

Chapter 14

The Vietnam War

From the wide brown land beneath the Southern Cross

Our journey ended in this sacred place;

A symbol of a generation's loss

Where the living and the dead come face to face.

The men whose names are written on the Wall

Show the true cost of war's great tragedy;

Though strangers to me, yet I know them all

Each one my brother, each one could be me.

Reflections look out from the Wall of stone

Creating images in each man's mind;

The face he recognizes as his own

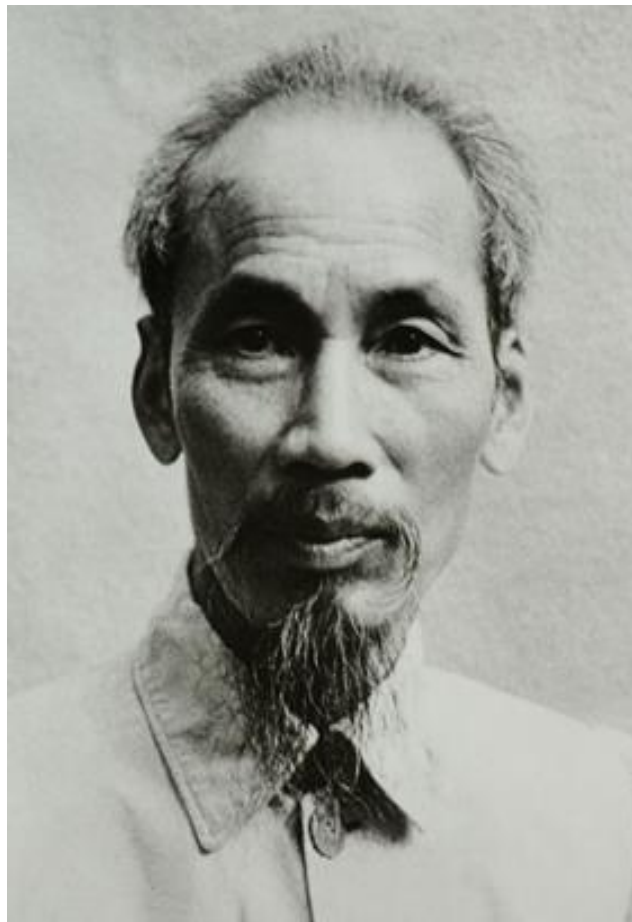
Surrounded by the friends he left behind.

Look deeply into this black granite Wall

And you will find a mirror to your soul.

Lachlan Irvine

Vietnam had been under French colonial rule since the 19th century. During the First World War, Japanese forces invaded Vietnam. To fight off both Japanese occupiers and the French colonial administration, a political leader, Ho Chi Minh, backed by Chinese and Soviet Communism, formed the Viet Minh which, translated into English, means League for the Independence of Vietnam. As the name implies, it was an anti-French and anti-Japanese resistance group. Ho Chi Minh first emerged as an outspoken voice for Vietnamese independence while living as a young man in France during the First World War.



Ho Chi Minh.

Ironically, during the Second World War, because of its opposition to Japan, the Viet Minh received funding from the USA as well as Russia and China. When the Japanese surrendered, they handed over some of their public buildings and arms to the Viet Minh rather than the French. Immediately after the war, Ho proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. A few weeks later, the Chinese, Vietnamese and French came to a three-way understanding in which the French ceded certain rights in China, the Viet Minh agreed to the return of the French (in exchange for

promises of independence within the French Union) and the Chinese agreed to leave. Negotiations between the French and Viet Minh broke down quickly resulting in ten years of war against France. This was known as the First Indochina War or, to the Vietnamese, the French War.

In 1954, the French began negotiations to leave Vietnam after their defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. A so-called peace accord was designed at the Geneva Conference in Switzerland, which saw Vietnam divided into two as a temporary measure until unifying elections could take place. North Vietnam became a socialist state under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and South Vietnam was led by a previous Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, appointed by the Emperor Bao Dai.



Ngo Dinh Diem.

The Geneva Accords promised elections in 1956 to determine a national government for a united Vietnam. With respect to the question of reunification, the non-communist Vietnamese delegation objected strenuously to any division of Vietnam, but lost out when the French accepted the proposal of the Viet Minh who proposed that Vietnam eventually be united by elections supervised by independent commissions. The United States countered with the support of South Vietnam and the United Kingdom. It provided for unification elections under the supervision of

the United Nations, but was rejected by the Soviet Union. With United States support (using secret CIA funding) in rigging the referendum of 1955, Diem removed the emperor and declared himself the President of the Republic of Vietnam.

Diem and the United States wanted to avoid holding the planned elections because they believed their side would lose. When, with U.S. support, the Diem government failed to conduct elections as had been planned, Viet Minh cadres who stayed behind in South Vietnam were activated and started to fight the government. This was the birth of the Viet Cong. The war gradually escalated into the Second Indochina War, more commonly known as the Vietnam War.

Like the Korean War, the Vietnam War was a war of political ideology pitting countries supporting socialism against countries supporting so-called democracy. I say so-called because Diem's state was more dictatorial than democratic. America saw Vietnam as a threat to the security of the West. The leaders of the Western allies – including Australia – concurred and pitted their troops against North Vietnam to assist the U.S. in what was to become that country's longest war that eventually proved unwinnable. America's later war in Afghanistan turned out to be longer and it too was unwinnable.

Estimates of deaths and casualties vary wildly but it is conservatively estimated that about 1.4 million people died comprising over 600,000 civilians, 280,000 Americans (and allies), and 440,000 Viet Cong and the People's Army of Vietnam. This ignores people killed in Laos and Cambodia. Laos is the most heavily bombed country in history. One-tenth of the population of Laos, or 200,000 civilians and members of the military, were killed. Twice as many were wounded. 750,000, a quarter of the population, had become refugees.

Almost 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam, but not all of them volunteered. Most were conscripted. They were forced to go through a nationwide lottery. Any 20-year-old man in the country could be picked, if his birthday was drawn in the draft. Many Australians opposed the draft and the war itself, and didn't believe Australia should be involved in what was essentially a local civil war.

In November 1964, the Menzies Government in Australia introduced a scheme of selective conscription known as National Service. The scheme was introduced under the *National Service Act 1964* and was designed to create an army of 40,000 full-time soldiers. So, Menzies, who had spent most of his political life supporting conscription through national referendums, finally got his way

despite widespread opposition to it. The process for choosing draftees was similar to a lottery. Numbered marbles, each representing a day of the year, were placed in a barrel. A predetermined number were then drawn individually and randomly by hand. If the number picked corresponded to the day of the year on which a person was born, they were required to present themselves for national service.

Men chosen by this ballot had to perform two years continuous full-time service in the Australian Regular Army. This could include overseas service in Vietnam. After their full-time service, they were required to serve for three and a half years part time.

There were exemptions. Men who were married before being called up and those who had a serious criminal history were granted indefinite deferment. Temporary deferments were available on the grounds of hardship or compassion, and to students, apprentices and trainees at university, teaching or technical colleges. Exemption based on physical or mental disability, occupation and conscience was considered after the ballot. The ballot method of selection was widely regarded as inherently unfair and strengthened opposition to conscription.

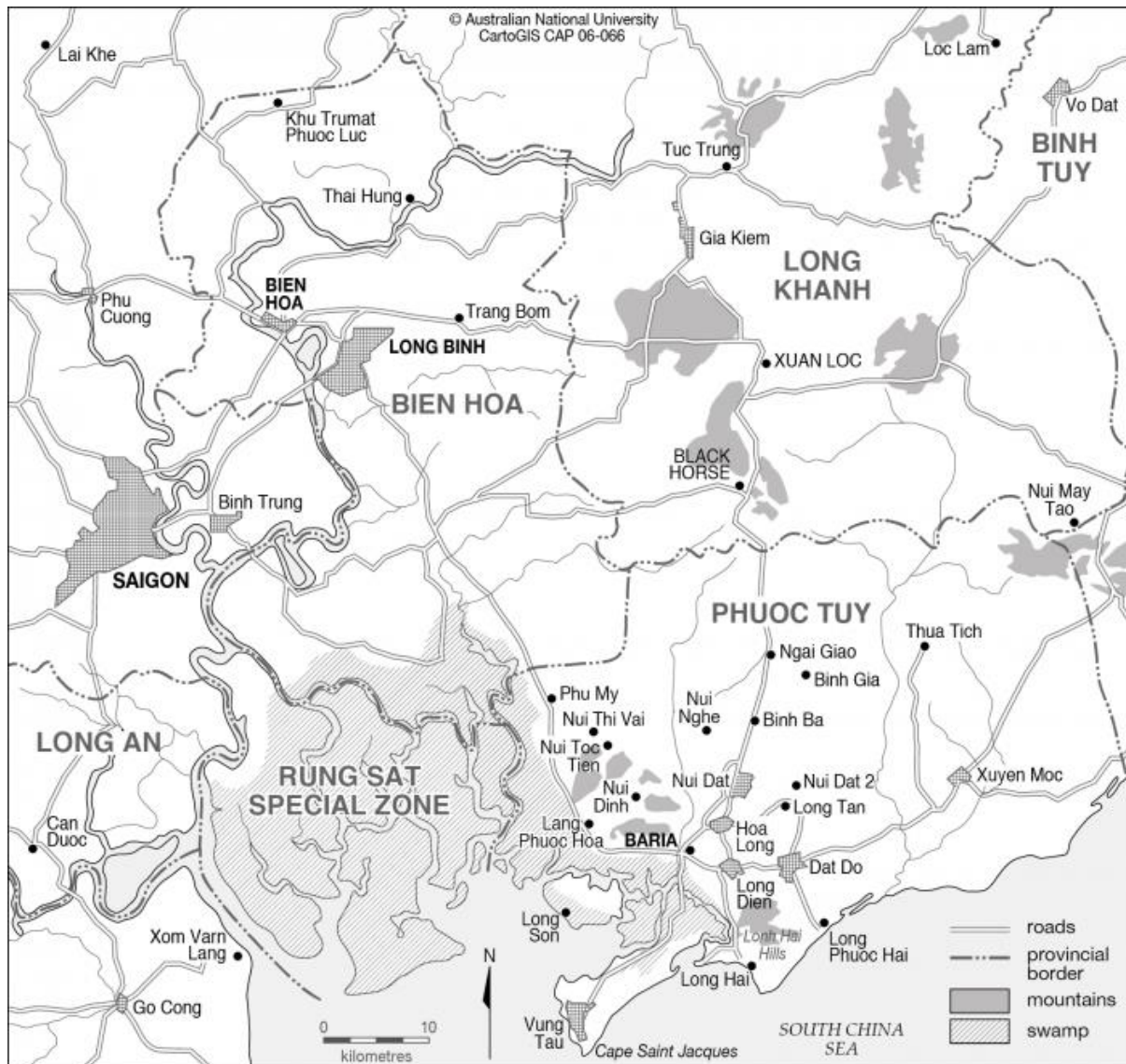
The Vietnam War was fought under incredibly difficult conditions - thick jungle, monsoonal rains, and an enemy that was very familiar with the conditions and merged into communities so that they were difficult to identify. 521 Australians died, and more than 3,000 were wounded.

The war dragged on for many years and when it finally ended it wasn't won. In the early 1970s the U.S. (and Australia) decided to pull out as public opinion turned against the war. By 1975, the North had claimed victory over the South.

