



DISPATCHES

War Veterans Village (Narrabeen) RSL sub-Branch Newsletter

November 2025



Remembrance Day

November 11



*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

In this issue:

David Farthing's Address and Unit Citation

Remembrance Day - November 11

Christmas Lunch

Address label

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DISPATCHES

War Veterans Village
(Narrabeen) RSL sub-
Branch Newsletter

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Dispatches is published monthly by the
War Veterans Village RSL sub-Branch.

Opinions expressed are those of the
individual authors and not necessarily
those of the sub-Branch.

*Through an active membership we keep
the ANZAC spirit alive and growing.*

Dates for the diary:

Tuesday November 4: Committee meeting.

Tuesday November 11: Remembrance
Day.

Thursday November 13: Monthly meeting
in the Lone Pine Lounge at 9.30am,
followed by morning tea.

Thursday December 4: sub-Branch stall at
the Village Markets - will members please
think about baking cakes, slices, biscuits,
etc., to make this a successful promotion
and fundraiser.

Thursday December 11: Christmas lunch.
Details appear on page 3 of this newsletter.

Thursday December 25: Happy Christmas!
*So that meetings can commence at 09.30
sharp members are asked to arrive, collect
their badge, sign in and get their raffle
tickets prior to the meeting time.*

Remembrance Day fundraising appeal

There will be a pop-up table selling a tasteful range of poppies,
badges and lapel pins adjacent to the large-print library in the
Gallipoli Building from 10.00am to 2.00pm on Saturday 8 and
Sunday 9 November.

A number of new lapel pins and favourites like the Three-
dimensional Poppy pin will be on offer.

Funds raised will support the activities of the War Vets RSL sub-
Branch.



Cash or card accepted



Ballpoint pen, sell at \$5.00



Nurses lapel pin, sell at \$8.00



From the Editor

The November edition of *Dispatches* has been a new experience. I
am penning, or at least typing, these words on September 25, five
or six weeks before they will be read.

Last month, following a number of requests, we read the text of
the inspiring speech given by Col David Wilkins OAM at the Village
Vietnam Veterans' Day service. This issue features the words of an
equally inspirational address, by an equally inspirational man,
CDRE David Farthing DSC RAN, a member of our own sub-Branch.

Other content includes the second part of a profile of our
President, Geoff Seis. It makes interesting reading.

For the first time we have a literature page. Keith Boog was getting
bored with hospital life in early September, so put pen to paper -
the result is on page 8.

I will be in Scotland when you read this; England begins on the
18th. Captain Cook Society conference on the 24-25th; 388th
annual dinner of the Ancient Society of College Youths
(bellringing), Rugby test at Twickenham and lots of military history
for future newsletters. Somebody has to do it! *Ralph*

Address by Commodore DD Farthing DSC RAN Rtd

To NSW Jewish Ex-Servicemen at the Jewish Museum,
11 November 2001

On Remembrance Day 2001 I am especially honoured to be speaking in this hallowed place and especially pleased to have been invited to speak by my close friend and mentor, Wesley Browne.



Remembrance Day is a time when we remember the sacrifices of all who have served their country in war and particularly those who have made the supreme sacrifice. It is not a glorification of war, but a tribute to the human spirit; the capacity of ordinary human beings to rise to extraordinary heights to put aside self-interest and to triumph over the horrors of war.

It is particularly appropriate to think of these things on this day as we once again have our military forces and those of our allies engaged in the difficult and we believe just cause against international terrorism. We pray that all those involved may return safely to their homes, having achieved their difficult task.

On this day I wanted to tell you briefly about my war in Vietnam, now more than 30 years ago, although it often seems like yesterday.

Many Australians are not aware that for four years the Royal Australian Navy had a helicopter flight in country in Vietnam; that is from August 1967 until June 1971.



Prime Minister Holt had indicated to President Johnson that Australia wanted to do more in the Vietnam War. The United States had a desperate need for helicopter pilots and the RAN was the only service which had a surplus of trained pilots due to a slippage in a programme for introduction of a new helicopter. Thus, we had the quite unique circumstance of fifty Australian sailors being integrated into the US Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company, comprising a total of 300 men and thirty helicopters.

