

# RICOCHET

Monthly newsletter of VVAA Sunshine Coast Sub-Branch Inc. MAY 2025

## ANZAC challenge to young

Young people were asked on Anzac Day if they would feel the same way as veterans if called upon to defend our freedoms and way of life.

"Those young men exhibited loyalty, mateship, courage and endurance because they thought that what they were fighting for was worth the sacrifice," guest speaker Colonel Gordon Hurford AM, MID (Retd), a Vietnam War veteran, told them at the main Maroochydore service at the Cotton Tree Cenotaph. "Perseverance and

persistence in the face of rejection are symbols of true courage. Do you have the courage?

"Please do not think that ANZAC Day in any way glorifies war. It is about honouring ordinary people who were asked to do extraordinary things for their country and they did so to the very best of their ability and at a significant personal cost.

"We must not forget those who went to war. We must remember those who died. We must honour

them. We must not forget the example they showed us; we must maintain their spirit of sacrifice and commitment.

"We must not forget the terrible cost of war; we must learn from the past. We must all work for peace together. And we must not forget those who continue to serve at home and abroad.

"Our freedom came at a price so we honour their sacrifice. And please remember that our freedom only survives as long as you are willing to defend it. The veterans here today are testament to that.

"Today is a day for all of us – a day to remember with affection the courage of people and the value of friendship to honour the dead and to acknowledge those who still suffer from the effects of war.

**PICTURED: Guard members from 9RQR defy the conditions.**

- Continued page 3.



### OUR MISSION:

To assist ALL veterans and their dependents in all matters relating to their health, welfare and well-being.

Our website: [www.vietnamvetssc.org.au](http://www.vietnamvetssc.org.au)

Email: [secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com) Editor: [ricocheteditor@gmail.com](mailto:ricocheteditor@gmail.com)

General information Page 2 INCLUDING LATEST OFFICE NEWS

Veterans & Families Counselling

**OPEN ARMS**

**1800 011 046**



**VIETNAM VETERANS  
ASSN of AUSTRALIA  
SUNSHINE COAST  
SUB-BRANCH Inc.**

**PATRON:** Laurie Drinkwater (pictured)

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## DROP-IN-CENTRE

Located at the rear of the Library Complex Administration Building (upstairs) , Cnr Sixth Avenue and Beach Parade, Cotton Tree.

Phone 54794552 E-mail: [secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com)

**OPENING HOURS:** *Currently the office at the Drop-In Centre is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday ONLY from 0900 to 1200 (9am– noon).*

**MEETINGS:** *Third Tuesday of the month: Comm Meeting, General Meeting — times, check office for details.*

**ACCESS:** *Due to privacy and security issues, entry is no longer available via the back door, but only through the front door. However, if you need to use the lift in the main library building, you have to advise the office on phone 54794552 to arrange office entry.*

**POSH MEETINGS:** *Partners Offering Support and Hope meet Friday 1- 4pm in the meeting room beside the Drop in Centre. Coffee/tea/chat.*

### Department of Veterans' Affairs

## Veterans' Advice Network (VAN)

129 Horton Parade, Maroochydore, QLD 4558.

**Free call to Brisbane Office 1800 555 254**

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PO Box 1797, (or 129 Horton Parade) Maroochydore, QLD, 4558

This service provides counselling and support to all veterans of overseas conflicts. The families of Vietnam Veterans are also able to receive counselling through us. Group programmes include the Lifestyle Management Program (5 days live-in with partner) and the Heart Safe Program (12 month gym). Other therapeutic/educational groups are being planned for the Sunshine Coast.

**DISCLAIMER:** The committee of Vietnam Veteran Association of Australia Sunshine Coast Sub-Branch Inc. and its individual members take no responsibility for errors, omissions or inaccuracies in this newsletter, nor accept liability for any loss or damage suffered directly or indirectly from the use of information contained in this newsletter, and do not warrant that opinions published in this newsletter are necessarily the opinions held by the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, this Sub-branch or the Sub-branch Committee, including individual members.

**OUR MISSION:** To assist all veterans and their dependents in all matters relating to their health, welfare and well-being.



- from Page 1.

"We do not celebrate victory nor do we glorify war - we celebrate the human spirit - the ANZAC Spirit," he said.

Earlier Colonel Hurford said he had often been asked questions about ANZAC Day and recalled two of those most frequently asked: "Why is this the date for a national day of remembrance and what does the term 'ANZAC Spirit' mean".

"April 25 is of course the anniversary of the day Aus-

tralian and New Zealand troops landed at Gallipoli, 110 years ago," he said. However, this event in isolation doesn't seem enough to make this date significant and Gallipoli was not the first time that Australians had been in battle, nor the last, and it was by no stretch of the imagination, an outstanding success.

"Australians had previ-

ously fought in other wars before 1915 and Gallipoli was not solely an Australian battle. We landed and fought alongside troops from New Zealand, Britain, France, India and Newfoundland.

"What made Gallipoli different for Australia was that it was the first major battle we Australians fought as a nation. Soldiers from every state of the newly federated Australia volunteered and fought under one flag as Australians. What chiselled itself into our national soul was the sheer scale of casualties."

"They had no hesitation about the nobility of their cause, and they fought with great courage, skill and audacity.