Afterwards many Australian troops returned home to criticism from those who opposed the war. This was grossly unfair as they were merely the instruments of the ambitions - or delusions - of their political leaders. It was not their fault that we went to war. I suppose you could say the same for every war.

Tens of thousands of Vietnamese people – mainly from South Vietnam - fled to Australia to escape the North's rule, and were accepted as refugees. They brought with them their distinctive Vietnamese culture and have made a significant contribution in making Australia a more multicultural nation.

During the Vietnam War, Australian forces were established in Phuoc Tuy Province in South Vietnam. Some Australian forces were redeployed elsewhere – especially during the Tet offensive in January 1968. This offensive was a general uprising of the Viet Cong aimed at simultaneously engulfing population centres across South Vietnam. The map below shows Phuoc Tuy Province and the main centres of Australian bases at Vung Tau and Nui Dat. Long Tan – the site of Australia’s most significant battle of the war is shown about four miles east of Nui Dat.



Map of the province of Phuoc Tuy

After the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnam fought a brief war against China in 1979. It lasted only a few months. China initiated this war in response to Vietnam’s actions against the Khmer Rouge in 1978, which ended the rule of the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge under the leadership

of the murderous Pol Pot. Most of the action of this war was along the border between China and Vietnam. As Vietnamese troops remained in Cambodia until 1989, China was unsuccessful in its goal of dissuading Vietnam from involvement in Cambodia. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Sino-Vietnamese border was finalized – although local skirmishes continued through the 1990s.

One final note. Whenever I visited Vietnam in the 1990s, I was moved by the total lack of animosity of the Vietnamese people towards the West. They talked of the war quite openly but bore no malice towards Australia or America as erstwhile enemies. They wanted nothing more than to build their nation. During my visits I saw deep poverty, especially in the rural districts, but with equitable economic policies aimed at improving living conditions, Vietnam is now considered one of the ‘tiger’ economies of South-East Asia. It is one of the world’s fastest growing economies and is now in the top fifty economies of the world - and still growing.

The stories below are unique in that most of them are first-hand accounts and I have not had to interpret information contained in archives. These are stories told by the people themselves. Some of them did not serve in Vietnam but I have included them because they were conscripted into the National Service at a time of war and, like others in earlier wars, circumstances known only to the Army, meant they did not experience action in the field.

I did not always get a positive response from all those I contacted. I suspected that some did not want to recall their stories and I did not press them.

You will also see below that many of the CRB personnel conscripted into the National Service undertook training at the Officer Training Unit (OTU), Scheyville (pronounced Skyville) in NSW. This was a military training establishment located in the Hawkesbury region of Sydney. Its sole purpose was to train cadets to become officers in the Australian Army. It opened in April 1965 and provided a 22-week long, rigorous commissioning course for trainees, tailored to meet the Army's need to rapidly increase the number of junior officers required to become platoon commanders of units serving overseas in Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. All the CRB personnel who were trained at Scheyville were qualified engineers, indicating that educational achievement, above all other qualities, was a major prerequisite to gaining a commission.

With so much to be taught over such a short period of time the OTU course was, by necessity, highly demanding. Physical and mental strengths were tested to their near limits. OTU was also used to train Air Cadets who sought a career in Army Aviation. History has proven what was first viewed by many as an experiment, to have been a great success. Graduates proved themselves more than up to it in Vietnam with nine being awarded the Military Cross, one the Australian Medal for Gallantry and six the Distinguished Flying Cross. Seventeen were Mentioned in Dispatches and eight made the ultimate sacrifice.

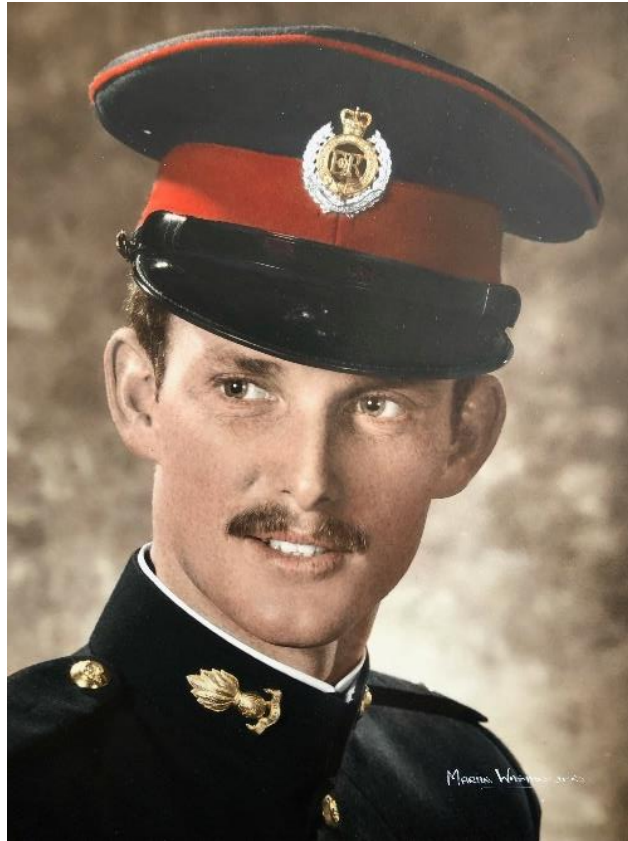
Below are the stories of the men of the CRB who entered National Service during the Vietnam War – with one exception, Captain Peter Robinson, who was a permanent member of the Australian Army.

2nd Lieutenant Robert (Bob) John Adams, 3800470

Bob was born in Bendigo in April 1949. He commenced school in Bendigo at the Violet Street Primary followed by Bendigo Secondary High School to Form VI. Bob commenced his tertiary education at the Bendigo Technical College and graduated with a Diploma in Civil Engineering from the Bendigo Institute of Technology.

On completion of his Diploma in December 1970, he joined the Country Roads Board at their Bendigo Office prior to commencing National Service. As with most National Servicemen, Bob had registered for National Service at age 19, but his service was deferred until he completed his engineering studies.

Bob commenced his National Service on 27 January 1971 and was selected for officer training OTU Scheyville, NSW. He completed the six months training course from which he graduated as a Second Lieutenant.



Bob Adams after graduation from OTU Scheyville, NSW – 1971.

After completing the RAE initial course at the School of Military Engineering in Liverpool, NSW, Bob was posted to the Chief Engineers Branch at Head Quarters Northern Command in Brisbane, where he was involved in the planning and pre construction activities for major army projects in Queensland.

He was Promoted to Temporary Lieutenant on 21 January 1972 and volunteered for a planning role at Army Head Quarters in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea Command, for a ten-week period. This required extending his National Service obligation, which by then had been reduced from 2 years to 18 months by the Federal Government.

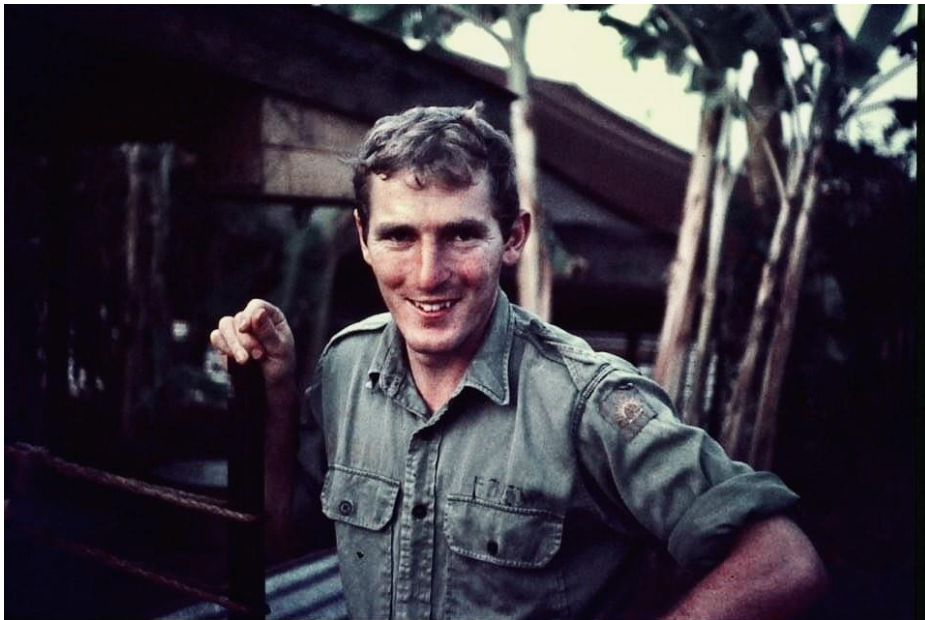
Bob completed his National Service obligation on 27 September 1972 and recommenced employment with the Country Roads Board. Bob worked on construction supervision of the Wallan-Broadford Section of the Hume Freeway and later, in Horsham Division and Mildura.

He was seconded to the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation from September 1976 to September 1977 as a construction engineer on the Kalbar Indonesian Australian Road Project, a Colombo Plan Project in West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Bob retired from VicRoads in December 2004 and enjoys meticulously renovating old houses in Bendigo and bringing them back to life.

Craftsman Kenneth Peter Arthur, 3795113

Ken was born in Hamilton in 1946 and served with the Royal Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME). More specifically, he served with 106 Field Workshop in Vietnam from November 1969 to August 1970.



Ken Arthur outside his tent in Vung Tau – 1969/70.

In November 1968, the Australian Army established 106 Field Workshop to improve the battle worthiness and damage recovery of its fighting equipment of the 1st Australian Task Force operating from their forward operational base at Nui Dat. The workshop was located in Vung Tau on Cape Saint Jacques about 40 kilometres south of Nui Dat. The unit comprised regular soldiers and national servicemen. Most of the unit's soldiers were from the RAEME but these men were supported by soldiers from the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps, the Royal Australian

Army Medical Corps, the Australian Army Catering Corps and other miscellaneous Army Corps personnel from time to time.

106 Field Workshop repaired damaged vehicles such as tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), often under extreme conditions, as well as making improvements to existing equipment. Concern about casualties caused by vehicles hitting mines led to 106 Field Workshop being commissioned to design and construct armour kits. After a number of trials using Viet Cong mines and damaged APCs, their modifications were approved. This additional armour became a universal modification for Australian APCs and proved so effective that it saved many soldiers from death and serious injuries.

On one occasion, a Centurion tank was badly damaged when it struck a Viet Cong mine during clearing operations near Nui Dat. It was essential that the tank be back in operation as soon as possible. Following closely behind the tank were members of the 106 Field Workshop, travelling in their specially adapted armoured mobile repair unit. The tank's track assembly was a complete write-off but the team managed to repair the tank, replacing the complete front suspension unit, front idler wheels and track in only eight hours.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

BEL/69/0826/VN

Members of 106 Field Workshop and two of the tank's crew replace a track on a Centurion tank.

Ken deferred his army service until he completed his mechanical apprenticeship. This was a great advantage as the men posted to the 106 Field Workshop were selected from the ones who had the highest marks at the end of the six week training at Puckapunyal. This created a corps of men who were similar in their abilities and attitude. Ken arrived in Vietnam on 26 November 1969. He was 22 years old.

Ken (KA) talked of the cohesiveness of how they lived together and worked together in an oral history undertaken by his wife, Gwen (GA), for the University of Tasmania. He said:

“I have never worked with a better team of fellows. You never needed to check on anyone of them, on any job – you just knew they would do it right! They were just so good!”

Below is an excerpt describing the camaraderie of the unit.