It is useful at this stage to recall the scale of operations in Vietnam. When we arrived in Vietnam in September of 1969 there were 550,000 US troops on the ground and over 1,000,000 South Vietnamese under arms. Of course the Australian contribution was quite miniscule – never more than 10,000 men in total – but the moral support to the US was of great importance at the time.

Our little Company was part of the First Aviation Brigade – the largest organisation of its type in the history of warfare with 30,000 men and 3,000 aeroplanes. The Australian contribution to that Company, small though it was, was of great importance.

The US conscript army had run out of appropriately trained people and the Australians, who were all highly trained professional servicemen, provided leadership, professionalism and technical support. The consequence of that contribution was that the 135th, nicknamed the 'Emus', not because they couldn't fly but standing for Experimental Military Unit, quickly earned the reputation as the elite aviation unit in the Delta of South Vietnam.

Whenever there was a critical battle in the Delta, the cry went up 'send for the emus'.

Our daily task was to fly in support of South Vietnamese. A typical day would see us getting up at about 4.00am and after a brief check of our aircraft and breakfast we would depart before dawn from our base at Bearcat, about 25 miles northeast of Saigon to our operational areas in the Delta.

*Bearcat base.
AWM image*



We would take eight troop carrying helicopters called Slicks, one command and control helicopter and three gun ships in a typical mission. The eight Slicks and the troop carrying helicopters were sufficient to carry a full infantry company and to land them in assault formation.

The command and control helicopter would fly overhead controlling the whole operation and would often have a senior Army Commander on board. The three gun ships, which were heavily armed helicopters, provided covering fire during the difficult phases of the assault and eventual retraction of troops.

Typically we would fly an early morning assault against an enemy position – this might involve four hours or so flying – we would then stand by at an airfield somewhere in the Delta – on call for any action – and then late in the day we would extract those same troops that we had inserted in the morning and take them back to their home base.

Having departed our base at Bearcat at say 5.00am, we often would not return until midnight or thereabouts that night. We would often fly twelve hours in a day. I think my longest personal day was 14 hours and 55 minutes.

As I said earlier, our operational area was the Delta of South Vietnam – lots of rice paddies which were flooded in the wet season and dry and dusty in the dry season – lots of branches and forks of the Mekong River and patches of heavily wooded country. The Delta was the most densely populated part of South Vietnam and the source of its economic strength as it was the greatest rice producer in Southeast Asia.



A Bell Iroquois helicopter, now in the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Nowra.

We were constantly in combat and it was quite common to have fifteen of our thirty helicopters in the Company grounded because of battle damage. Our team became very good indeed at patching up damaged helicopters and getting them flying again.

Because of the nature of the War and the fact that there were no defined front lines, we were constantly under threat. Often we would receive fire as we left from our home base early in the morning and there were no truly secure areas. We were always aware that we could come under fire at any time. When not in operations we used to fly above 1,500 feet because the doctrine was that above that height you were safe from more small armed fire from the ground. However, Lieutenant Commander Pat Vickers, second in command of the 1st Flight, was killed by an AK47 round when transiting above 1,500 feet and so we were never really safe anywhere in our operational area.

Of course, as in any war, we had our lighthearted moments. Towards the end of my tour, we had to move our Company base from Bearcat up to the northeast of Saigon down to Dong Tam in the Delta. In my dual role as CO of the Australian contingent and as Executive Officer of the overall Company, I saw it as my duty to be last out from Bearcat when the Company evacuated. As a result, instead of flying down to Dong Tam I came out in the Company jeep with a couple of Australian sailors for escort armed with M16 rifles with a trailer on the back bringing the last of the things that we wanted to move.

After we had passed through Saigon and were moving on Highway 15, which is the main road down into the Delta, we came to an area about 40 miles south of Saigon where there was an enormous thicket of giant bamboo. Now every day of the War we had taken automatic fire from this thicket of bamboo and of course as a result in our helicopters we used to avoid the area, as there was no need to go there.

But in my jeep of course Highway 15 went straight past it and so I said to my two sailors “cock your weapons, eyes out looking” and then proceeded to go as fast as the little jeep would go, which was about seventy miles an hour.

So here we are in this dangerous area going lickety split in the jeep, weapons cocked, eyes out and alert, and an American Military Police Sergeant stepped out from this very thicket, held up his hand and pulled me over and proceeded to book me for speeding. I think the speed limit in South Vietnam was probably fifty miles an hour.