"Gallipoli lasted eight months. The casualties were shocking – 8709 Australians and 2779 New Zealanders were killed; 24,653 were wounded. Gallipoli was a battle we lost, so why do we celebrate defeat.

"One answer is, I believe, that we never did set out to celebrate victory but we set out to honour the sacrifice that

# The ANZAC Spirit

had been made. Had we wanted to choose a victory, we had plenty of other opportunities in our military heritage," he said, referring to other battles in World War One and since up, to Afghanistan.

"We stand and dedicate ANZAC Day to the memory of those who fell in all wars."

He asked: "So, what is the ANZAC Spirit? To me, the ANZAC Spirit is a set of values and attitudes that are deeply ingrained in Australian and New Zealand culture, particularly associated with the Australian and New Zealand soldiers of World War I. It embodies qualities like endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour, and mateship, reflecting the spirit of sacrifice and resilience shown by the soldiers at Gallipoli and in subsequent conflicts.

"The ANZAC Spirit continues to be a source of pride and inspiration. It's a reminder of the sacrifices made by those who have served their country and a symbol of national resilience. The values of the ANZAC Spirit, such as mateship and courage, remain relevant in modern times, inspiring people to face challenges with determination and a sense of community.

"The Spirit of ANZAC is still seen today in times of crisis or hardship. During cyclones, floods, droughts and bushfires, Australians come together to rescue one another, to ease suffering, to provide food and shelter, to look after one another, and to let the victims of these disasters know they are not alone.

"This is exactly what the ANZACs did and it is clearly evident in so many ways today. Lest we Forget."



*Kurt Schirmer Photography*



**COLONEL Hurford with family on Anzac Day. ABOVE: RAAF Super Hornet flyover impressive despite the weather (Kurt Schirmer photo). More photos pages 6 and 7.**

## From the President

Hi Everyone,

Hope you are all safe and healthy. Well, another Anzac Day has come and gone already. Although the weather wasn't the best on the day, it did manage to clear up a bit later in the day but by then, I would imagine that most of you would have been safe and secure inside one of the many RSL Clubs here on the Coast having a sherbert of some sort or another.

I ended up attending the Mudjimba RSL Club's ceremony and what a great day it was. The Cenotaph in the park was absolutely packed and not a soul left when the rain started. MC on the day was Mr. Graeme Wong, the Club's President, who once again did an outstanding job of conducting the service. Sadly, I understand that this will be Graeme's last year as President of the Club and I/we wish him all the best in his future endeavours. I must also make mention of the Club's volunteer status which, in my mind, was nothing short of being somewhat remarkable. For a small Club, they all performed in a most prodigious team effort, and throughout the day, displayed a solid determination to ensure that all veterans and others present enjoyed a wonderful day. Well done Mudjimba RSL.

Reports from other members indicate that the Maroochy RSL also had an outstanding day, both at the Cenotaph ceremony and afterwards at the Club itself. I understand that there was 'standing room only' at the fellowship gather-

ing after the ceremonial service, and that numerous comments and remarks were made by those present indicating what an outstanding event it had been.

As a Director of the Maroochy RSL, I have been contacted by numerous members of that club who have offered their personal congratulations on the manner, and professionalism of the club's staff throughout both the ceremony itself, and the club's later activities. Well done Maroochy RSL.

Now back to Vietnam Veterans business. The latest update regarding our proposed move from the library building to the Maroochy RSL Hub (Sub-Branch) has 'sort of' been resolved. We will move into the Hub providing there is sufficient space available in the office that has been offered.

Over the next couple of weeks committee members will attend the Hub office and measure up exactly what we can or can't fit into the workplace provided. If it appears that we can fully continue to operate there, as we do now at the library, then the move will be on. We will try to keep you all informed as we progress.

Well, that's about it from me, stay safe and look after your health.

**Best Regards,  
Mick Howe,  
President.**



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## From the Secretary

Hi All,

Well, Easter has gone and the year is almost six months over. This means that the period of grace for renewing membership has almost expired.

Unfortunately, unfinancial members will soon be erased from the Financial List, the Ricochet List and the Email List.

If you have been a tad slow in renewing, please do so ASAP. This saves unnecessary time by the Membership Officer, Ricochet Editor and the Secretary removing details then having to reinsert them.

Incidentally, the life subscription has been very popular and is a good option for those who are members of multiple associations. One payment and that is it forever.

On another note, planning for Vietnam Veterans Day is off to a flying start. At least two groups are holding reunions in August and will joining us for the ceremony and luncheon.

An advertisement for Vietnam Veterans Day appears in this month's edition and will be updated over the following months.

Lunch tickets will be available from the DIC as from 1 June.

As usual, there will be a few raffles to help with the costs of the day. Currently, the prize pool is a bit down and any prize offers would be appreciated.

That's it from me

**Regards**

**John Cunnington**  
**Secretary**



## Remembering all in uniform

The silent battles faced by all in uniform — particularly the unseen toll of mental health struggles — were emphasised in an Anzac Day address by Senior Sergeant Brad Doolan at Bli Bli.

"In the past few weeks I've lost two of my friends — both in the blue uniform — who have lost their lives to suicide. They were dedicated, respected, and much-loved members of our policing family, our Queensland and Australian communities.