KA: Oh yes a good team of blokes. The army is a great leveller of personalities seeing all you have got is each other - everyone has the same amount of clothing and gear and bedding, so there is no distinction amongst the lower ranks and it works out really well.

GA: You talked about how it pulled some people into line and you were too busy for petty squabbles.

KA: Oh yes, there's no fighting. Everybody is really busy.

GA: You talked about how it was great to work with those fellows. They were efficient and expert at their jobs.

KA: Yes, the fellow mechanics were all very good to work with. They were all efficient workers and you could trust what they had done was correct and you could trust that when using a crane or something, that it was not going to come whizzing down on top of you. So there was a lot of trust and there has to be in the army. The army is made up of trust and everybody watching out for everybody else.

Ken served under two Commanding Officers' (COs). Their different styles for handling the soldiers was apparent in Ken's interview. One CO was focused on producing the best working environment and the other was intent on upholding the army's regulations and rituals.

KA: was the first one and his instructions were that “I don't care how you live as long as you work,” and he wanted to get some accolade for having turned out the most work of any unit. So, we never had tent inspections or suchlike but he did achieve his aim.

The other one was an army man through and through. He thrived on cleanliness and presentation and doing the right thing.

On the very first day just after the morning parade (which was a pill parade) at the end of it ... we fell out and just wandered off, but later, with the second CO there was a special procedure. No one knew what to do at first so we had to learn from scratch and the very first morning set the scene for lots of argy-bargy. For the tent inspections, he would run his fingers along the top of the cupboards in the tent. He soon found out there were a lot of rat traps.

Another excerpt described some of Ken's experiences.

GA: Do you have a very vivid memory of one experience you could share?

KA: Well our unit was a forward repair team which consisted of three mechanics and one electrical fitter - we were on call 24 hours a day to go out at a moment's notice and fix a broken down engine or tank, sometimes guard duty on something that had blown up.

GA: Tell me what is mine sweeping?

KA: You sit on top of the tank and pray that nothing happens (laugh) while the engineers walked in front sweeping the road – at a very slow pace – a slow process.

GA: Do you remember the incident in the photo? Do you remember how this came about?

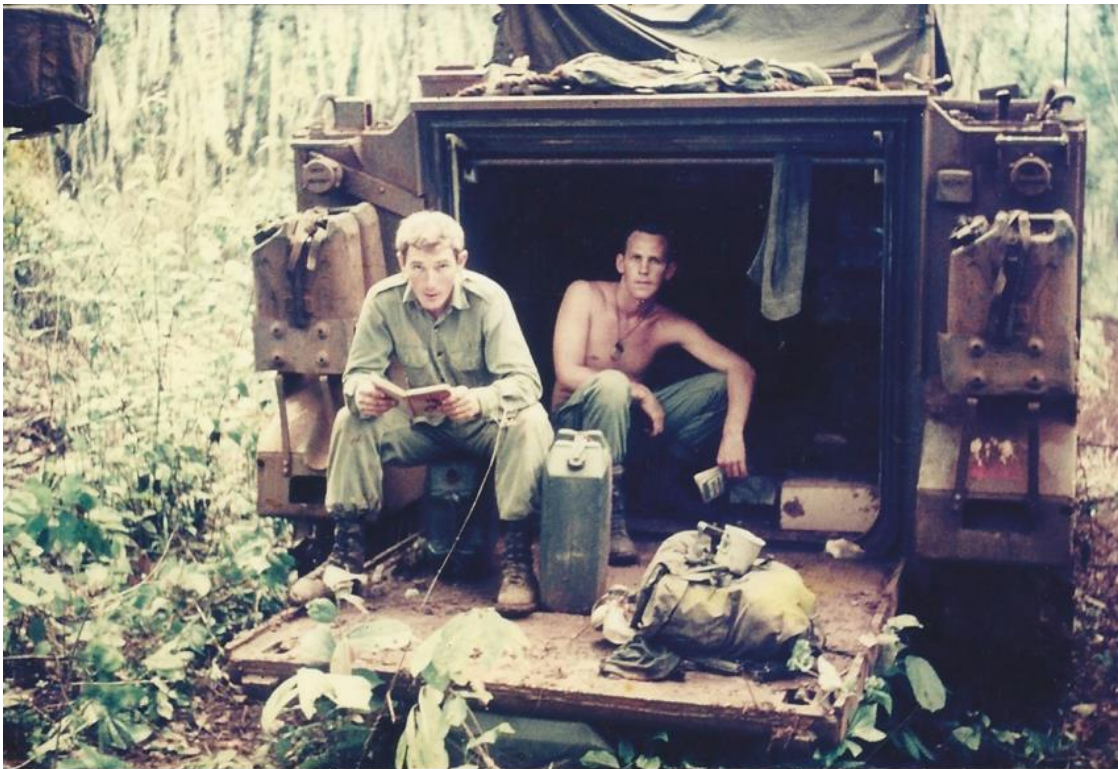


KA: Yes, that was an operation that we were asked to do - following the tanks into the rubber plantation. It was in the dry season and I asked what I had to do being the driver. He said, "Just stay with your right hand track in the path of the tank in front".

GA: I am not sure of the difference between a tank and an APC.

KA: The tank is the big one with the gun and ours (the APC) is just the little sportscar.

KA: Ours is an APC with a small unit... had a crane on it. We slept in the back. It had two hammocks.



Ken and partner at home in their APC.

It was very hard to keep up to a tank which spewed out heaps of dust. You couldn't see two metres in front of you. We would get up in the morning, have breakfast and then move the tanks to a new holding position for the day.

GA: How did you have a shower?

KA: We had a bucket.

KA: Then, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the tanks were started up but they were not moved. The engines were revved up as if you were moving. This was all designed to confuse the enemy because they could hear for miles that tanks were in the area. It was not a quiet mission.

Ken said that despite his experience in a warzone and the upheaval to his life as a young man, he came back and put all of it behind him and didn't dwell on it too much.

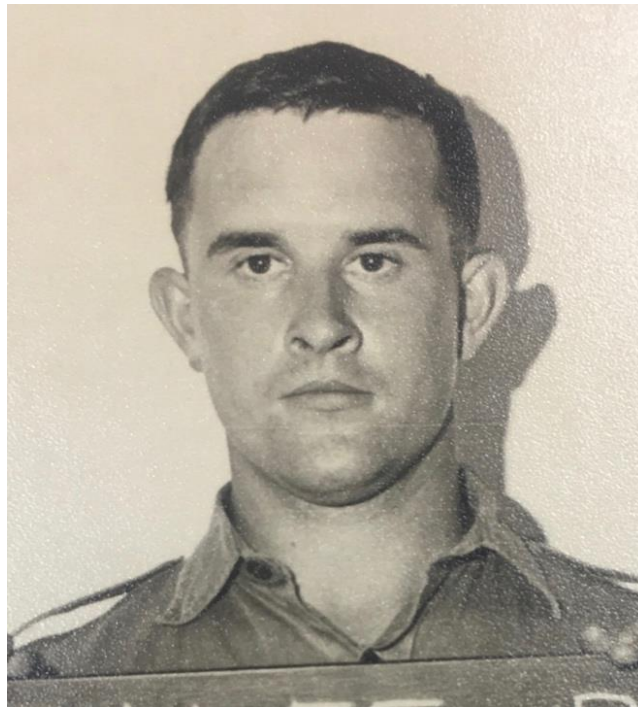
In the oral history he said, *"I think everybody is changed by it. Yeah some more than others. No more than other experiences in life."*

Ken joined VicRoads in 1983 and worked in Warrnambool Division's pre-cast concrete yard. In 1992 he transferred to the Divisional laboratory and he retired, due to ill health, in 2010.

Lieutenant Peter John Balfe, 3797765

Peter was born in Melbourne in 1945 and educated at Scotch College before commencing his engineering studies at the University of Melbourne. Peter was a cadet with the CRB during his engineering studies and, at the time of being drafted, he had already accumulated six years of service with the CRB.

He married Anne Bardsley on 21 May 1969.



Peter Balfe's enlistment photograph – 1970.

By his own admission, Peter was not a very enthusiastic conscript but he decided, nevertheless, to comply with his obligations. He was conscripted in the second ballot – in July 1965 - and he remembers clearly the afternoon in the Prince Alfred Hotel in Carlton when he found out that his marble had been drawn – together with a number of his fellow engineering students.

After completing his Bachelor of Civil Engineering and a Master of Engineering degree, he finally enlisted early in 1970. He did some basic training at Puckapunyal and was selected for the Officer Training Unit (OTU) at Scheyville NSW, where he spent six months in very intensive training designed to equip young men with the skills to be a Platoon Commander in Vietnam.

Peter graduated from the OTU with the Governor General's Medal for being first in his class. He spent the remainder of his military service with the rank of Acting Captain as the Garrison Engineer in the Liverpool Area. This appointment, like many other National serviceman postings, was not a very productive use of the skills and knowledge of the young men who graduated from OTU. Nevertheless, Peter has very fond memories of his army career because of the associations made there – they mean a great deal to him. In recent years he has attended a number of reunions of his compatriots from the OTU – the last being held in Canberra in 2020, their 51st.

Several of his close associates from the OTU paid the price. One was killed in action and at least one, who rose to the position of Vice Chancellor of one of Australia's major Universities, had late onset PTSD.

Peter said that being conscripted (and serving his time in Australia) was nothing like serving in a war zone like Vietnam. He would probably have had deep reservations to any deployment overseas, but putting aside his philosophical objections to this, he has the greatest respect for those that did. So, while National Service had been fairly straightforward for him, he realises that it was not so for many other national service conscripts and he has great sympathy and admiration for them.

Peter's career at the CRB/RCA/VicRoads commenced after his discharge from the army. He had a four year secondment to the West Gate Bridge Authority, initially in the re-design team and then supervising construction. He described this as probably the most exciting time of his professional career. This was followed by team management positions in Bridge Sub-Branch and Materials Research Division, then a range of general management appointments including Projects and

Budgets Engineer, Regional Manager Bairnsdale, General Manager Road System Management, Director Major Projects and finally, Deputy Chief Executive Officer for seven years.



Peter Balfe – circa 1986.

Peter left VicRoads in 2004 after 40 years of service and spent the next 10 years as the Independent Reviewer for the EastLink Project and the Peninsula Link Project. Peter said these appointments would not have been possible without all of those years of experience at VicRoads. He has very fond memories of VicRoads and its predecessors and the people that he worked with there. He said, “I doubt that there have been many other organisations that could boast about the type of care, commitment and loyalty that we took for granted.”


Sapper Juris Oskars Bruns, 3796361

Juris was an Engineer in Metropolitan Region and Bridge Division from 1970 to 1976. He was born of Latvian parents in Germany in 1945 and his family’s story is worth telling.

The following family information was gathered from stories and notes of his brother, Aivars Aldis Bruns, and his sister, Rasma Eimanis (nee Bruns). They left Latvia in 1944. Their father, Martins Bruns, was a senior officer in the Latvian Army and he had managed to secure a place for his

family on the last army ship leaving Riga. They only got as far as Northern Germany - to a small farming community in Pokrent, which today, has a population of 700 people. It was here that Juris was born. When the American Army arrived in Germany, the family was moved to a displaced persons camp in Lubeck on the German Baltic coast. They spent five years there and then shifted to another camp at Fallingsbostel in North Central Germany. They were one of the last families to leave this camp. A month before Christmas in 1950, they were put on a plane for Australia. The name of the plane was 'The Flying Tiger'. It carried mainly pregnant women and young families. It flew out of Bremen Airport in Germany and eventually landed in Sydney.