Anyway, I said to this Sergeant, “Sergeant, you don’t seem to realise that you are in one of the most dangerous areas of the Delta and as soon as you’ve finished this nonsense and given me this ticket I intend to be speeding again”. I didn’t wait to get his reaction to that, but I hope he had enough sense to then go home.

Another funny incident arising from the extraordinary circumstances of this War happened at a little provincial town called Vinh Long. As I told you, we usually were on stand by in the middle of the day sitting at some airfield and that we would then eat our American K rations which were uniformly awful and if we were lucky, a Vietnamese peddler would bring out a basket full of French bread sticks, baguettes, and sell them to us.

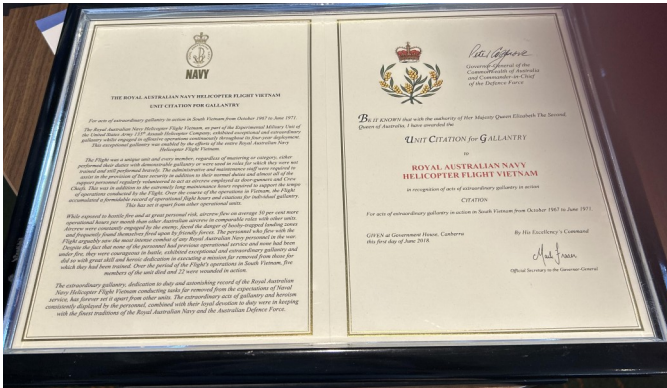
However on this day the Vietnamese commander, Colonel Du, invited me to take lunch with him and he indicated a place to land my helicopter, which happened to be right in the middle of Highway 15, which as I said earlier is the main road in the Delta, and during the day was always bumper to bumper with traffic.

I pointed this out to him but he said not to worry, his troops would direct traffic. So I parked my helicopter as directed and went into a ramshackle Vietnamese restaurant on the banks of the Mekong and had a quite exquisite ten-course luncheon.

When we came out from the restaurant of course we were confronted by the biggest traffic jam you have ever seen anywhere and I really felt that that was one day we hadn’t done much to win the hearts of the South Vietnamese people! *To be continued.*

Citation

Those fortunate enough to hear David Farthing speak at the March general meeting will recall that he displayed the "Unit Citation for Gallantry to ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY HELICOPTER FLIGHT VIETNAM"



The wording of the Citation read:

For acts of extraordinary gallantry in action in South Vietnam from October 1967 to June 1971.

The Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam unit of the United States Army 135th Assault Helicopter Company exhibited exceptional and extraordinary gallantry while engaged in offensive operations continuously throughout its four-year deployment. This exceptional gallantry was enabled by the efforts of the entire Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam.

The flight was a unique unit and every member, regardless of mastering or category, either performed their duties with demonstrable gallantry or were used in roles for which they were not trained and still performed bravely.

The administrative and maintenance staff were required to assist in the provision of base security in addition to their normal duties and almost all of the support personnel regularly volunteered to act as door-gunners and Crew Chiefs.

This was in addition to the extremely long maintenance hours required to support the tempo of operations conducted by the Flight. Over the course of the operations in Vietnam, the Flight accumulated a formidable record of operational flight hours and citations for individual gallantry. This has set it apart from other operational units.

While exposed to hostile fire and great personal risk, air crew flew an average 30% more operational hours per month than other Australian aircrew in comparable roles with other units. Aircrew were constantly engaged by the enemy, faced the danger of booby-trapped landing zones and frequently found themselves fired upon by friendly forces. The personnel who flew with the Flight arguably saw the most intense combat of any Australian Navy personnel in the war. Despite the fact that none of the personnel had previous operational service and none had been under fire, they were courageous in battle, exhibited exceptional and extraordinary gallantry and did so with great skill and heroic dedication in executing a mission far removed from those for which they had been trained. Over the period of the Flight's operations in South Vietnam, five members of the unit died and 22 were wounded in action.

The extraordinary gallantry, dedication to duty and astonishing record of the Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam conducting tasks far removed from the expectations of naval service, has forever set it apart from other units. The extraordinary acts of gallantry and heroism consistently displayed by the personnel, combined with their loyal devotion to duty were in keeping with the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Defence Force.

The Citation was signed by the Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, with the authority of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second, Queen of Australia, on the first day of June, 2018.