"The spirit of Anzac isn't just about war, it's about courage in the face of struggle, it's about loyalty, resilience, and it's about looking after your mate." — from **Sunshine Valley Gazette**.



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## ANZAC DAY

**DESPITE** heavy rainfall, thousands turned out across the Coast for Anzac Day (from left anti-clockwise) indoors at Bli Bli, wreaths at the Caloundra memorial, Afghanistan veteran and Maroochy RSL CEO Jason Scanes and Jacki, 207 Squadron RAAF Cadets at Mudjimba, and 102-year-old Navy and Coral Sea veteran Bill White with Long Tan veteran Laurie Drinkwater.



SC News photo



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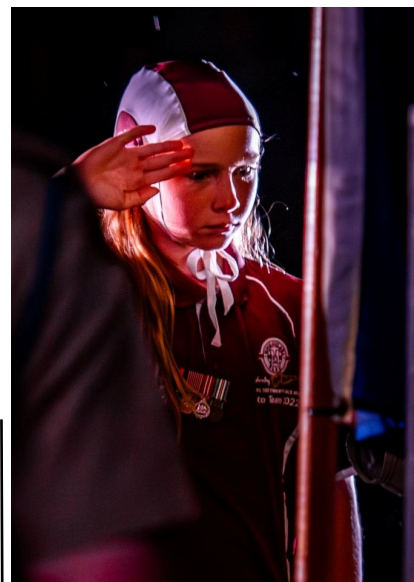
MOOLOOLABA

NOOSA





## LEST WE FORGET



**HEAVY** rain did not deter marchers at Maroochydore (above) and at other centres, but at Nambour (far left) floodwaters prevented any sort of service. The dawn service was still able to go on at Mooloolaba (left and below).



### Naval Association of Australia Maroochy Waters Sub Section

Once Navy - Always Navy, is the proud motto that underpins the fellowship spirit embodied in the Australian Naval Association's principles and in this same spirit, the Maroochy Waters Sub Section, extends its warm invitation to former personnel of the: RAN, RN, RNZN and the MERCHANT NAVY, to join our enthusiastic members for pleasant fellowship.

We are an accredited Not for Profit organisation committed to the support of worthwhile veteran and community welfare programmes.

If you have served in any of the above listed units, you and your family are welcome to join the comradeship of fellow, like-minded people, at our monthly social meetings at the RSL Branch office on Memorial Ave Maroochydore, opposite the RSL Club.

Enjoy, also, the quiet ambience of our museum of naval memorabilia containing a wealth of original artefacts, uniforms and models of naval ships used in conflict, all representing a worthy reminder of the contribution by the men and women in their military role of the Australian and Allied Navies through the years.

For further information on becoming a member of our association, with a proud naval heritage, please contact the Maroochy Waters Sub Section, Naval Association of Australia:

Bill Hayward, President, 0411 024 985, [bloggshayward@yahoo.com](mailto:bloggshayward@yahoo.com)  
Michael Wilson, Secretary, 0457 852 122, [michaelwilson1@bigpond.com](mailto:michaelwilson1@bigpond.com)



**THANKS TO Sunshine Coast News and other photographers for photos used in our coverage. Weather intervened and we have not been able to present our usual coverage of regional Anzac Day events. Many, of course were cancelled.**



My, how time flies? Having Easter, with two Public Holiday's on following Fridays makes it go even faster. Plus making contact with an old (not so old, really) friend makes it appear even longer.

But first, Easter. Wasn't it really heart-warming to see so many church car parks so full, both on Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

Think of the large numbers of worshippers inside the churches, all coming to worship and praise the reason we celebrate Easter.

Jesus Christ, badly bruised and in a borrowed tomb, then raised to new life on the Sunday. Where else but the Scriptures would we find such an amazing story of love and kindness for those who set out to harm Him?

Then we had Anzac Day. Thousands thronged to view the marches held across our nation.

Many of you participate in the marches, all held to recognise those who had served our two countries in times of war, giving us the freedoms we enjoy today.

Then there was the message I received on my phone, asking if I was the man they sought. It warmed my heart to hear I was the person they had been looking for, as the enquirer was my high school friend, Noel Williams; we lost contact while I was in Vietnam nearly

## ***Fireside with the Padre***



60 years ago.

Once we had made contact, we were amazed to find that it was through his neighbours, Thai and Diamond in Sippy Downs, folk we are all familiar with, through their long association with VVAASC.

We noted that his Wife, Maxina, had worked at the PA Hospital with my sister, Ellen, and were sorry to hear about my sister's passing in 2023.

That group also had another friend, an Army WO2, Billie Basile, who passed away at age 32. Billie was also in our class at Cavendish Road Intermediate and High Schools.

I trust your month has been as interesting as mine. God bless you and yours and keep you well as we move into a much quieter phase after Easter and Anzac Day.

**Arthur Fry**

**Honorary Chaplain**

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## VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA SUNSHINE COAST SUB-BRANCH, MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING, APRIL 2025

Meeting opened: 1105hrs Ode recited: by Mick Howe. Attendance: as per book. Apologies: as per book.