They caught a train from Sydney to the migrant camp at Bonegilla near Wodonga in northern Victoria. A few months later, Juris' mother and the two younger children were sent to the Benalla Migrant Camp while his father was sent to a job, digging trenches for the Sydney Metropolitan Sewerage and Drainage Board.

60	Serial No.	
Surname <u>BRUNS</u>		
Christian Names <u>Juris</u>	Age <u>20.4.45</u> Sex <u>M</u>	Specimen of Signature <i>Austria Bruns</i>
Nationality <u>Latv.</u>	Marital State <u>S</u> Religion <u>prot.</u>	
Date of Arrival <u>26 NOV 1950</u>	Description	<i>4 Boneg. Hosp. 7.1.51 - 10.1.51</i> <i>no. 51/1/483.</i>
Ex Ship <u>AUS 178/A. Lft. 15</u>	Height	
Date of Departure <u>12/1/51</u>	Weight	
Destination	Hair	
DEPT. OF IMMIGRATION	Eyes	
HOLDING CENTRE <u>BENALLA</u>	Complexion	
VIC. TL 2687	Scars	
Trade	General	
Standard of Education		
Address of Next of Kin (if known)		
Father: <u>Martins</u>		

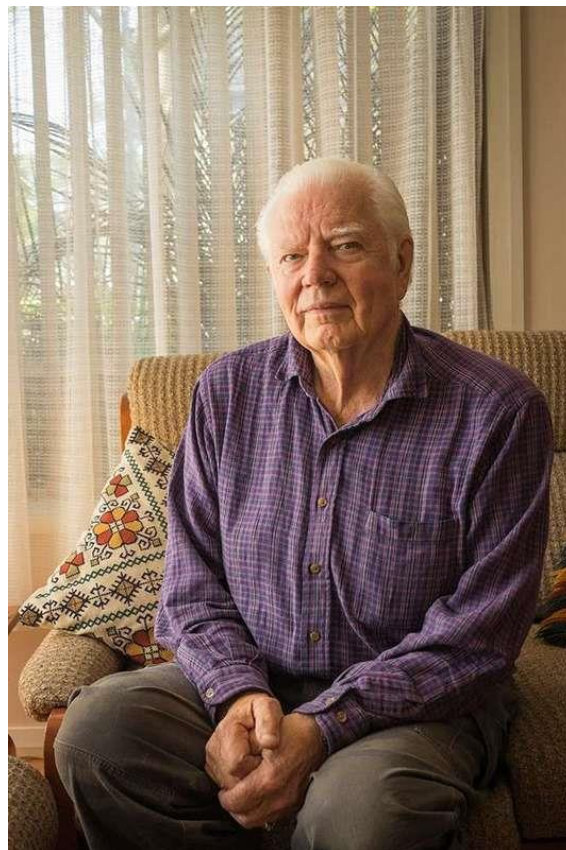
Juris' registration card at Bonegilla Migrant Camp.

Aivars was 16 years old and was considered an adult and so had to complete a two year Australian Government contract. He was assigned work with the Army Canteen Services in Benalla. In his free time he earned extra money picking pears and peaches for local fruit growers. Juris' mother

secured a job at the Italian clothing factory in Benalla. She did piece work, sewing pyjamas for Coles stores.

Juris attended kindergarten at Benalla migrant camp. His sister was 13 years old at the time, and she enrolled in Year 1 at Benalla High. She recalls having to catch a bus to high school and finding it very hard to fit in. The European migrants were called “Balts” by the other students. She couldn’t speak English and struggled with the text books and history exams. On the other hand, she did quite enjoy the practical classes such as cooking and needle work. She said that the practical classes got her through high school.

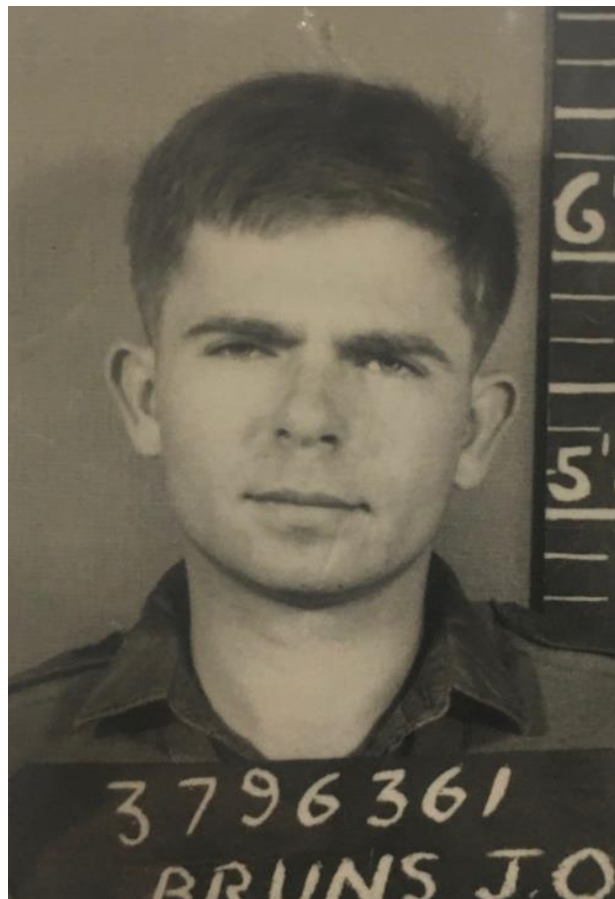
After working a couple of years in the canteen, Aivars was allowed to go back to Benalla High School from which he matriculated in 1954. A year later, the Bruns family left Benalla and shifted to Fawkner on the northern outskirts of Melbourne. Aivars started working with the Country Roads Board as a draftsman while studying subjects towards a Civil Engineering Diploma in the evenings. In 1972 the family was living in Surrey Hills.



Aivars Bruns - circa 2015.

Aivars died in Surrey Hills in October 2018.

So this was the Bruns' family introduction to Australia. It is somewhat ironic to think that Juris and his family escaped war-torn Europe only for him to be conscripted for another war in his new home some 20 years later.



Juris Bruns enlistment photograph – 1969.

Juris completed a Diploma of Civil Engineering at Swinburne Institute of Technology and subsequently gained a Bachelor of Civil Engineering at Monash University. He was only too aware that there was a strong protest movement at Monash University against the Vietnam War and conscription in general – mainly by the students and lecturers in the faculty of the Arts. It was while he was studying at Monash that he received his National Service registration papers.

His basic training commenced in April 1969 at Puckapunyal Army Base Victoria, lasting 10 weeks. Juris was then assigned to the Royal Australian Engineers Corps and transferred to their base at Liverpool, NSW. Training consisted of the regular drill rehearsals, attending military lectures,

weapon instructions and PT exercises. On one occasion, an accidental fall from a suspended rope crossing resulted in a serious leg injury which required extensive physiotherapy treatment and crutches for several weeks.

At Liverpool, he qualified for a Grade 1 Military Surveying Certificate. He later gained a Grade 2 Certificate in Vietnam. Towards the end of 1969, Juris was notified that he was to be deployed to South Vietnam for a 12 month Tour of Duty. This required the completion of an intensive 4-week long jungle training course at Canungra, Qld, simulating expected conditions in Vietnam.

He left for Vietnam in early January 1970 – departing from Sydney Airport at the somewhat clandestine hour of midnight. The reason for this was to avoid anti-Vietnam protestors interrupting the farewells of departing recruits with their families and friends. He was assigned to a specialised engineering unit - 198 Works Section - based at the Australian Defence Force (ADF) combat base at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province. This was Australia's tactical area of responsibility in South Vietnam.

The base comprised tents accommodating about 5,000 military personnel from various corps. The tents were erected on raised wooden platforms to prevent flooding from the torrential monsoon rainfall and were enclosed with sandbag walls to provide protection from any incoming Viet Cong mortar fire.



Juris (back row on the right) and fellow 198 Work Section recruits outside their tent in Nui Dat Combat Base.

Rostered duties in Nui Dat included nightly sentry observation from watchtowers and day patrolling outside the wire fence perimeter. Personnel at Nui Dat were generally well catered for with good meals. The men could meet other recruits in the evening at the 'boozer' canteen and there was an outdoor cinema when the opportunity arose. All the while, artillery shelling and U.S. B52 bomber strikes could be heard in the distance. This continued almost every night while Juris was stationed at the base.



Juris on a reconnaissance mission with an APC convoy.



Juris and South Vietnamese children outside a country village.

The 198 Works Section had a small number of 'Nasho' recruits with specific engineering skills who reported directly to a Captain or Major as their commanding officers. The recruits' responsibilities were to carry out military reconnaissance and topographical surveying within Phuoc Tuy Province and record any information which was considered to be of military importance. Travel for these operations was by military jeep, Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) convoy or helicopter - depending on the accessibility of the terrain.

The relative safety or danger of the various areas was designated by a colour coding system using green, amber and red to specify the risk of each zone. The red zones indicated the likely presence of Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army (NVA) combatants, land mines, booby traps and other destructive incendiary devices. The field information used to identify the zoning areas was provided and updated regularly by the ADF's intelligence sources in Phuoc Tuy Province. This was then forwarded to Nui Dat's HQ and subsequently conveyed to 198 Works Section.

During the ADF's presence in South Vietnam a considerable number of civil aid projects involving 198 Works Section were completed - including reconstruction of roads, bridges and culvert crossings and schools and houses and other buildings for the Vietnamese civilian communities. Based on topographical survey data collected during reconnaissance, the suitability of various locations for proposed projects could be assessed. Once a site had been selected, ground investigations, detailed site survey and other required preliminary information was obtained. Appropriate design for a particular project could then be completed and construction drawings prepared for implementation by the Royal Australian Engineers' 17 Construction Squadron based at Nui Dat.

Juris also witnessed the dreadful aftermath of aerial spraying of the Vietnam countryside with Agent Orange defoliant. This product decimated vast areas of the dense rain forests, lush green jungle and other vegetation. Many Vietnamese civilians and military personnel on both sides - including those at Nui Dat - were exposed to this, resulting in serious debilitating effects. The Government of Vietnam alleges that up to four million people were exposed to it, three quarters of whom suffered illness as a consequence. Agent Orange also caused enormous environmental damage in Vietnam. Over 3,100,000 hectares of forest were defoliated and eroded tree cover and seedling forest stock making reforestation more difficult. Animal species diversity was also sharply reduced.

The controversy about the alleged adverse effects of Agent Orange on ADF personnel in Vietnam has proved peculiarly resistant to resolution. As far as I could research, not one case has ever been

presented in Australia in favour of veterans' claims for compensation. Tim Fisher, a widely respected former deputy prime minister – also a Vietnam veteran – died in 2019 claiming that there was a possible link between his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam and his various cancers

After nine months of service in Nui Dat, Juris took his rest and recreation (R and R) leave with two of his mates, in Hong Kong. There were other designated overseas locations for R and R including Sydney (very popular with American servicemen), Bangkok (Thailand) and Taipei (Taiwan). Another R and R destination was the city of Vung Tau – in Vietnam – situated on the foreshore of the South China Sea. The ADF's logistics HQ, their second base in Phuoc Tuy Province, was located on the outskirts of this city. It was widely known that the Viet Cong militia also frequented Vung Tau for their recreational leave and leisure. Dressed in their customary Vietnamese civilian attire, they were able to effectively blend in with the local residents thus drawing no attention to themselves. This was an unusual situation where the military personnel of two opposing forces co-existed peacefully in the same city while the war continued in the rest of the country.

