherwise, this could be the group for you – or somebody you know! Yes, it's a sub-club of the RSL (and has been since the early 1990s when our sub-Branch started it, about 5 years after our Memorabilia Collection began to accumulate). The main purposes of the club today covers having a nice meal with good, friendly company in a convivial and relaxed atmosphere, and then sit back and enjoy listening to an interesting guest speaker, ask questions or just be informed and entertained.

It's not a 'meeting', but it IS a dinner in a casual but informative way. The topics vary each time. It may be historically related, either local, national or related to "us" in some way, but could be on any subject and not always military or historical, but certainly interesting and informative.

We gather bi-monthly, with no formal meeting as such. Dinner is a 2-course meal with coffee/tea. Formalities are kept to a minimum. We do this on the first Thursday in the months of February, April, June, August, October and December, starting at 6.30pm and finished by approximately 9pm.

Membership is just \$5 per year, but you need to be a member of the Cronulla RSL to join our group. Note that there is a meal cost and you should book to ensure you're catered for. Drinks are at your own cost. Bookings can be made via calling Iris Dymond on 9524-2875 by the Tuesday prior to the dinner.

If you need more information, call Stan on 0409 952 866.

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY 2018

An excellent day weatherwise too – sunny, not too windy – and about 100 people in attendance, plus those onlookers from the nearby cafes. Around 80 of the 100 came back to the RSL for light refreshments, which included some visiting from other sub-Branches.

The service went very well, MC'd by Geoff Schuberg, and all went without any hitch at all. Paul Zaat delivered the Address and that met with high interest and comment later. Paul's speech follows this introduction.

(Photographs courtesy of Corey Nichols)

Andrew Humphrey salutes during the National Anthem.



MC Geoff and part of those attending.*Some of the attendees.*

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY PRESENTATION (by Paul Zaat)

Good Morning, thank you all for your attendance here this morning as we commemorate Vietnam Veterans' Day and I would also like to take the opportunity to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the 'Battles of Fire Support Bases, Coral and Balmoral', two major battles that took place in Vietnam in 1968. I am very pleased to say that amongst us here today, we have proud heroes of these battles, men that are members of Cronulla RSL Sub-Branch.

As a Vietnam War Veteran, I am honoured to be given the opportunity to address you all and I do so on behalf of my fellow War Veterans' and those who serve, and have served, this great nation with honour, pride and distinction. My address today, is a brief overview of the Vietnam War and three aspects of the war:

1. Major battles fought involving Australian troops
2. Unrest and dissent back home during the war
3. And the statistics of this war, which are mind boggling, but need to be known so as to help us avoid another war of this magnitude – we must always remember, the Vietnam War was the longest war Australia participated in during the 20th century.

A prominent historian once said, and I quote "For Australia, the Vietnam War was the cause of the greatest social and political dissent since the conscription referendum of the First World War".

From our response in July 1962, when asked to provide army training team members to assist the South Vietnamese forces, until our final withdrawal of RAAF transport aircraft in March 1975, Australia's involvement in this war was borne of controversy.

Another significant fact about Australia's involvement in this war was that it forced the government to re-introduce 'National Military Conscription' in November 1964 - something that the Government had put to rest only a year earlier. This decision was very controversial as it greatly affected the lives of over 300,000 young men. To add more angst to the conscription debate, the government changed the legislation from local service to overseas

Paul Zaat.

service (or as we all know now as, War Service), this brought about the fact that 15,700 National Servicemen served in the war and served with great distinction.

With South Vietnam unable to hold back the North Vietnamese forces and communist insurgents, the US requested greater assistance from other nations. Australia, under Prime Minister Robert Menzies, responded by setting up a task force increasing combat troops to two Infantry Battalions, a Squadron of RAAF helicopters, with jet bombers included later, and our Navy assisting the US to patrol the Vietnamese coast and provide Navy clearance divers. Our forces would reach a peak of 8,500 personnel, with US forces increasing from 200,000 to 543,000. With our commitment being increased, so did the unrest at home increase. The vision shown nightly on the television brought home to many the death and destruction in Vietnam.

In 1966, Australia was involved in its first major battle of the war, The Battle of Long Tan. A force of 108 Australian and New Zealand soldiers took on the might of a well-trained force of 2,500 Vietcong. A battle, which consisted of fierce fighting for several hours in unbearable conditions of torrential rain and low fog, plus the problem of ammunition running low for the troops, was of serious concern. With pinpoint artillery inflicting heavy losses, and a resolve of our forces to fight to the end, the Viet Cong were forced to withdraw. The men of 6 RAR were awarded US Presidential and South Vietnam Citations for gallantry, as well as a number of personal Military Awards. Australian casualties were 18 KIA and 24 WIA. Enemy losses were estimated at between 500-600 killed or wounded. Today, we commemorate the 52nd Anniversary of that battle.

In 1968, with the build up of the TET offensive by many thousands of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces, fighting in cities, towns and military bases continued for some months. Even though an eventual victory over the Communists was declared and North Vietnamese and Viet Cong casualties were extremely high, Australia and US military advisors doubted if a total victory in Vietnam was ever possible, and, of course, that was later proven to be true.

The courage, bravery, military skills and determination to overcome the enemy, was again shown by our men of the 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, in the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral.

The US Command requested Australian Infantry support to set up the Fire Support Bases north of Saigon, as it was an established route for North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (NLF) to attack the South Vietnam capital.

On the 12th of May, the Infantry Battalions and Australian and New Zealand Artillery began to prepare defensive positions. In the early hours of the next day, the might of the North Vietnamese 7th Division and Viet Cong main force of 2,500 infantry attacked Fire Support Base Coral.