Mick Howe read the minutes from the March General Meeting. Business arising: Laurie Drinkwater to lay Wreath obo VVAASC at Cotton Tree at ANZAC Day Service after the march. Spotlight sales cancelled. Win Fowles gave thanks for the donated \$150 obo 106 AACU for the Perpetual Trophy "Best Recruit". Update Laurie Drinkwater trophy: has been located and still with 106AACU. No further business arising. Carried.

Inwards Correspondence: Invitations from Palmwoods State School and Caloundra State High School to attend ANZAC Day Ceremonies. John Cunningham to attend Palmwoods and Danny O'Kearney to attend Caloundra. Maroochydore RSL letter supporting the VVAASC moving to rooms in the RSL Maroochydore Sub-branch. Jewellery request from NT Legacy. Letter and cheque (\$2943) from Grealy and Grealy Solicitors – bequest from Mr C.E. Ebner.

Outwards Correspondence: Letter to solicitors representing the Estate of the late Mr C.E. Ebner acknowledging the bequest of \$2943. Letters sent: Invitations to VV Day 2025, Sunshine Coast Council Permit for VV Day. Emails sent: Cadet Units and Defence re VV Day. Posted: DHJ order to NT Legacy. Moved John Cunningham, seconded John Huxham. Carried.

Membership Report: Currently there are 174 financial members. Moved Pieter Reus, seconded Win Fowles. Carried.

Office Manager Report: John Huxham advised that he will be away until mid-May and thanked the volunteers who attend the Drop In Centre. Moved John Huxham, seconded Bob Johnson. Carried.

Merchandise Officer: Discussion re the cabinet in the Drop In Centre. Moved Mick Gay, seconded Pieter Reus. Carried.

Sub-Committee: VV Luncheon Tickets will be available on 01JUNE2025. Already had interest from several groups and associations. Caloundra bus to be a 22 seater this year due to lack of patronage last year. Moved John Cunningham, seconded Mal Overend. Carried.

DHJ: Four attendees to the April session. Labels being printed by Nambour Print and Copy. Moved Graeme Scott, seconded Mick Gay. Carried.

General Business: Mick H. read a letter he received from the Maroochydore RSL Board, Short discussion ensued; Chris W. enquired updating engraving of the Office Bearer and Life Member shields; Win F. advised 2 copies of Camaraderie donated and highlighted the importance of Veteran's issues being represented; Mal O. enquired if Ted Robinson was ok, was advised that last information received he was okay; Bob L. volunteered to attend the Mudjimba Dawn Service representing VVAASC. Wreath organised. Meeting closed: 1135hrs. Next meeting Tuesday, 20 May 2025 1100hrs (email will update location).

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**Darren Fletcher**

Dip D.T Adv Dip D.P. (Syd)

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## TIMELINE MAY

**1 May 1945:** 26th Brigade, 9th Division, troops invade Taran after General MacArthur instructed Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead, commander of I Corps, to seize and hold Taran Island and destroy the enemy forces there.

**2 May 2011:** U.S. Special Operations Forces killed Osama bin Laden during a raid on his secret compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The raid marked the culmination of a decade-long manhunt for the elusive leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization based in the Middle East. Bin Laden had ordered the coordinated aerial attacks of September 11th, 2001, in which four American passenger jets were hijacked then crashed, killing nearly 3000 persons.

**6-11 May 1969:** Warrant Officer Class 2 Ray Simpson, Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, originally from Chippendale, NSW, performs the action for which he was awarded

the Victoria Cross in fighting in Kontum Province, South Vietnam.

**8 May 1942:** During World War Two in the Pacific, the Battle of the Coral Sea began in which Japan would suffer its first defeat of the war. The battle, fought off New Guinea, marked the first time in history that two opposing naval forces fought by only using aircraft without the opposing ships ever sighting each other.

**8 May 1970:** The first Vietnam moratorium protests took place – they were the largest public demonstrations in Australia's history at the time, representing growing discontent within a portion of the Australian population to the government's commitment to the Vietnam War in general and conscription in particular.

**13 May 1968:** Australia-defended Fire Support Base Coral base, north of Saigon, was attacked by North Vietnamese troops. Eleven Australians were killed and 28 wounded before the attackers were driven back. Three days later, in another attack 52 enemy soldiers were killed and one was taken prisoner. Five Australians were killed and 19 wounded. On **26 May** Fire Support Base Balmoral, near FSB Coral, was attacked and three soldiers from 3 RAR were killed and 14 wounded.

**14 May 1943:** The Australian hospital ship Centaur was sunk by a Japanese submarine off the south Queensland coast. Only 64 of the 333 on board survived.

**16 May 1868:** An Australian cricket team arrived in England for a series of matches. The team consisted of 13 Aboriginal men from the western district of Victoria. They surprised their competitors, winning 14, losing 14 and drawing 19 of their 47 matches.

**24 May 1966:** Private Errol Noack was killed in Vietnam. A member of 5 RAR he was the first Australian national serviceman to be killed in the Vietnam War. On the same day Warrant Officer Class 2 Keith Payne, of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, originally from Ingham, Queensland, performed the action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross in fighting in Kontum Province.

**26 May 1940:** The Dunkirk evacuation began when boats and vessels of all shapes and sizes ferried 200,000 British and 140,000 French and Belgian soldiers across the English Channel.



