

## NATIONAL PRESIDENTS REPORT



It is that time of year again when I wish all members the compliments of the season. This has been a successful year for the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) and I hope all members felt that way with their lives and are looking forward to an even better year ahead.

We must all remain positive and continue to achieve outcomes for improved lifestyles.

Since the last edition of Debrief there was an election that saw both a new Minister for Veteran Affairs, The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP and the opposition spokesperson Senator Michael Ronaldson appointed. I have had meetings with both to draw their attention to our current issues. Not in order of priority I raised the matter of proper indexation of DFRDB/DFRBF & Com-Super, Erosion of Disability Pension and findings of the various reviews that are being or have been undertaken. Among those are the review of Pharmaceuticals, BEST/TIP DVA Funded Advocacy Services and Military Rehabilitation Compensation Act. I emphasised that this association was anxious to see results from these reviews and was concerned in fact that we demand that the association is consulted in any changes to services etc that arise as a result of these reviews.

In the last week of October I was invited to participate in a two day Think Tank convened by the Centre for Military and Veteran Health (CMVH). The event subject was "Readjustment to "Normal": How can DVA and Defence Help". It all revolved around what are the re-adjustment challenges facing serving members and their families, how do they find the programs and services available, and what are the gaps. To assist in the panel discussions and workshops around all this along with a few ESOs were personnel from CMVH, service providers, Defence and DVA. Another group were a Battalion Commander and RSM, Reservist all from Army, two Officers from the RAAF and two from the RAN. They were to assist in panel discussion around retaining people in service. As well injured/impaired serving members were also in attendance to identify their experience and assist with finding gaps. These panel discussions were very interesting and went on for over half the first day.

After those workshops there was a keynote address LTCOL (Dr) Rakesh Jetly on a Canadian perspective on adjustment issues, what the current strategies are in dealing with them, and what the challenges are.

He obviously spoke on the Canadian experience from their, like Australia's, problems from operational tempo. Further discussion panels concluded day one.

Day two reviewed the work and then considered the outcomes. The most important issues were noted. Further working parties developed strategies for improving adjustment support as it related to the issues.

The main finding was that although Defence has a decompression period after a deployment because of the operational tempo the service person does not return to normal because of the expectation of the next deployment. Opinion was that they come down around half-way to a position decided to be a "new normal". CMVH will write a paper for Defence on the outcomes from this forum.

It is pleasing to see that these research bodies like the CMVH acknowledge the input this association can have in the situations now being experienced by the young servicepersons of today. So we continue to have influence and work hard to improve services to our constituents and those serving now. Along with this we are becoming the point of contact for the younger generation in assisting them with claims.

For those on the road who may be travelling near Phillip Island I recommend that you take the time to call in at the National Vietnam Museum. The changes there really show why it has won tourism awards.

Ron Coxon

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