

VVAG - VIETNAM VETERANS ACTION GROUP



From the desk of the Secretary.

MEDIA RELEASE Wednesday, 23 April 2008

REASONS WHY VVAG, WAI 1401 & MAJORITY OF VIETNAM VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE SEEKING SOME SORT OF RECOGNITION

A unique group of young/fit Tri-Service men and women were ordered by the NZ Government to go and fight a war in South Vietnam. About 3285 (?) men and women were sent during the period 1965 – 1975 (some Veterans doing several tours) in doing this, 39 Veterans lost their lives during the war.

How were these Veterans rewarded on their return to NZ? By returning during the hours of darkness under a cloud of silence and secrecy. Then came the ostracisation and condemnation by the RNZRSA and the civilian population, the failure of the Government to give us a proper medical treatment just to name some of the major issues that we had to deal with.

Some 40 years later, the Veteran is still seeking recognition for their unique service carried out on the orders the Government. Why is this happening? Below are just a few brief facts on this matter:

1. The NZ Govt refused to recognise that they sent Veterans into a War Zone
2. They refused for 30 years (+) to acknowledge that Veterans were sprayed with Agent Orange and other defoliant chemicals and we lived 24/7 in this Toxic environment. Clothes, food, drink and shower water was all contaminated with dioxin. Phuoc Tuy Province, where the majority of NZ Veterans were based, was the worst sprayed area in Vietnam. Almost the entire province was sprayed with a combination of Agent Orange, Agent White and the Arsenic based Agent Blue, to name some of them. There were 31 chemicals in total, used in Vietnam many with deadly side effects as well as the experimental use of Dapsone which has synergistic side effects.
3. The NZ Government allowed the manufacture of the herbicide 24D/245T known as Agent Orange which had unacceptable levels of the deadly Dioxin TCCD to be sent by them to Vietnam using their own RNZAF aircrafts.
4. The Government knew in the 1960's on how these Dioxins affected people and their future generations. The scientists have stated that the Dioxin TCCD is an unnecessary bi product in the production of the herbicide 24D/245T known as Agent Orange is the most deadly poison known to man and the effects are intergenerational and can last hundreds of years.
5. Government Ministers and high profile Businessmen were shareholders and some were on the Board of the Chemical Companies that made the Herbicides. The Dioxin

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TCCD is an unnecessary bi-product in the production of the herbicide 24D/245T by heating it up and producing it too fast. The German Firm, Bohringer Sohn perfected a method that could produce the herbicide without the dioxin or at least with minute traces. So the Chemical Companies were aware of this and don't say they did not know the side effects. Dr Mann and Professor Elliot released documentation to the NZ public in 1971 on the birth defects associated with dioxin poisoning.

6. The study done at the Massey University under the Professor Al Rowland's several years ago confirmed that all the Vietnam Veterans tested had DNA damage and it's reasonable to assume that all Vietnam Veterans to some degree have genetic damage amongst the many other life threatening health issues. The Majority of reported Vietnam Veterans deaths are either from Cancer or Heart issues. PTSD/suicide accounts for most of the remaining reported deaths.
7. The NZ Defence Department knew about the purging of medical documents from returning Veterans and did nothing about it.
8. NZ was the only allied Country that made their Veterans pay tax.
9. Government admitted that the "Reeves & McLeod Reports were based on false information. There has been continual collusion and cover up between Chemical Companies and Governments to deny the effects of Dioxin (TCCD) poisoning, and it is only very recently because of the overwhelming evidence that is now available that the NZ Government has been forced into accepting that there are many serious and life threatening health issues for the Vietnam Veterans and their families with the Dioxin poisoning. The wives/partners and children of the Vietnam Veteran are being in some cases seriously affected. Too many have died unnecessarily.
10. The Report of the Health Select Committee re inquiry into exposure of Agent Orange and other defoliant chemicals, printed in October 2004, stated an open admission of guilt by the Government.

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11. The Government were still allowing the manufacturing of the herbicide until 1987, some 17 years after it was banned in the USA. Why? When there were known serious health issues? VANZ was not promulgated until the late 1980's.
12. Parade 98, run by the EVSA, was done to try and quell the ill feeling. This didn't work.
13. Tribute 08 is where the Govt and the Defence Dept are to make a formal apology to the Veterans and their families for all their wrong doings. Why is it then that the Veteran has to pay to register to attend Tribute 08? Whose fault is this? The EVSA are according to the Minister Rick Barker are responsible for the entire running of Tribute 08 and the Government only gave \$1,000,000 to help as a part of the MOU.