After completing his 12 month tour of duty in Vietnam, Juris returned to Australia. It was evident to him that there was still considerable anti-Vietnam War sentiment in Australia. The remaining few months of his service was spent at the Watsonia Army Barracks in Melbourne.

In April 1970, Juris commenced employment with the CRB at its Head Office in Kew. He was assigned to Metropolitan Division where he worked as a site engineer on various projects including the reconstruction of Elgar Road at the road/rail underpass and associated intersection works at Maroondah Highway in Box Hill, the Banksia Street duplication in Heidelberg, and the widening of the Nepean Highway between Elsternwick and Moorabbin. All of these projects required close coordination with various service authorities in relocating their assets to fit in with the new roadworks. He was also seconded for 12 months to Bridge Division.

After six years with the CRB, Juris resigned, seeking further opportunities and challenges in his career as a civil engineer. He worked for a few national companies specialising in the innovative and highly specialised field of pavement recycling and soil stabilisation. His first position with one of these was as construction engineer but it eventually led to a managerial role. He managed a number of contracts where VicRoads was a client. Juris then established two companies of his own – one specialising in investigation and design of recycled pavements and the other a general construction company carrying out roadwork contracts for Municipal Councils and Regional Shires in Victoria.

He retired in 2015 and resettled in the rural town of Euroa in north east Victoria. He joined the local fishing club and was elected vice president, and he also joined the local RSL subbranch.

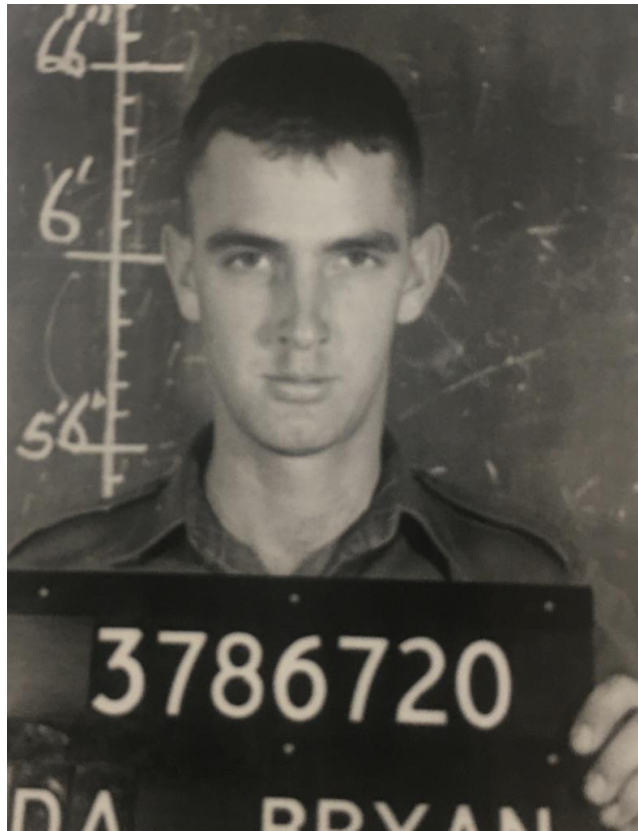
It was only after many years since returning from Vietnam, with considerable contemplation and hesitation, that Juris decided to participate in an Anzac Day parade march knowing that there was now acceptance by the community of returned Vietnam veterans. He did so with pride wearing his service medals and marched accompanied by his son, a commissioned Naval Officer with special forces training and who also saw active service in the Middle East during the period 2000 to 2002.

Juris found it a gratifying and rewarding experience to include his story in this book to provide an insight to others of military service life with the ADF in South Vietnam.

Lance Corporal David Alexander Bryan, 3786720

David served in the 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. His tour of duty in Vietnam was from 28 April 1966 to 12 May 1967. He was an Administrative Officer in the CRB.

David was born in Ivanhoe in March 1945. He matriculated from Northcote High School and worked as a clerk in an insurance office for 18 months before joining the CRB. He had been working for the CRB for 10 months before his marble was drawn. He enlisted in June 1965.



David Bryan's enlistment photograph.

As can be seen from the scale in the photograph, David is a tall man.

In December 1966, he wrote the following, unedited letter to his colleagues in the CRB.

Haven't been able to write for the last six days as we are on an operation in a small mountain range. This has been our most eventful op so far, for our company at least.

The third day in the jungle at the base of one of the mountains eight fellahs from our platoon were wounded in a booby trap blast. Most of them were in the section I used to be in until three weeks ago so I was lucky I changed sections. After the eight fellahs were taken out by "Dust Off" choppers seven platoon went through the area and another booby trap went off injuring four more blokes. So the choppers were called in again. Two blokes were critical, but we have heard word since that all are satisfactory now. Two or three fellahs in our platoon will be going home as a result of their wounds.

After we got them all off on the choppers we cleared away from the area and the American choppers and jets blasted the area with rocket bombs and machine gun fire. The following day we found V.C. headquarters came up on the

top side of the mountain; there were many huts and tunnels and a cave where we found thousands of rounds of ammunition, heaps of military gear and documents plus boxes of grenades and mortar bombs, T.N.T. and tons of rice. We took the ammo. etc. and documents and blew up and burned the huts, tunnels and rice.

Next morning, we were walking along a track where we found five booby traps set across the track. The engineers disarmed them – they were Chinese grenades with trip wires attached. A little further along the track we ran into a large deserted V.C. camp where we found much the same as the previous one. All our captured ammo., goods, documents etc. were taken out by helicopter.

Yesterday, American helicopters picked us up from a large clearing from a base of one of the mountains and brought us to the Vung Tau - Bien Hoa Road where we are now camped. Yesterday afternoon one of our small army Sioux helicopters landed on the road. It started to take off when suddenly a rotor blade hit a steel telegraph pole and the chopper immediately crumpled up beyond recognition and exploded. Some of the fellahs raced over and dragged the pilot and passenger out. Both were critically injured. A “dust -off” chopper was radioed to take the pilot straight to Saigon for neurosurgery. All this happened about 50 yards from where I was standing.

The sergeant called us over with our shovels to clear a detour road round the chopper. We were told to pick up some sand bags lying on the side of the road and fill in the ditch. I was just about to pick up a bag when the corporal who had already picked one up only to find a booby trap hand grenade under the bag.

He dropped the sand bag and yelled out “Grenade” and he and all of us dived flat out on the road just as the grenade went off. Fortunately none of us were wounded as the bag and sand took a lot of the blast. So we have had a bit of a rugged time so far.

This is our diciest operation yet. For the next few days we are patrolling up and down the road. This is the first break I have had today since we started the operation.

Got word today that the helicopter pilot in yesterday’s crash here was shot in the head so a lucky shot from a sniper from the scrub near the road around here, caused all the damage.

We were out on a small operation the last three days. During that time we had to search a village for Viet Cong and weapons etc. We only caught one V.C. suspect. All the houses in the village were of matted bamboo walls and grass roof construction. The floors were all earth. The people were very poor and a lot of the kids had malnutrition which could be seen by their large swollen bellies.

Though very poor, the people have very large families. While I was going through the houses I noticed the furniture. The beds were built off the ground with a grass mat on top. Stools and tables were all home made of wood apparently scrounged from old army positions. Every house had large pottery containers full of rice – their staple diet. Outside they have the same containers to catch rainwater from the roof.

Every house has an underground bomb shelter with an entrance from inside and outside. Some have deep pits under their beds. They also use hammocks to sleep in. The houses of the larger families have many hammocks hanging from the roof. There are many wells in the village, some as deep as 60 to 70 ft deep.

The population of the villages I have been through so far have consisted mainly of women and children and a few old men. The men between say 17 to about 40 are mostly in the AVRON ARMY. This is the South Vietnamese Army. Some in this age group would be Viet Cong naturally.

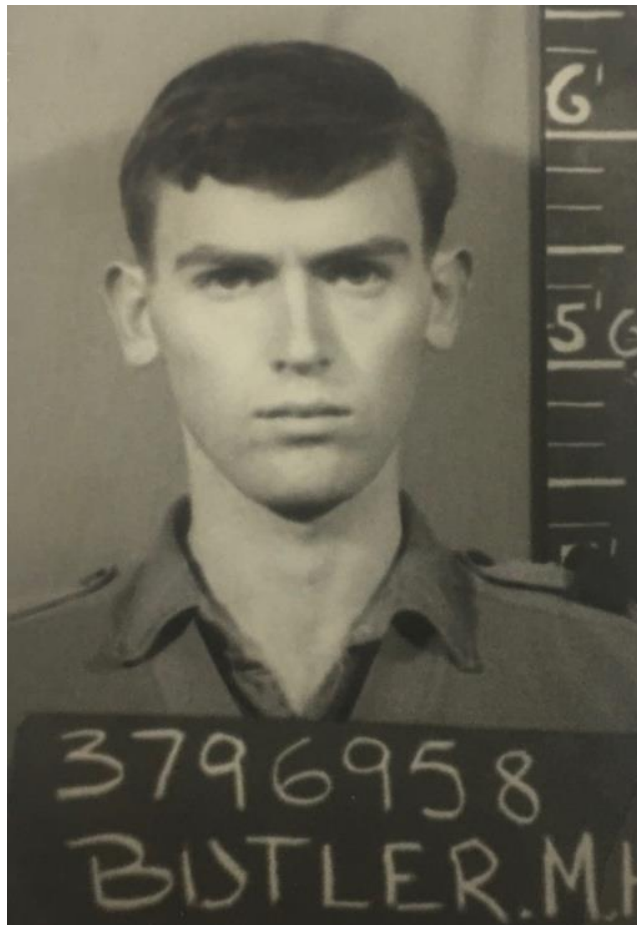
David was discharged in June 1967 after two years of service.



David Bryan (wearing hat) helping a wounded comrade.

Gunner Michael (Mike) Hartley Butler, 3796958

Mike was born in Birmingham (UK) in August 1948. He and his family migrated to Australia in 1959. He served in the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.



Mike Butler's enlistment photograph – 13 July 1979.

He graduated from Ringwood High School in 1966 and enrolled at Swinburne College of Technology to study for a Diploma of Civil Engineering. He was called up for National Service in August 1968 at the age of 20 but this was deferred until 1969 due to ongoing studies.

In June 1969, Mike was drafted into the army at Swan Street barracks, Melbourne, and then he transferred to Puckapunyal Army Camp, Seymour, to do basic training for ten weeks. During this time he learnt weapons skills and did physical training until September 1969.



