

Queensland Vietnam Veterans Visit Sitrep.

I have not long returned from a most interesting and informative week in Queensland meeting and talking to our Queensland Vietnam Veteran brothers. Both New Zealand born and Australian born members are represented in the Queensland Vietnam Veterans Association, which is a sub branch of the Australian Vietnam Veterans association.

Escorted by the ex Secretary and Queensland State delegate to the National Conference my host Bruce Weir, I was invited to the State meeting of the executive and sub branch delegates held in Stanthorpe. From the acclaim afforded Bruce it was evident he is a member in high standing within the Australian Vietnam Veteran community for his work to advance the betterment of Vietnam Veterans. I was shown a number of presentations made to him to this effect.

The keynote speaker was Mr Ken Donald (and his deputy). Mr Donald is a most distinguished academic and the chair of the Australian Medical Authority. (The RMA) Also in attendance was the Queensland State Government senior official for War Pension matters.

Ken Donald is held in great esteem by the veterans and the Government and is currently serving his third (at the bequest of the veterans) and he states firmly - his final term - as chair of the RMA. With out exception all veterans I spoke to were in awe of his work and support. This was underlined by the tribute paid to him by Mr. John Smith President of the Q.V.V.A.

An ex Wallaby – Mr Donald is the Head of the Queensland School of Mental Medicine at the Queensland University and was Chancellor of the Q.U.

The RMA is the Australian structure that deals with claims from Vietnam veterans.

Simply put the system operates under a pre approved or accepted prescriptive “Statement of Principals” (SOP) bases. I would point out here that the view of the meeting - and the wider veteran community in Australia - as reported at the meeting, are staunch advocates for this clear cut approach. Ken Donald and his deputy along with many others have copies of the Law Commission Paper and the RNZRSA response. See page 17 through 19 of their submission.

This meeting in particular exposed a number of myths surrounding pension matters and the requisite criteria applicable in Australia. Suffice to say from the outset that a lot of what we have been led to understand is not all together correct.

A material advantage inherent with the RMA is that the list of accepted conditions is extensive. There are several hundred in fact - soundly documented and under the BEGNIGN governance of the RMA. No political impute.

Importantly and a point that dispels some of the myths is that the RMA undertakes all of the work on behalf of the veteran.

- The RMA methodology searches the existing data base for the disability. If it is there the Vietnam Veterans claim is accepted. A timely and efficient delivery of service to the veteran. No stress.
- If after the initial search nothing is found, the RMA undertakes a systematic review of the presumptive conditions seeking one that they may align the claim with.
- This latter step again exposes a myth. The RMA does this with the **“Reverse onus of Proof “** principal uppermost in mind.
- Most of time this is successful. The RMA then makes an addendum under their delegated authority to the SOP’s and the Vietnam Veterans claim is accepted. Again a timely and efficient delivery of service to the veteran. No stress.
- In the event that the nature of the ailment continues to escape the diligent attention of the RMA, they undertake the next step. **Not the veteran.**

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- The RMA initiates research on behalf of the claimant veteran. The RMA looks for relevant information that may be best used to support the claim. Applying the **“Reverse onus of Proof “**
- This is generally the case when a new condition is involved. The more claims for an identical condition the easier this is. Otherwise the legal principal of “Precedent” applies
- The presumptive schedule of conditions continues to grow and is concrete discipline for dealing with Vietnam Veteran claims.
- Delivering the best of both the presumptive approach and the discretionary approach in a most cost effective manner.

In summary:

- Medical Documentation is presented that a condition exists.
- The RMA searches the data base for the condition.
- The claim is accepted or the RMA undertakes to find supporting evidence.
- The RMA is
 - ✓ Transparent
 - ✓ Speedy
 - ✓ Consistent
 - ✓ Efficient
 - ✓ Cost effective
 - ✓ Not open to bureaucratic interference
 - ✓ Able to meet ongoing new and remerging veteran needs.
 - ✓ Non stressful to the Vietnam Veteran

For those who are interested I will continue the report covering off different issues like:

- Australian Vietnam Veteran entitlements
- Australian Vietnam Veteran pensions
- The influence of Agent Orange
- Legal and advocacy support
- Vietnam Veteran Action Group
- P.T.S.D.