**PICTURED:** After the battles of FSB Coral and Balmoral.— from AWM.

### Sources include:

<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/defining-moments-timeline>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_history\\_of\\_Australia\\_during\\_the\\_Vietnam\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_Australia_during_the_Vietnam_War)

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar>

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# *'When you're laughing, the whole world laughs with you'*

A man walks into a restaurant with a full-grown ostrich following closely behind. The waitress approaches and asks for their order.

"I'll have a hamburger, fries, and a Coke," the man says. Then, turning to the ostrich, he asks, "What about you?"

"I'll have the same," the ostrich replies.

A short while later, the waitress returns with their food. "That'll be \$9.40," she says. The man reaches into his pocket and, without hesitation, pulls out the exact amount.

The next day, the pair returns. Again, the man orders a hamburger, fries, and a Coke, and the ostrich echoes his choice. Once more, the man reaches into his pocket and produces the exact change.

This routine continues daily until Friday night. As they walk in, the waitress greets them, "The usual?"

"Not tonight," the man replies. "It's Friday, so I'll have a steak, baked potato, and a salad."

"Same," says the ostrich.

The waitress serves their meals and says, "That'll be \$32.62." Without missing a beat, the man reaches into his pocket and hands over the precise amount.

Unable to contain her curiosity any longer, the waitress asks, "Sir, how do you always have the exact change, no matter the price?"

The man smiles. "Years ago, I was cleaning out my attic and found

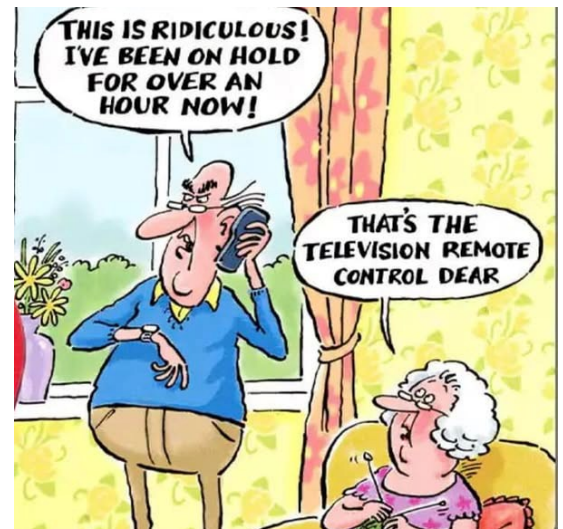
an old lamp. When I rubbed it, a genie appeared and granted me two wishes. For my first wish, I asked that whenever I had to pay for something, I could just reach into my pocket and always pull out the right amount."

"That's incredible!" the waitress exclaims. "Most people would just wish for a fortune, but you'll never run out of money!"

"That's right," the man nods. "Whether I need a gallon of milk or a luxury car, the money is always there."

The waitress glances at the ostrich. "And what about your second wish?"

The man sighs, shaking his head. "I wished for a tall chick with long legs who agrees with everything I say." - from a Facebook post.,

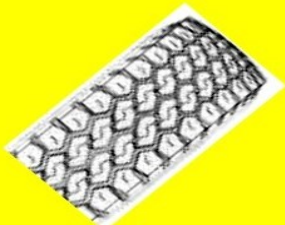


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# Uncertain future for Adavale retreat after floods

Adavale Veterans' Retreat is no more – that is what appears to be the case after the town 931km west of Brisbane and 67km north-west of Charleville with a population of 70 – was flooded on 27 March.

"We are waiting for the insurance to finish their inspection. We believe that the buildings will be written off," said



our member Ted Robinson, caretaker with wife Pip at the time, recently.

"We have lost everything in the dongas, kitchen and bar. The cold room and contents have been spotted above 3 kilometres down the Blackwater caught in trees. The water came very close to the top of the buildings.

"I was rescued three times, survived a helicopter crash in flood waters and received second degree burns in a flood all in two hours. So I'm still working on processing it all," he said.

He told Channel 7 News: "Twelve months in Vietnam in and out of helicopters, survive all that, come to Adavale and the bloody thing crashes."

Eventually they were evacuated to Quilpie. "Pip was evacuated out of Quilpie after she had a bit of a breakdown. But is recovering well now," Ted said.

Supporter Wendy O'Hanlon has already started a fundraising campaign to help rebuild the retreat: "The devastating floods in Western Queensland have affected so many, including Adavale Veterans Retreat which was founded by our own Sunshine Coast photographer and Vietnam War veteran, Ted Robinson, and fellow veterans to create a peaceful escape for war veterans and first responders. Ted is also a long-time Mooloolaba SLSC member," she wrote on Facebook.

"Ted and wife Pippa were rescued by helicopter from the roof of their retreat hut. Pippa was rescued first. During Ted's rescue, the helicopter crashed in flood waters, luckily landing on its belly before tipping over to the side.

"The pilot was taken by the fast-running floodwaters and was rescued clinging to a tree. Ted sustained minor leg injuries but his chest and side were severely burnt by the dripping av-gas.

"Please make a tax-deductible donation to this registered charity via their website: <https://www.adavaleveteransretreat.org/donate>"

**PICTURED: Ted Robinson (left) and Premier David Crisafulli in Quilpie after the evacuation. — photo Channel 7 News.**

## SCOOTAVILLE ON AGAIN

Scootaville is on again this year, in both Queensland and Victoria, organiser Trev Benneworth reports.