After initial penetration of the artillery positions, the Australians fought back the enemy after much heavy fighting, lasting several hours. The base was attacked again on the 16th, 22nd, 26th and 28th of May, the fighting was relentless. On each occasion, the Australian Infantry, plus pinpoint artillery from Australian and New Zealand guns, and great support also from the Cavalry, armoured tanks and incredible work by US and Australian pilots, the attackers were forced to withdraw.

On 24th and 25th of May, Fire Support Base Balmoral was established by troops of 3rd Battalion RAR Infantry, some 5kms from Fire Support Base Coral. On the 25th of May, some 1500 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attacked the base. A second attack followed on the 28th, with further attacks in early June, but a combination of infantry, artillery, tanks and mortars once again defeated the enemy. Australian casualties sustained in the battles were 26 KIA and 99 WIA. Enemy losses exceeded 450 KIA or WIA.

The sustained fighting in these battles were the heaviest Australia had been involved in since World War II. For their bravery and courage, all Australian Forces, on the 13th of May this year, were awarded "The Unit Citation for Gallantry" by the Australian Government. An award long overdue and worn with pride.

Australia's reputation as a fighting force was second to none, this was again shown in other battles that Australia was involved in, which included Binh Ba; Gang Toi; Hat Dich; Kham Duc; Long Khang, Nam Dong, Nui Le, Suoi Bong Trang and Suoi Chau Pha. With each of these battles, Australia's reputation as a jungle fighter was held in high regard by all forces they came in contact with, even the enemy.

The stark reality of all this is, that over a period of 12 months, many National Serviceman and Regular Army soldiers (like myself), spent 240 days in combat. We were a very well trained and proud force who were respected by all nations involved in the war.

With continuous fighting throughout 1969, and South Vietnam struggling to hold some provincial areas north of Saigon, it became more of a tactical nightmare for Australia and US forces.

In February of 1970, my Infantry Battalion 8 RAR became involved in the Battle of Long Hais, a mountain range just 15kms from our main Australian base at Nui Dat. After fierce fighting for 6.5 hours in an area known as the "Minh Dam Secret Zone" against D445 Viet Cong Battalion, our forces were pulled back so as to allow giant US B-52 bombers and heavy artillery, as well as guns from naval vessels offshore, to plaster the mountain for two days.

On returning to the mountain three days later, we found a virtual city built under the mountain and that the bombing had little effect on the massive bunker system, which had been built over a period of years. The survivors of D445 had dispersed to the north east of the province. Australian casualties were 11 KIA / 59 WIA. Enemy losses exceeded 100 KIA or WIA. The 8th Battalion was awarded the Cross of Gallantry with Palm by the South Vietnamese Government plus a number of personal military awards.

With more and more vision of the war shown every night on television into Australian lounge rooms, the protest movement both in Australia and the US gained significant momentum. Thousands protested in all capital cities and mothers were demanding the government to withdraw from this war and bring their young sons home.

By mid 1970, with the Paris Peace Accord showing no positive signs for a resolution, the US Government, under President Johnson, decided to withdraw troops and under the Vietnamisation Programme, advised South Vietnam it would have to go it alone in the near future. As protests continued and returning soldiers were vilified by many Australians, the then Labour Opposition Party, led by Gough Whitlam, promised, if elected in 1972, it would end our involvement in the war.

In 1970, when my Battalion departed (Nui Dat) Vietnam, after 350 days in country, we were not replaced by Australian troops, but rather our lines were taken over by South Vietnam forces. The wind-down had begun.

By 1972, with a new government in power, all combat troops returned home, usually in the early hours of the morning, to spare more protests by the Anti-War Movement.

In March 1975, the last Australians departed Saigon just prior to the fall and takeover by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. "This long and destructive war was over" – BUT the suffering was yet to begin.

(Continued next page)

Finally I would like to read an article published in a Sydney newspaper in 1985 called 'Vietnam At A Glance', the facts are hard to comprehend, but the truth brings home to us all the stark reality of war:

- 59,520 Australians served in The Vietnam War
- 15,700 were National Servicemen
- 521 Australians were killed in action (average age of 20 years old)
- 3,129 Australians were wounded in action
- 6 Australians missing in action (at the time of publication)

- 3,000,000 Americans served in The Vietnam War
- 58,202 Americans were killed in action (average age of 20 years and 3 months)
- 304,000 were wounded in action
- 2,100 missing in action
- Medivac helicopters flew 500,000 missions transporting 900,000 patients, 480,000 being US troops

- 224,000 South Vietnamese military personnel were killed in action
- 415,000 South Vietnamese civilians were killed during the war
- 425,000 wounded

- 1,100,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were killed in action
- 300,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong missing in action

- 4,000,000 Vietnamese killed or wounded (10% of the population at the time)

- Cost in AUD to Australia – 500 million
- Cost in USD to US – 120 billion

These statistics are, in my opinion, offensive and immoral, and once again proves there are no winners in war. On days such as today, we are not here to glorify war, we are here to honour those who have served, suffered and continue to suffer, and those who have paid the supreme sacrifice.

~~ **LEST WE FORGET** ~~

2019 IS ALMOST HERE!

First **General Meeting** will be **Monday 4th February**. After that...

- **Monday 11th March** (Our AGM, always held on the 2nd Monday of this month to give time to finalise, print & distribute our Annual Report.)
- **Monday 1st April** (No fooling!). It's also our **ANZAC Lunch** after the meeting, with partners invited to attend at 12 noon.
- **Monday 6th May, 3rd June, 1st July, 5th August, 2nd September, 14^h October** (due the previous Monday being the Labour Day public holiday), **4th November** and lastly, **2nd December**.

NOTE that we will continue our **NIGHT CHAPTER** meetings during 2019, but as at this time, dates are to be confirmed and will be advised.

Until next we meet, do have a Merry (and safe) Christmas and a healthy and Happy New Year.