The medals

When sub-Branch member David Farthing recited the Ode at the Village ANZAC service he proudly wore the medals shown below.

They are, from left to right:



- Distinguished Flying Cross (Vietnam 1962-1975)
- Australian Active Service Medal (1945-1975) with 2 bars
- General Service Medal (1962) with Malaya Peninsula bar
- Vietnam Medal (1964-1973)
- Australian Service Medal (1945-1975)
- Defence Force Service Medal, with four bars, each for 5 years
- National Medal - minimum 15 years of service
- Australian Defence Medal
- Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Malaysian Service Medal - *Pingat Jasa Malaysia*
- Distinguished Flying Cross - awarded by the USA
- United States Air Medal - V-clasp indicates earned in combat
- South Vietnamese Gallantry Cross - with Silver Star



President Geoff Seis

(Continued from the October edition)

Back home, with the 17th Construction Squadron, in 1992 they were off to Weipa to build Scherger RAAF airfield, turning bushland into a bitumen runway, roads, hangars, and hard standing for buildings and a tent-

city.

In 1998 the project was finished; the machinery was moved to Weipa to be barged to Karumba, in the lower Gulf, from where it was moved on by military and civilian transport. Geoff was last to leave, driving an International semi-trailer pulling a sixty-tonne float with a water-tanker trailer.

He had no sooner got home than he had to go straight onto fire control at Holsworthy Range with the water-tanker, in support of the RFS. Then at last some time off with his young family.

Back at work, the following year the Unit moved machinery to South Australia for a three-month Indigenous housing project in Oak Valley, and then to Docker River, NT, for a further four months. Then, in October, came East Timor. Geoff's service there was brief - a bad fall necessitated medical attention back at home.

Finally, in 2000, came a long-term posting - sixteen years in total at the School of Military Engineering, Moorebank, as an earth-moving operator, instructor and then as Maintenance Manager. During this time Geoff also worked at IRR Holsworthy and 19th Chief Engineer Works at Randwick, as a plant operator and semi-trailer driver.

It was back to the School of Military Engineering in 2010, but this time as a member of the civilian staff in the plant yard, following his discharge from the Army. In 2014 he left the system altogether.

During this time, from 2000, Geoff also drove semi-trailers for the nearby Buttercup Bakeries, doing bulk loads to Canberra, Newcastle and Bathurst. Later Moorebank to Melbourne with loads of bricks, returning with stand-up concrete wall panels for high-rise building.

While at Buttercup Geoff was a member of the Army Reserve 21st Construction Regiment. In 2016 ill health forced retirement from the workforce.

Geoff's life went downhill for a while. He had endured a bad divorce back in 2010, but the children stayed with him until 2016, when PTSD, depression and anxiety disorders kicked in, forcing complete retirement.

Living in Homes for Heroes, unfit and with no medical support, things improved when he found a good doctor at the TLC here in the Village. He moved to Beersheba. But things got even worse - Geoff underwent heart surgery in 2018.

In 2019 he returned to Gulgong to help out family members on their properties; at the same time doing odd jobs around there and in Mudgee. Bad luck continued: in 2022, after hard time with a then lady friend.

Geoff was living in a caravan at the Showground with his Kelpie Bozo.

Having found no doctors suitable available in Mudgee, he would travel to Mosman to see his old doctor.

Then, in 2023, Geoff 'bit the bullet' as he says - he made contact again with the Village and was accepted to move back in to Beersheba. There, among other things, he builds amazing Lego models, some of which were displayed at the Village Expo a few months ago.

Geoff has turned his life towards helping fellow soldiers. Our War Vets RSL sub-Branch President has led a full life indeed.

"Into a safe heaven"

Remembrance Day

The 11th hour; the 11th day; the 11th month; 1918; the guns fell silent. A time sacred ever since.

Fighting ceased on the Western Front, after four years of continuous conflict.

Germany's leaders signed an armistice - a suspension of hostilities. For two decades afterwards this date was called Armistice Day in commemoration, honouring those who had laid down their lives and those who had served.

After the Second World War the Australian Government, in agreement with the United Kingdom, changed the name to Remembrance Day, allowing the Day to remember those lost in all wars and conflicts.