The Queensland section will leave Brisbane on Sunday, 24 August and travel via Toowoomba, Goondiwindi, St George, Cunnamulla, Thargomindah, Quilpie, Charleville, Blackall, Barcardine, Emerald, Biloela, Gayndah and Kingaroy arriving back to Brisbane on 13 September.

"We've modified our original route to include the recently flooded towns of Cunnamulla, Thargomindah and Quilpie," he said. More information on [www.scootaville.org.au](http://www.scootaville.org.au)

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# Operation Babylift gave thousands a home

For Hercules pilot Ian Frame, the Babylift flights were 'just another task in a long string of tasks'. In typically assiduous C-130 style, the crews of Detachment S simply got on with the job, not aware that their flights in extremely challenging conditions were creating an important chapter in the history of the Royal Australian Air Force.

After decades of war and with the imminent fall of Saigon, a humanitarian crisis was unfolding in South Vietnam. As the North Vietnamese Army took more and more southern cities, South Vietnamese citizens began to flee en masse.

Australian combat troops had been officially withdrawn from Vietnam. But in 1975, as the communist north steam-rolled its way south, the South Vietnamese ambassador to the United Nations asked US-led forces for help relocating thousands of orphans, many of them bi-racial, who had been brought to Saigon.

Among hundreds of thousands of refugees, Saigon was crowded with abandoned and orphaned children. Very few doctors were available, most having been seconded to war work; and the mortality rate for children, particularly orphans, was extremely high. There was real fear that a bloodbath would ensue when the communists took over, particularly for children born of American soldiers and Vietnamese women.

The United States government was keen to be seen to be doing something good for the South Vietnamese. As a last gesture of support and friendship for the South Vietnamese,

*From Australian War Memorial website – by Emily Hyles.*

President Gerald Ford allocated huge resources and coined the name Operation Babylift, as a commitment to evacuating 3000 orphans from Saigon.

Australian servicemen in Vietnam were no strangers to orphanages. Many men visited orphanages when they could, passing on the gifts of guilds and clubs in Australia who sent clothing, toys and food. The Australian government was convinced it should help in a humanitarian way, not just militarily.

Their plan centred around the use of RAAF aircraft to transport food and relief supplies; but also how to lift vulnerable Vietnamese civilians from the front line; and when to extract orphans to Australia.

The task was approved in late March, and Detachment S (for Saigon) was brought together at RAAF Base Richmond. This detachment, based at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport, was to assist with the distribution of Red Cross supplies and other non-military tasks.

Initially the unit comprised two C-130 Hercules from 36 and 37 Squadrons and two C-47 Dakotas from Transport Support Flight, Butterworth, Malaysia, but within a fortnight it had expanded to include six more C-130 aircraft.

- continued next page



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- from previous page.

As the North Vietnamese Army advanced and conditions deteriorated, Detachment S was forced to operate from Butterworth or Bangkok and make daily relief sorties to South Vietnam.

RAAF Hercules flew dozens of sorties into Saigon and An Thoi airfield on Phu Quoc island, taking in rice, shelter and other aid to the mass of refugees who had fled there. The Australian government also arranged for RAAF medical teams to assist in the movement of children whom Vietnamese authorities would allow to leave. They would be evacuated to Australia to adoptive parents who had already been approved by state and territory adoption authorities.

On the ground in Saigon, Rosemary Taylor, an Australian school teacher and social worker, liaised with various orphanages to collate a list of orphans who were well enough to travel. Taylor had been in Vietnam for many years and had established an adoption assistance agency, Friends For All Children (FFAC), a system of acute care and housing for abandoned and orphaned children.

For nearly two years she had arranged the overseas adoptions of Vietnamese orphans, usually on an ad hoc small-scale basis. "These babies [had] no identity and no prospects. They were never the centre of anyone's universe and never received the nurturing warmth of parental love. To give them caring parents was the first step."

On 4 April, Rosemary Taylor was notified that two Babylifts would take place that day. Children in reasonable health, who could endure a long air journey, would be taken on a C-5A Galaxy to the United States. Those in more fragile health would undertake the shorter journey to Australia. Taylor and FFAC readied over 200 children, babies and escorts that same day.

That same morning at RAAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia a Hercules crew piloted by Flight Lieutenant John Stone and Flying Officer Geoff Rose, carrying a RAAF nurse and two Airfield Defence Guards, departed early for Tan Son Nhut



PICTURED: RAAF Chaplain John White with orphans at a Vung Tau orphanage.—AWM photo

## Babylift sorties continue

airport. When they landed there was no information about their next duty, so the crew remained on board on the tarmac. After some hours they were taken to stay at the Embassy Hotel in the city.

As they checked in, they received an order to return to the aircraft immediately. In Geoff Rose's words, "Driving back, we could see a huge pall of smoke rising in the northern distance." There was frenzied activity at the airport and the Australian crew watched a 'continuous stream' of helicopters landing briefly in front of the airport operations building, then flying toward the billowing smoke.

While Stone and Rose's crew had been en route to their hotel, the first 'Babylift' aircraft had taken off, a RAAF C-130 carrying 87 babies bound for Bangkok. This was followed shortly after by a colossal US Air Force Galaxy C5-A aircraft carrying hundreds of orphans, escorts, medical and military personnel.