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14. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was released December 2006. It was a start, although most of the Vietnam Veterans were unaware of its existence or the signing of same until after it was released. The MOU was kept secret and never discussed with either the Vietnam Veteran membership of both the RNZRSA or the EVSA. This upset many of the affected Veterans and family members who received nothing from the MOU.
15. The worst part of this entire fiasco is that the NZ Government have been fully aware of the life threatening health issues for decades and are only now looking after about 1% of affected persons.
16. It was because of this that it was decided by a Group of disaffected Vietnam Veterans to form the Vietnam Veterans Action Group (VVAG). There are currently over 200 veterans and about 500 family members and the list is growing all the time as Veterans and family members become aware of what VVAG is trying to achieve. As the NZ Government, RNZRSA and the EVSA would not talk to VVAG and discuss the very important health issues it was decided that to proceed any further that we would need to seek legal advice. A Waitangi claim was filed, WAI 1401. Investigation is currently under way by the legal team who believe we have a good case.
17. The Vietnam Veterans and their families have been severely disadvantaged in the fact that we have been Sprayed and Betrayed by our own Government and Ostracisation from the RNZRSA and the New Zealand Public for doing the job the Government sent us to do.

These are only some of the facts relating to this matter.

The above information can be corroborated and is available on request or visit the VVAG website

www.vvanz.com or the many websites that deal with Agent Orange/Dioxin poisoning and Toxic chemicals issues.

How can this be resolved?

1. The MOU only assisted about 1% of the Veteran community, leaving 99% still suffering from Dioxin related conditions and still dying at a rate of one Veteran every 9-10 days.
2. Update the War Pension Rate to coincide with the 21st Century.
3. Look at a medical card system, similar to the Australian Gold Card, for Veterans health.
4. The Tax paid back estimated with interest whilst in theatre (\$8000 - \$10000).
5. Recognise the War Widows and their Dependants through an adequate pension and associated benefits including a health card to cover all their health issues.
6. Recognise the future generations.

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7. A lot of Veterans and their families are in desperate situations and are just hanging on to the last of their pride and dignity. Don't make them lose that dignity and have them beg for money etc that, rightfully, should be theirs.
8. Vietnam Veterans should not have to beg, borrow or steal for something they did to protect the whole of New Zealand. \$1M has been earmarked for the running of Tribute 08 and yet the Veteran still has to pay. : -- Remove and refund the registration fee.
9. Some form of ex gratia payment to be made to all Vietnam Veterans with disabilities from attributable war service and recognised by VANZ. \$1000.00 per % point of accepted disability up to 100% and anyone on a section 23 up to 160%. Those that have already received a payment to be topped up to this level.

New documentation is being produced every other day.

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Please come clean and show leadership and fix these problems you have either ignored or refused to recognise. The MOU is only helping about 1% of affected persons what about the other 99%?

There are not many Vietnam Veterans left. It appears that the Government are waiting for us all to die as the AOJWG submissions have been embargoed for 30 years when we will all be dead.

Just looking at the facts set out above, you would not think that the NZ Government would want this to go to Court. The RNZRSA and the EVSA seem to control what is given to the Vietnam Veteran. The failure of the Executive of both organisations in not letting their members have a say and discuss the issues in the MOU is reflected very clearly in that only about 1% of affected persons are receiving any ex gratia payments. Let the Veteran have his say in these things. There are many Vietnam Veterans who will have nothing to do with the RNZRSA because of past performance and the MOU has not helped their cause either. With Vietnam Veterans having to pay the \$95.00 registration fee, why with the \$1,000,000 given to the EVSA according to the Minister Rick Barker as a part of the MOU, should the Vietnam Veterans have to pay anything? This is proving to be a sore point with the Vietnam Veterans and many are not attending because of this and this is certainly not doing the EVSA image any good after the MOU fiasco. There are a few Vietnam Veterans that will be attending to see their mates and will not pay the \$95.00 for the privilege. What's going to happen then? You can bet your bottom dollar that if there is any sign of rejection to those that chose to be with their mates it will be an embarrassing public relations disaster if any action is taken against them.

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Any Vietnam Veteran or their family wishing to support what VVAG is endeavouring to achieve may do so by visiting to our website www.vvanz.com and download the registration forms.

Anyone wishing to support VVAG can donate to the Westpac Levin account: ---
Account name: --- Vietnam Veterans Action Group (VVAG)
Account number including the BSB is 03 56793 00

Australian Kiwi Vietnam Veteran Residents and Supporters

Commonwealth Bank Nerang Branch
Account name Vietnam Veterans Action Group (VVAG)
BSB 06 4451
Account number 1 0316809

The Executive of VVAG takes this opportunity to thank the membership of VVAG and to take this public announcement as recognition of their support. An update news letter will sent out to those members that who do not have an email address.

The Executive and Members of VVAG thank everyone for their support

Disclaimer

It is not the intention of the Vietnam Veterans Action Group (VVAG) to hinder what has been achieved by the EVSA, RNZRSA and the NZ Government and nor should the actions of VVAG interfere or disrupt the current process, rather bring to the attention of the respective parties the concerns and issues not being effectively dealt with for all Vietnam Veterans and their families.