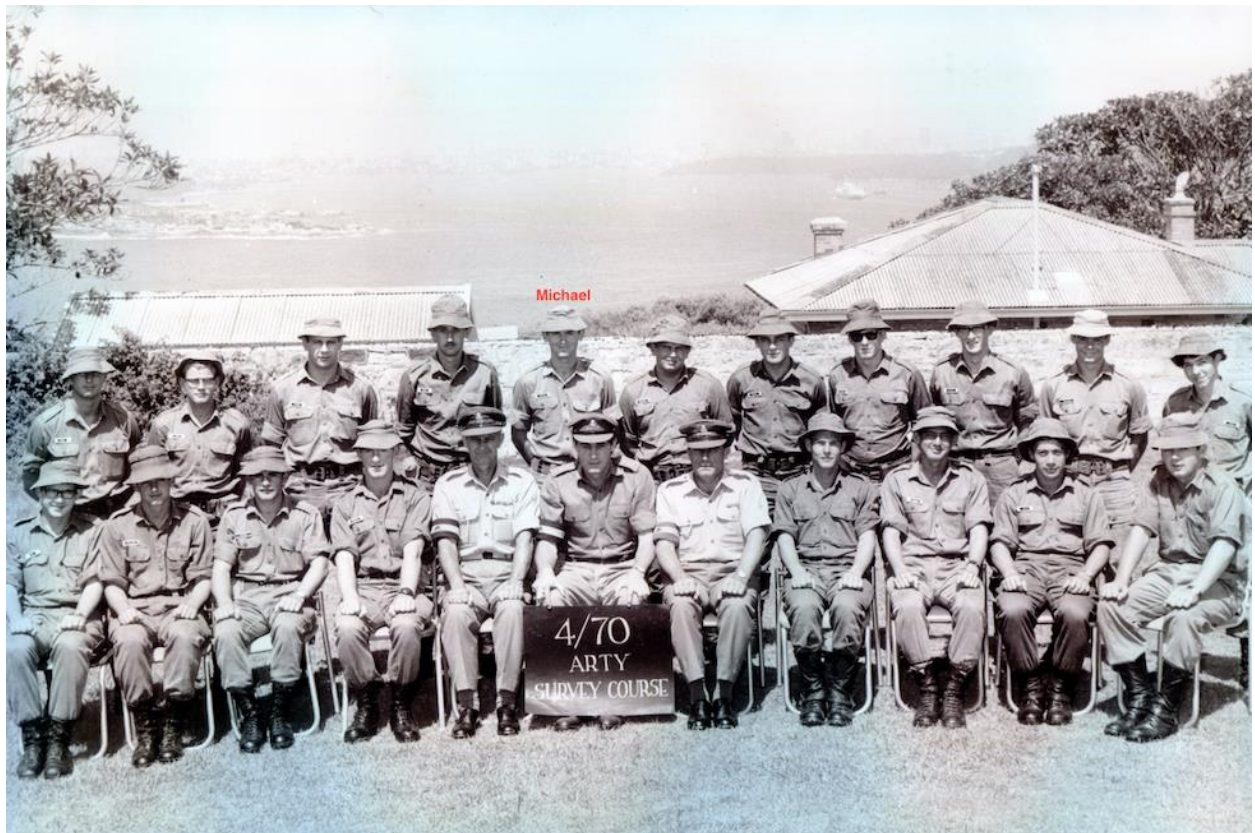
Mike Butler after initial training.

At Puckapunyal, recruits were able to nominate a Corps in which to serve although they didn't necessarily get their preference. Mike nominated Artillery because his uncle was an Artillery sound ranger in WW2. He got his choice and was transferred to the artillery at Holsworthy Army Base in Sydney in September 1969, with the aim of becoming an artillery surveyor in 131 Divisional Locating Battery.

131 Divisional Locating Battery consisted of four sections that provided artillery gun batteries with support and information. The sections were:

- Survey - First order survey from trig points – accurate to within 10 seconds of arc and +/- 0.5 metre co-ordinates. Artillery guns were fired under second order survey.
- Sensors – small electronic detectors dropped from the air to monitor troop movements.
- Artillery Intelligence – including sound ranging and listening posts.
- Radar – to detect incoming rounds of shellfire.

During his stay in Sydney he was sent to North Head – School of Artillery, Manly, to complete a seven week Artillery Surveying course.



Mike (in the centre of the back row) at the Artillery Surveying Course, 1970.

Early in 1970, Mike was sent to Canungra Jungle Training Centre in Queensland for three weeks to do further weapons training and jungle warfare training

Mike was now a fully-fledged member of the Survey Section with the rank of Gunner and was based in Holsworthy until June 1970. He anticipated that he would be sent to Vietnam and, at that stage, had no objections to being sent.

In June 1970 he was flown from Sydney to Saigon, Vietnam, and then on to the Australian Task Force Base at Nui Dat in the province of Phuoc Tuy (Australia's province of responsibility) east of Saigon.

In 131 Battery, the Survey Section's main task was to provide co-ordinates and bearings to the Fire Support Bases (FSBs) which were set up in Nui Dat or remote jungle locations.



An aerial view of a Fire Support Base with three artillery guns.

The surveyor's main equipment consisted of the following:

- Curta – a cylindrical handheld calculator used for computing survey results.
- Wild T2 Theodolite.
- Tellurometer – a distance measuring device which utilized radio waves between two sets of equipment located over survey markers.
- PIM – Precision Indicator of the Meridian – a theodolite set on a sealed cylinder of oil which functioned as a gyroscope.



Mike using a tellurometer (left) and the Wild 2 theodolite (right).

Surveys included triangulation, sun shots with the use of the PIM and other traditional survey methods. Some triangulations were carried out with the use of helicopters which hovered over (say) four trig points or survey points that were inaccessible to the surveyors. The theodolites would be trained on the rotor of the chopper whilst it hovered over each point and triangulation used to pinpoint the station location where the theodolite was set up.

131 Battery was called the “*Eyes and Ears*” of the Task Force.

On 2 February 1971, Mike was in a convoy of Land Rovers and tanks heading for a FSB when the Land Rover he was in, hit a land mine. There were four soldiers in the Land Rover including Len Walker (also a surveyor) who went on to work as a draftsman for the CRB in the Ballarat Division office. All four were wounded and air lifted to the Task Force Base hospital at Vung Tau. Mike also suffered a ruptured ear drum. After a week in hospital Mike and Len were returned to Nui Dat whilst the other two men were medevacked back to Australia. Mike continued surveying from Nui Dat for another five months.

After twelve months and six days in Vietnam, Mike was flown back to Sydney and then on to Melbourne the next day. He was discharged from the Army at Watsonia barracks on 8 July 1971. There was no debrief or effort by the Government to assist in the transition to civilian life after 12 months in a war zone. Given his experience in army surveying, and before leaving Vietnam,

Mike sent a letter to the Title Survey Division of the Country Roads Board in May 1971 seeking employment as a survey assistant. Mike commenced in Title Survey Division on 12 July 1971 under Max Corrie (a Title Surveyor) – four days after discharge from the Army.

After six months in Survey Division, he decided to further his career and recommence the Civil Engineering course at Swinburne which he completed in 1974. He was then classified as an Engineer Class I with the CRB and commenced work in the Traffic Engineering Division in 1975. He was keen to get involved in construction after going on the Engineer's Training Scheme and spending some six months on the Mulgrave Freeway Project working under Don Durant.

After a further stay in Traffic Engineering, he was relocated to Metropolitan Division and then reclassified as an Engineer Class 2 on the Greensborough Freeway Project (1983 – 1989) under Ray Bridger. In 1987 a Welcome Home Parade for Vietnam Veterans was to be held in Sydney and Ray encouraged Mike to attend which he did in October of that year. Ray and the few staff members at Greensborough were the only people at the CRB/VicRoads that Mike had told that he was a Vietnam veteran.

Mike was promoted to Engineer Class 3 (and later Class 4) at the Western Ring Road Project serving under Ken Mathers and later, Graham Gilpin. This was for a period of ten years until December 1999. He was then appointed Project Delivery Manager (Class 5) at the Docklands Project under Trevor Boyd. The Docklands Infrastructure Project entailed the realignment of the Charles Grimes Bridge and associated tram and roadworks around the Docklands Stadium which was under construction from 1999 to 2002.

Following the completion of the Docklands Project, Mike was transferred to the Craigieburn Bypass Project and spent four years there.



Mike (second from right) with colleagues (l. to r.) Trevor Boyd, David Lewis, Brian McFadzean and Eric Perera at the Docklands Project.

After 33 years with CRB/Road Construction Authority/VicRoads, Mike was enticed, in 2004, to join an ex-colleague, Ray Bridger, at the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC) based in Melbourne – as General Manager Highways and Transport. His main task at SMEC was as Proof Engineer and Construction Verifier on the Eastlink Project. After six years he retired in 2010 to enjoy life with his family of three children and six grandchildren.

He was horrified to learn that his fellow army surveyor and CRB colleague, Len Walker, had died in a tragic drowning accident in February 2007. The other two men in the mine-stricken Land Rover are living in Coffs Harbour and the Blue Mountains.

After I wrote this up – with Mike’s considerable assistance – I sent him the Chapter on the Vietnam war. He responded to me noting that others had mentioned Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Despite Mike’s stellar career and positive approach to life, it is sad to learn that he too has suffered PTSD for many years.

2nd Lieutenant Lindsay Neil Clay, 3791294

Lindsay was born in Bendigo in September 1945. The Bendigo region appears to be over-represented in terms of the number of CRB personnel who were called up for National Service during the Vietnam War. Others were Bob Adams, Noel Osborne, Ken Mathers, and Douglas Welshe.

Lindsay attended Bendigo Senior Technical School and completed his Diploma of Civil Engineering at Bendigo Technical College in November 1966. He had been working as an Engineering Assistant at the CRB's Bendigo office for 22 months before being drafted on 19 April 1967. Lindsay remembers his first day well. Meeting the Divisional Engineer, Len Upton, for the first time, Upton remarked, "Clay Eh! Clay and Roads don't mix!"



Lindsay Clay's enlistment photograph.

Lindsay was actually called up for National Service in 1966 but he was granted a deferment to complete his Diploma and to undertake 12 months of practical work experience with the CRB. This included short secondments to Bridge Branch, Traffic and Location, and Information Technology.

After commencing service in April 1967, he did two weeks of basic training at Puckapunyal, and was then selected for Officer Training as part of the second intake of 1967. Lindsay graduated from the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville in September 1967 as a Second Lieutenant and was posted to 23 Construction Squadron RAE at Holsworthy NSW.



2nd Lieutenant Lindsay Clay on graduation from OTU, Scheyville – 1967.

Lindsay completed his two years National Service with the squadron as an acting Captain. At Holsworthy, he was involved in the conversion of the former Anzac rifle range into an airfield (including the construction of hangars for light aircraft), construction of a replacement rifle range at Casula (including concrete buttresses), and construction and sealing of two miles of access road to the new range. Upon completion of his service he returned to the CRB at Bendigo.

Lindsay was discharged on 18 April 1969 after completing the mandatory term of two years. He transferred to the Army Reserve the day after his discharge.

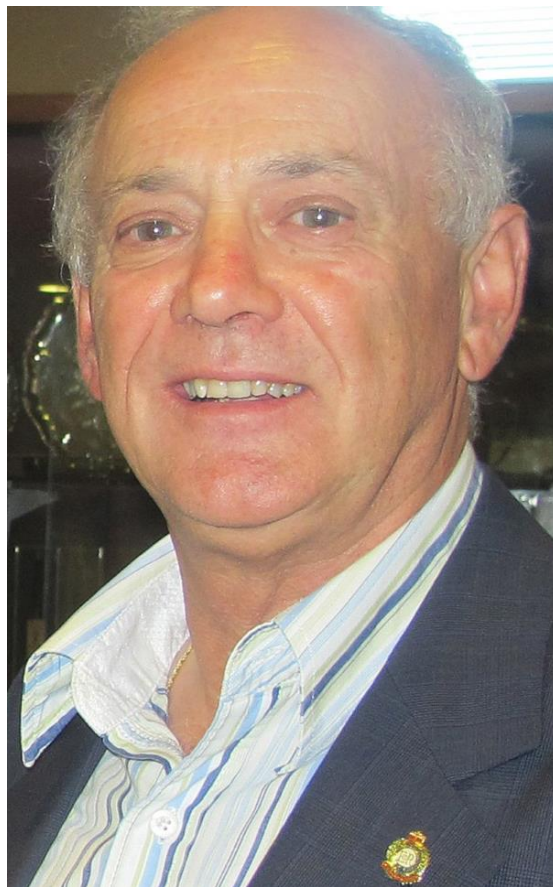
Lindsay returned to the CRB and took on a number of roles in Bendigo Division including: Construction Engineer, Manager of the Precast Yard, Municipal Liaison Engineer and Team Leader, Road Safety and Traffic Management.