Minutes after take-off, at 23,000 feet, the locks of the Galaxy's rear loading ramp failed and a catastrophic explosive decompression occurred. The pilots began an emergency descent and turned back for Tan Son Nhut. With hydraulic systems inoperable, they were unable to maintain flight and the aircraft crashed, slid, and broke into four sections in rice paddies near the airport. Of the 330 passengers and crew, 154 were killed. Describing the chaotic scene, Geoff Rose recalled a stream of helicopters flying to the crash site and ferrying survivors to hospital.

On the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut airport, Stone and Rose's crew wondered what had brought the Galaxy down – had it been shot down or sabotaged? What lay in store for them? Waiting to depart for Bangkok, their Hercules A97-190, was loaded with 107 babies. "The smallest were simply placed in cardboard boxes, packed side by side on the floor and the loadmaster secured each row of boxes with a tie-down strap. It was such a sad and pathetic sight to see so many tiny, helpless babies and young children crammed into the back of our aircraft."

The crew conducted a methodical pre-flight inspection, and it was dusk by the time they were given clearance to take off. In a darkening sky they flew over the site of the Galaxy crash and the Hercules climbed with a tense and silent RAAF crew.

The flight passed uneventfully, and in Bangkok the cargo of babies was transferred to a Qantas 747 for their onward journey to a new beginning in Australia. For pilot Geoff Rose, "It was a day I experienced the stress and anxiety of operating in a war zone, but also one of the most satisfying days of my life."

The following morning Stone and Rose's crew returned to Saigon and Geoff Rose photographed the Galaxy crash site. "We could clearly see the path it had taken as it slammed into the sodden earth, bounced across the river and slid to rest, leaving bits and pieces of debris strewn across the paddy fields just a few kilometres short of the airport."

## CONTINUED NEXT MONTH





## **ATTENTION MEMBERS**

### **VIETNAM VETERANS DAY, MONDAY 18 AUGUST 2025**

The day will commence at around 0600 hours with the “Toast to the War Dogs” at the War Dog’s Memorial, Alexandra Headland. Breakfast, tea and coffee will be supplied.

### **COTTON TREE CENOTAPH**

#### **Main Commemoration Ceremony**

**Assembly: 1045 hours at the swimming pool complex, The Esplanade, Cotton Tree. The short march to the Cotton Tree RSL Cenotaph commences at 1045 hours.**

**Service:** 1100—1200 hours.

**Luncheon:** Maroochy RSL following the service. Welcome to guests at 1215 hours. Lunch tickets are available at the Drop-In Centre from 1 June.

**Cost: \$45 for members and partners. Non-member’s price is \$55 per head. Lunch includes a sumptuous three-course meal, subsidised beer and wine, entertainment, lucky door prizes, raffle draws and surprises!!!**

**IMPORTANT:** At the luncheon there will be free seating available. However, If you would like to pre-book a table (maximum of 10), please notify John Cunningham on 54933513 (0415375968) or email [secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com) and arrange the bookings with him **after you have purchased your tickets.** Names are required for each **person.**

**Transport:** In previous years, a bus was provided to transport guests to Cotton Tree from the Caloundra RSL. Due to the small number who caught the bus last year, (9 on a 57 seater), the Association is looking at other transport options. When purchasing tickets you will be asked whether you require transport from the Caloundra RSL. Depending on numbers, a smaller bus may be an option. Pick-up time will be 0945 hours. The bus will leave the Maroochy RSL at 1630 hours.

**Special dietary requirements** - leave a message with the duty officer at the Drop-In-Centre or contact John Cunningham on 54933513, (0415375968) or email [secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryvvaasc@gmail.com)

## Roll of Honour — Vietnam, MAY 1962-75

### May 1966

Noack, Errol Wayne (4717546), 5 RAR, 21, Pte, Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide.

### May 1967

Bartholomew, Glen Trevor (2782555), 1 FldSqn, 22, Spr, Memorial Gardens, Lismore NSW.

Brady, Gregory Vincent (2782812), 1 FldSqn, 22, Spr, Goondiwindi Cemetery, Goondiwindi Qld.

Brooks, Dennis Lindsay (3787889), 1 FldSqn, 22, Spr, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Deed, Ramon John Peter (3788300), 1 FldSqn, 21, Spr, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Mathieson, Kenneth Frank (37175), UL S Comd ex 6 RAR, 21, Pte, Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park, Melbourne.

O'Hara, John Laurence (2782779), 1 Fld Sqn, 22, Spr, Wollongong Crematorium NSW.

Renshaw, Terrence James (3788172), 1 FldSqn, 22, Spr, Wangaratta Cemetery Vic.

Ruddy, James (214360), Unit Detachment 55 Advanced Engineer Stores Squadron (RAE), 32, Cpl (Temp Sgt), Beresfield Crematorium NSW.

### May 1968

Abbott, Dal Edward (2786017), 1 RAR, Pte, 21, Terendak Military Cemetery, Malaysia.

Bailey, Errol John (2786313), 1 RAR, 23, Pte, Beresfield Crematorium NSW.