The War did not end on November 11; that would come only with the signing on June 28 1919 of the Treaty of Versailles, which not only brought the Great War to a formal close, but imposed onerous conditions on the loser.

These conditions, many historians maintain, led inevitably to another War twenty years later. Our own Prime Minister, William Morris 'Billy' Hughes played an important role, as was only appropriate after the loss of 60,000 of his countrymen.

Total deaths from the British 'Empire' were almost 700,000, with 2.5 million wounded. Even those figures are dwarfed when civilian losses are included - an estimated 15-22 million died in the 'War to end all Wars'.



Keith Boog sent this poem to *Dispatches* while he was in hospital:

The Tour 8RAR '69 – 70'

We left our shores '69', not knowing our fate at that time,
We were young and spirited, full of life
This journey of ours would lead to strife.
The day had come to say goodbye, from airports and
wharves, the flag did fly.
Family and friends showed us much love, with tears in
their eyes, they looked above.
As jets flew past, with such a roar.
Would it be the last time they saw,
Brothers, fathers, leaving for war?

As the distance gathered between them and us, we
looked at each other while all the fuss?"
Heading to a land far away, to an unknown war, to this day.
The Reg's, the Nashos as one, carrying their packs and
a brand new gun.

After days at sea and owls in the air, we arrived, glad to
be there.
Looking in amazement at what we saw, this was the
beginning of our tour.
As we move to our base at Nui Dat, armoured vehicles
are to our back.
The war was near; it could be seen. I heard a bang - the
truck did lean.
"How close was that?" My mate did say, his safety
reassured without delay.

On arrival at Base Nui Dat, I settled into my new flat.
Metal bed, metal locker, this old tent was a real shocker!
Wooden pellets for the floor, mouldy sandbags around
the wall.
Home from home, let's not complain, the mud, the
heat and the continuous rain.
14 days in country, the task at hand, Operation Phuoc
Tuy over vast land.
The initial patrols were five days long, the Hamlets, the
bunkers around Hao Long.

Protecting the farmers during the day, ambushing at
night without delay.
Six months in country, and operations grew long, five
weeks at a time chasing Viet Cong.
Day after day, the hardships are abundant, the killing
and the wounding, and the shouting is loud.
Patrols continue around Xuyen Moc and Dat Do. The
pain and the suffering of mates I know.
Back in lines another op completed, a beer in hand
and a weight off my feet.
It doesn't last long, that's for sure. 10 days later, back
for more.

As the months go on, nothing has changed. Hopefully,
home can soon be arranged.
With casualties mounting and unrest at home, this tele-
vision war can't leave us alone.
Eleven months my tour, I lost what's happening mate
after mate, 18 in total—this war I do hate.
The day has come, the news is here, 350 days in country,
and the end is near!

Finally, to leave this god forsaken place, the excitement
could be seen on everyone's face.
We had served our "country" as requested, we fought
and toiled and never rested.
By air and sea, we left for home, together as one and
never alone.
We were brothers in arms to say the least, the mates we
lost,
May they rest in peace.

On arrival home, no words of (war) were spoken, some
bruised, some battered,
with spirits broken.
Family and friends gave us their support, despite little
knowledge of the war we fought.
With pain and anger in my heart, I longed for the day
and a fresh new start.

Lest we forget

"To live in the present, negates the past."

A Poem for Remembrance Day

The inquisitive mind of a child.

Why are they selling poppies, Mummy?
Selling poppies in town today.
The poppies, child, are flowers of love.
For the men who marched away.

But why have they chosen a poppy, Mummy?
Why not a beautiful rose?
Because my child, men fought and died
In the fields where the poppies grow.

But why are the poppies so red, Mummy?
Why are the poppies so red?
Red is the colour of blood, my child.
The blood that our soldiers shed.



The heart of the poppy is black, Mummy.
Why does it have to be black?
Black my child, is the symbol of grief.
For the men who never came back.
But why, Mummy are you crying so?
Your tears are giving you pain.
My tears are fears for you my child.
For the world is forgetting again. *Author Unknown.*
<https://anzacday.org.au/a-poem-for-remembrance-day>

*Jan Slater and Peter Yardley recently gave me some
copies of 2023 Dispatches, edited by my predecessor
Doug Smyth, who is currently unwell.*

*Doug published this evocative poem two
years ago. Please think of Doug as you read
it ... Ed*