Lindsay left VicRoads in September 2000 but continued to work on engineering projects as a consultant in the Bendigo area.

Lindsay retired in 2011 and lives with his wife, Carole, in Bendigo.

Lieutenant Colonel George John Giummarra, RFD, 3797884

George was born in May 1945 in the charming baroque city of Ragusa in the south eastern corner of Sicily. His Italian name at birth was Giorgio. With his family, he sailed from Genoa in Italy to Melbourne travelling 3rd Class on the *Protea*, arriving in March 1951. There is little doubt that his parents were fleeing the damage and memories of the Second World War. He attended St Joseph's Technical College in Melbourne after which he gained a Fellowship Diploma in Civil Engineering, graduating from the Royal Institute of Technology in 1969.



George Giummarra – circa 2020.

George commenced at the Country Roads Board in January 1967 working initially in Traffic and Location and, later, in the Freeway Planning Sections. He also spent two years on the training scheme, rotating through Materials, Bridge, and Metropolitan Divisions. After this initial training, he joined Dandenong Division in its new location at Nunawading but soon after he headed off to Puckapunyal to meet his national service obligations.

George commenced his recruit training for National Service at Puckapunyal, Victoria, on 28 January 1970. He was there briefly before being selected for officer training at OTU Scheyville in mid-February 1970. He graduated from OTU in July 1970, and immediately commenced three months of Corps Training at the School of Military Engineering at Casula in Sydney NSW. He was then posted to Headquarters Central Command (HCC) in Adelaide, South Australia, in October 1970, and he completed his National Service there in November 1971. At HCC, George was mainly responsible for various infrastructure developments. He lived in the Officers Mess at Keswick, a leisurely walking distance from Adelaide CBD. At an officers' ball in 1971, he met Sue, his future wife.

At the completion of national service, George returned to Dandenong Division and shortly afterwards went to Plans and Surveys Division to work on the design the Scoresby Freeway (now East Link) between Mulgrave Freeway and Ringwood. George moved to Road Planning in 1994 and became involved in the open planning exercise to determine – through community consultation - the location of the Ringwood Bypass and later the location of the Eastern Freeway between Springvale Road and Doncaster Road.

In 1979, he was seconded to the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Authority for 12 months to assist in the preparation of a Regional Strategy Plan. His work responsibilities included developing land use strategies, policies and regulations for the Region covering all matters concerned with transport in an environmentally sensitive area.

In 1983, following the restructuring of the transport agencies in Victoria, George worked with the Road Traffic Authority - mainly in the Traffic Management Division. His was involved the implementation of dynamic traffic signals across the Melbourne metropolitan area, the Fairway program providing priority systems for trams at signalised intersections, and policy areas associated with the multi-purpose taxi program and heavy vehicle monitoring systems.

With the formation of VicRoads in 1988, he worked in the Central Metropolitan Region on the implementation of Swanston Walk in the CBD. He was seconded to the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB) in 1991. He became the Manager of Local Roads Services for ARRB Transport Research. He developed standards and manuals for local roads and became a recognised expert in the field of cost-efficient pavements for low volume roads. He disseminated research and provided training to engineers in Victorian municipalities and conducted over 300 technical workshops across Australasia.

George obviously considered that his National Service was merely a work in progress, because within five months of his discharge in 1971, he signed on with the Army Reserve. He was to serve with the Reserve for another 24 years. It involved some 14 postings of varying length, starting with 10 Field Squadron and concluding with the Headquarters 3 Training Group. The postings included a couple of senior instructional roles and mentoring - environments in which George thrived. He left the Army Reserve with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel with a Reserve Force Decoration honouring his long and faithful service. He was also awarded an Australian Defence Medal and the Blamey Award. Field Marshal Sir Thomas Albert Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO, ED died in May 1951. He was the only Australian ever appointed to the highest attainable military rank of Field Marshal. To perpetuate his memory and achievements, the Blamey Award was established in 1954 to acknowledge members of the Australian Defence Force selected for outstanding qualities of leadership.



George during his military service with the Army Reserve.

George died of a brain tumour in November 2021 at the age of 77.

Corporal Michael (Mick) John Hoare, 3797900

Mick was born in Geelong in 1945. He was an accountant at the CRB before being called up for National Service in January 1970. Prior to this, he had been granted four years deferment to enable him to complete part-time accounting studies. He did ten weeks Recruit Training at Puckapunyal followed by another ten weeks Infantry Corps training at Singleton, NSW. He was then posted to the 4th Royal Australian Regiment (4RAR) in Townsville and joined the Battalion in June 1970 as it was building up for its second tour of Vietnam.

This was a period of intense training in 4RAR. The new arrivals were allocated to Companies and placed on training courses. Mick completed a five week signals course in July, followed by a ten week administration course in Brisbane between September and November 1970. Many days of this course were spent learning to touch type on manual typewriters. Jungle warfare training at Canungra occupied the remainder of November, after which he returned home for four weeks leave.

On his return to Townsville, he was posted to Battalion Headquarters as Operations Clerk. This position involved recording of operational radio traffic, deciphering coded messages, typing and duplication of Operation Orders, After Action Reports and Command Post log sheets, and compilation of the Commander's Diaries.

After the annual leave break the Battalion conducted a series of exercises to test its efficiency at Platoon, Company and Battalion level, culminating in its departure for Vietnam in May 1971. Mick was part of the Advance Party which flew out of Townsville on 1 May on a Qantas Boeing 707. The Main Body followed on the HMAS Sydney, arriving in Vung Tau on 13 May. The Rear Party followed by Qantas 707 about two weeks later.

The Battalion was joined at Nui Dat by a New Zealand complement and became 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion. They had arrived in Vietnam at the start of the wet season – heat, rain, humidity and malaria.

But there are memories of Vietnam that rest very heavily on Mick. He and Ralph Niblett met in the same platoon at Puckapunyal during recruit training. They used to meet up for a coffee during their weekends off. However, Ralph was killed in Vietnam. He was shot in the chest on 21 September 1971, during the Battle of Núi L , the last major engagement by Australian soldiers in Vietnam. Ralph was 22 years old. He and his girlfriend proposed to get married after his return from Vietnam. Mick described the circumstances thus:

“Our boys were patrolling and they came across a bunker system and got into a bit of strife. He (Ralph) turned out to be one of the last Australian killed in action over there¹. We lost five killed and 24 wounded. They were all well trained soldiers with similar plans.”



Ralph Niblett

Ralph came from Cobden in Western Victoria and he is buried in the cemetery of his home town.

In Nui Dat, Mick recorded radio messages and disseminated orders. Three or four nights a week, he manned an M60 machine gun at a sentry point behind claymore anti-personnel mines. He said that at night, he could see the glare and hear all the bombing in the distance. He and his comrades

¹ Ralph was the eighth last Australian soldier to be killed in action in the Vietnam War.

were overjoyed in August 1971 when the Australian Government announced it was withdrawing from this unpopular war. They all kept a calendar and every day they crossed out another square. Mick said he thought the Viet Cong were pretty happy to hear the news too.

After returning to Australia in October 1971, Mick resumed his accounting career in the CRB.

But he has never forgotten those that were lost, and the veterans who survived with the physical and mental scars of war. He said:

“We lost nine all up while we were there, but you don’t hear so much about the ones that were wounded. It was more about the body count, as the Americans called it.”

Mick enjoys the reunions with his mates but the recent COVID-19 outbreak put paid to the proposed 50th anniversary of the end of the war which was to be held in Canberra in 2021. However, on Vietnam Veteran’s Day, Mick flew the flag at half-mast and quietly contemplated the fallen.

“For me, Ralph is always front of mind of those we lost. The spirit lives on. We’ll carry on, keep in touch and open up when we can.”



Michael Hoare - 2021

2nd Lieutenant Geoffrey (Geoff) Alan Hose, 3799122

Geoff was born in Colac in 1948.

To Geoff's disappointment, his marble was drawn out of the National Service ballot in 1967 while he was studying for a Diploma of Civil Engineering at the Gordon Institute in Geelong. However his entry into National Service was deferred until July 1970 to allow him to complete his studies. He had worked for the CRB for six months before enlistment and during this time, he also got married.

After entering the Army, Geoff was sent to recruit training at what he described as the “very depressing” training centre at Puckapunyal. However, after about 10 days, he was selected to attend the “not so depressing”, but challenging, OTU Scheyville in NSW. The course spanned a period of five and a half months and Geoff said that the participants had to cram a great deal and were always under pressure to complete their tasks. Many officer cadets were marched out during the course and Geoff did not really enjoy his time at Scheyville but he was driven to graduate simply to prove that he could cope. He graduated fifth in his class in December 1970.



Geoff Hose's enlistment photograph – July 1970.

Later in life, after reflection, Geoff thinks his time at OTU was most beneficial for him. He said that it made him grow up. It provided a solid base for management and leadership of men, and it made him more organised and better able to evaluate options. He was physically fitter than at any other stage of his life and it gave him confidence in his own ability.

After Scheyville, Geoff was posted for three months to the Royal Australian Engineers Corps at the School of Military Engineering in Sydney. This course focused on a basic training in military engineering such as the evaluation and construction of Bailey Bridges, bridge demolition and the coordination of engineering requirements with overall battle needs. He was then posted as Works Officer for 7th Field Squadron at Enoggera in Brisbane for the balance of his national service. During his posting there, he spent a large part of the time building all weather gravel roads and associated drainage structures at Army training centres in South East Queensland. Whilst the squadron was not building cutting edge road facilities, it provided Geoff with opportunity to become familiar with road construction equipment, and develop a feel for the capabilities and limitations of various equipment and materials. It also enabled him to experience managing a troop of young men for the first time in his life.

Fortunately, Geoff was not posted to Vietnam.

On his return to the CRB in 1972, his sense was that his time in National Service was not detrimental, as there was still a presence of old military personnel in management. After some urging from Bruce Addis (Chief Bridge Engineer), he joined the CRB's Supplementary Reserve Unit 22 Construction Regiment and by 1979 had risen to the rank of Major. He strongly supported the rationale for the Supplementary Reserve, as it enabled civilians to develop the sort of skills that might be required should there be another war. Geoff ended his Reserve service in early 1982 when he went to work in Thailand - as described below.

On his return to the CRB, Geoff spent a year in Road Design Division followed by a couple of years on the Engineers Training Scheme. He then spent the next seven years in Metropolitan Division supervising road construction and, in 1978, was appointed the Project Manager of the Keilor Bypass on the Calder Freeway.

In 1982, Geoff was granted two years leave to work for the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation on a two year contract as the Project Engineer on the Thai Australian Rural Road Improvement Project in Southern Thailand. He was responsible to the Project Manager for the procurement of equipment and delivery of the civil engineering works (road and bridge construction, and irrigation works). The project also included the establishment of a precast concrete plant and bituminous spray sealing unit. This project was implemented under the auspices of the Australia International Development Assistance Bureau (now AusAID). There was a small primary school at the site, run by an Australian teacher, so Geoff was able to take his wife and three young children with him. He describes it as a great family experience.