Brown, Lindsay Noel (3790530), 3 RAR, 22, Pte, Benalla Cemetery Vic.

Constable, George Alfred (235125), 161 Recce Flt, 32, Maj., Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery, Sydney.

Cooper, Alan John (4411171), 3 RAR, 20, Pte, Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide.

Dawson, Ian Kenneth (215063), 1 RAR, 24, Cpl, Rookwood Crematorium, Sydney.

Desnoy, John Walter (3791033), 3 RAR, 22, Pte, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Durrington, John Thomas (36485), AATTv (Att. RAI), 29, Sgt (Temp. WO2), Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Hamersley, Frederick George (54828), AATTv, 38, Sgt, Karrakatta Cemetery, Perth.

Hickey, Robert Bernard (215745), 1 RAR, 24, Cpl, Rookwood Military Cemetery, Sydney.

Lewis, Peter Edward (43423), 3 RAR, 24, Sgt, Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide.

Martin, William Henry (1731467), 1 RAR, 22, L/Cpl, Winton Cemetery, Qld.

McNab, Robert Leo (39354), 1 RAR, 20, Pte, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Nisbet, Christopher Robert (1201338), 1 RAR, 20, Pte, Pinnaroo Cemetery and Crematorium, Brisbane.

O'Brien, John Alfred (2786748), 1 RAR, Pte, 21, Macquarie Park Cemetery and Crematorium, Sydney.

Pearce, John Gregory Stinson (2784043), 1 RAR, Cpl, 22, War Cemetery, Rookwood, Sydney.

Sawtell, Christopher James (216970), 12 FldRegt, 19, Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Chatswood, Sydney.

Scott, Ian James (3791583), 12 FldRegt, 21, Gnr, Camperdown Civil Cemetery, Vic.

Sheppard, Laurence (aka Lawrence) Rodney (3790506), 1 RAR, 22, Pte, Springvale Cemetery, Melbourne.

Thomas, William Malcolm (4718911), 3 RAR, 21, Pte, Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide.

Trimble, Bevan Maxwell (3791291), 1 RAR, 21, Pte, Bendigo Cemetery, Victoria.

Wallis, Alan John (2787255), 1 RAR, 21, Pte, Sandgate General Cemetery, Newcastle NSW.

Watson, Richard Christopher A (39403), 1 RAR, 20, Pte, Springvale Crematorium, Melbourne.

White, Harry Winston (216009), 1 RAR, 23, Pte, Macquarie Park Cemetery and Crematorium, Sydney.

Whitton, John Hunter (311532), 1 RAR, 28, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Worle, Jeffrey Thomas (3790789), 3 RAR, 21, Pte, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Young, Alexander Henry (1732408), 104 SigSqn, 21, Sig., Pinnaroo Cemetery and Crematorium, Brisbane.

Young, Brian Thomas (1733095), 1 RAR, 21, Pte, Pinnaroo Cemetery and Crematorium, Brisbane.

### May 1969

Bramble, Peter John (2789684), 1 FldSqn, 21, Spr, Forster Cemetery, Forster NSW.

Davies, Ronald Edward (38530), 1 FldSqn, 24, Spr, Springvale Crematorium, Melbourne.

Drummond, Andrew (55537), 5 RAR, 27, Pte, Carnarvon Cemetery WA.

Gill, Michael William Thomas (14667), RAS (att. AATTv), Sgt (temp. WO2), Garden of Remembrance, Toowoomba, Qld.

Kerr, James Kelly (218508), B Sqn, 1 ArmRgt, 19, Trp, Garden of Remembrance, Rookwood, Sydney.

Lee, Errol John (235328), 5 RAR, 22, Lt, Woden Cemetery, Canberra.

Locke, Geoffrey Robert (39161), 9 RAR, 22, 2/Lt, Garden of Remembrance, Launceston Tas.

O'Neill, John Barry (39457), 1 Div. Supply/Transport Workshop, 20, Cftsm, Garden of Remembrance, Springvale, Melbourne.

Reidy, Paul Francis (3793403), 9 RAR, 21, Pte, White Hills Cemetery, Bendigo, Vic.

Shipp, Noel Ervin (R59629), RANHFV, 24, LAC, Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery, Sydney.

Yule, Robert James (218491), 9 RAR, 20, Pte, Rookwood Crematorium, Sydney.

### May 1970

Ahearn, Alan William (214287), 8 RAR, 25, Sgt, Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Sydney.

Crouch, Noel Valentine (5716239), 7 RAR, 22, Pte, Katanning Public Cemetery WA.

Earle, Philip (45104), 8 RAR, 23, Pte, Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide.

Goody, Phillip Raymond (1734847), 8 RAR, 22, L/Cpl, Monto Cemetery Qld.

Neal, Dennis William (1735386), 2 RAR, 22, Pte, Gympie Cemetery Qld.

Tully, Desmond John (2792375), 2 RAR, 21, Pte, Lismore Crematorium NSW.

### May 1971

Mills, Noel Reginald (1200423), RAA Chaplains' Dept, no age, Chaplain, died Repatriation General Hospital, Concord NSW (no funeral details).

• *From Australian War Memorial, Roll of Honour; Department of Veterans Affairs; Virtual War Memorial, Australia; Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Wall of Faces.*

**'At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them ...'**

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