He returned in January 1984 and became the Works Methods Engineer with responsibility for transferring best practices in road construction to Regions around Victoria. In 1985 he was appointed Assistant Regional Manager, Eastern Region and remained there for almost two years.

In early 1987, Geoff took long service leave to take undertake a 3-month assignment with the United Nations Development Programme in Laos. He expected his role was to provide advice on road maintenance but when he arrived in Vientiane, he was asked to undertake a route reconnaissance for the construction of a new 56 km road through uninhabited jungle in Southern Laos. This was, without doubt, Geoff's life adventure. He spent five weeks walking through the jungle to determine a route with six local soldiers as his support staff. They were required to carry all their food, or alternatively, eat the range of uninviting food the soldiers shot. Fortunately Laos and Thai are very similar languages and after his time in Thailand he had learnt basic Thai - so was able to communicate with his Lao staff. Of course there was no Global Positioning System technology then, and so they had to rely on aerial photos, contour plans, and compass and clinometer readings. Geoff said his army training was invaluable – without it, he might still be wandering through the jungles of Laos.

In early 1987 the Overseas Corporation of Victoria won a World Bank funded project to provide services to the Public Works Department Fiji for the Fiji Road Upgrading Project. The Road Construction Authority (RCA) provided the personnel and Geoff was appointed Project Manager. He led a 17-member team, complete with their families. Over the next ten years or so, the RCA sent 81 people to Fiji. The departure to Fiji was delayed for six weeks because of the first military coup.



Back Row: Bill Farrell, Les Bull, John Gavin, Peter Hassett, Mike Hodgson, Barry Bromham
Front Row: Lyle Grinter, Cliff Lawton, David Wood, Geoff Hose.
1998.

Shortly after the team's arrival, there was a second military coup and as a result of this, most of the British expatriates left Fiji and Geoff's team filled many of the vacant roles. Geoff himself became the Director of Roads for the Government of Fiji. As a result, their line responsibilities made getting things done within the PWD much easier than otherwise would have been the case. Under the project Geoff supervised the construction of 120 km of sealed main roads which was regarded by the World Bank as being very successful.



Left to right: Owen Thomas (another Nasho), John Gavin, Les Bull, David Baldock, Ken Barnhill, Apasi Tora (Fiji Minister for Roads), Geoff Hose, Bob Wills, John Murphy and Graeme Foley – 1990.

Geoff returned to Australia at the end of 1990 and was appointed Executive Engineer Metropolitan Region. In mid-1991 he was appointed the Manager Contract Services at a time when design and construction contracts were introduced for many major projects.

Geoff resigned from the CRB in 1993 to work with Mobil Oil Australia/Emoleum in their bitumen and road surfacing businesses. In 1996 he managed the merger of CSR's Readymix Asphalt and Mobil's Emoleum Road Services to form CSR Emoleum. While at Mobil Oil Australia, Geoff was a Director of the Australian Asphalt Pavement Association for five years and Chairman for one year.

He came out of retirement in 2006 to work for Thiess-John Holland on the EastLink Project as the Project Manager Pavements. In 2008 Geoff worked for the RACV, managing the design and tender documentation for the proposed \$100 million Torquay resort and golf course development. The remainder of his career was spent with Davis Langdon Australia Pty Ltd (bought out by Consultant Engineers AECOM) and general consultant engineering works on transport projects including Gateway Reviews for the Victorian Government on major road projects.

2nd Lieutenant David Leslie King, 3800084

David was working in the Road Design Branch of the CRB at Head Office in Kew when he was called up for National Service.

He commenced service on 27 January 1971 and after initial training at Puckapunyal, he was transferred to the Officer Training Unit in NSW. After six months of training, he graduated as a Second Lieutenant. He was posted to the RAE.

I have yet to view his archive.

2nd Lieutenant Kenneth William Joseph Mathers, 3788767

Ken was born in Bendigo in August 1945. He attended White Hills and Golden Square Primary Schools and the Bendigo Junior Technical School. He undertook his engineering studies at the Bendigo Institute of Technology completing his Diploma of Civil Engineering in 1964.

Ken commenced his engineering career with the Country Roads Board in Bendigo Division in January 1965. He then embarked on the Division's training program for young engineers working in the field with construction and bituminous surfacing gangs, and in the laboratory and the survey teams. He was transferred to Ballarat Division in August 1965 where he worked on road design and materials testing in the laboratory.

Ken enlisted on 20 April 1966 in the fourth intake for National Service. The following comments were noted on his enlistment papers: "*Very sound chap. Very good bearing. Commission material.*"



Ken Mathers on enlistment – April 1966.

While not being a true believer in the Vietnam War, he had looked at the career opportunities in the Army and decided to make the most of the two years that lay ahead. Most of his final year Civil Engineering colleagues at BIT had also been called up. The first two weeks at the 2nd Recruit Training Battalion in Puckapunyal (after the mandatory haircut and vaccinations) were mainly taken up with the testing process to gain acceptance for officer training at the OTU, Scheyville.

Arriving on the Parade Ground at Scheyville was an unforgettable experience for Ken, and like other officer cadets, made him wonder if he had done the right thing. However, it did not take him long to become familiar with the daily routine.



Ken during early days at OTU.

One unforgettable experience occurred when he was one of six OTU cadets selected to be a pallbearer at the funeral of 2nd Lt Gordon Sharpe - the first National Service Officer and Scheyville graduate to be killed in Vietnam.

His intake at OTU had a low pass rate with only 54 of the 91 cadets graduating. While he enjoyed officer training, making good friends along the way, the most disappointing aspect was losing close friends who did not pass and, who after completing 20 of the 22 weeks training, were shipped out immediately before he could say goodbye.

The staff at OTU were highly professional soldiers. Most were graduates of Duntroon and some had had overseas service. The Non-Commissioned officers were also highly skilled soldiers and included Warrant Officer Keith Payne who later won a VC for bravery in Vietnam. One could say the cadets were being trained by the best. All of his fellow graduates from BIT successfully graduated at OTU.

On graduation in September 1966, Ken was posted to the Royal Australian Engineers and to 21 Construction Squadron based at Puckapunyal. Soon after he was directed to join the Squadron participating in a major military exercise 'Barrawingga' in Shoalwater Bay, Queensland.

The next adventure was a three-month Regimental Officer's Course for Engineer Officers at the school of Military Engineering located at Casula, NSW. This was a different learning experience for Ken. He learned to drive numerous types of army vehicles, design and build "Bailey" and pontoon bridges, and trained in many other army engineer core activities.



Office work at 21 Construction Squadron.

In April 1967 he returned to 21 Construction Squadron and became involved with maintenance works in the Puckapunyal area. In January 1968, he was given responsibility for taking part of the Squadron (personnel and plant) to Shoalwater Bay for another exercise. Highlights of this journey included the management of operators driving a Cat 12 grader over 1,950 km, route changes and delays due to extensive flooding in NSW and Queensland. Camping under the Tamworth Showgrounds grandstand for a week in wet conditions was not exactly fun for any of troops.

Eventually the group arrived in Shoalwater Bay and immediately began the preparation activities for the exercise. This presented numerous challenges including road building, water supply and sanitation facilities during extreme wet weather (300 mm per day) that went on for at least the first

10 days. Communications were non-existent and he remembers that he made special allowances for the troops to go into Yeppoon to make telephone calls to family and girlfriends.

Ken really enjoyed most of his National Service and considers himself fortunate in not being required to go to Vietnam. He worked for some outstanding and dedicated soldiers, in particular Major John Stein the Officer Commanding 21 Construction Squadron who later reached the rank of Major General and remains a close friend. He departed the Squadron in early March for discharge at Watsonia Army Barracks.

Ken returned to work with the CRB at Bendigo where he worked in road and bridge construction, bituminous surfacing, and road maintenance and had further spells in road design and the laboratory. He also participated in a six-month training scheme at Head Office in bridge design and traffic engineering.

During his time in Bendigo, he married Pam. They had three children and renovated a large double brick house. After seven years in Bendigo, Ken moved to Metropolitan Division. Projects undertaken included Banksia Street Duplication, Essendon Airport Interchange and the duplication of Beach Road through St Kilda.

In 1981, he was appointed Project Manager for the Melton Bypass. The major challenge on this project was constructing roads on the highly expansive basaltic clay subgrade. Working with geologists from Materials Research Division, he gained agreement for sandstone to be excavated from Werribee Gorge State Park. The material was used as a sub-base to minimise moisture content changes in the underlying basaltic clay and so prevent loss of surface shape in the completed road.

In 1985, Ken was promoted to Project Manager for the Hume Freeway between Wodonga and Springhurst and in late 1988 returned to Melbourne to take on the role of Project Manager for the first stage of the Western Ring Road at Broadmeadows. One initiative was the introduction of a Design and Construct contract for construction of the Hume Freeway Interchange. The alignment went through a disused and deep rubbish tip. The final solution was to lower the ramps to eliminate the level crossings with the Upfield railway tracks. Quality Management was also introduced into construction contracts around this time. Another initiative was the jacked tunnel solution for the

freeway to pass under Pascoe Vale Road and the Melbourne-Sydney rail tracks at Jacana without disrupting rail traffic.

In 1992, he transferred to Head Office to work on the planning of CityLink with Bob Evans and Rob Gilpin, and participated in the short-listing of two bidders to undertake the massive Project. With a change in State Government, the project was put on hold for two years until there was greater certainty about the prospect of electronic tolling.

In early 1995, Ken left VicRoads after 30 years of service to take the position of Director Engineering at Melbourne City Link Authority (MCLA) playing a key role in the assessment of bids and subsequently overseeing the development of City Link by Transurban and their Design and Construct contractor, Transfield Obayashi Joint Venture.



Ken - on retirement from Melbourne City Link Authority.

Soon after the opening of City Link in 2000, Ken left Government to work as a private consultant. In early 2003, he returned as the Chief Executive Officer of the Southern and Eastern Integrated

Transport Authority (SEITA) which was later renamed Linking Melbourne Authority (LMA). It was established to procure and deliver EastLink as Melbourne's second toll road. Connect East, a private sector consortium, won the concession and commenced work on the 39 km tollway in March 2005.

Simultaneously, SEITA, had been undertaking the planning and environmental approval process for the Frankston Bypass - which had been renamed Peninsula Link - and commenced the procurement process in 2008. A 25-year Concession was awarded and construction commenced in February 2010 with the 25 km freeway standard facility opened in early 2013.

He participated in the proceedings of Roads Australia (RA) and served on the Committee for some seven years. In 2015 he was awarded RA's prestigious John Shaw Medal for services to the road transport industry joining some outstanding past winners such as John Bethune, Dr Max Lay, Colin Jordan and Peter Balfe

LMA had also been responsible for the planning of the East West link that joined the city end of the Eastern Freeway with the Western Ring Road initially focussing on the western half. With a change in State Government in late 2010 a decision was made to give priority to the eastern half. The Planning and Environmental Approval process was then undertaken by the LMA simultaneously with procurement and in September 2014 a contract was signed with a private sector consortium for \$5.3 billion to build a toll road between the Eastern Freeway and CityLink at Flemington. In late November 2014, the Labor Party won the election and determined to abandon the East West Link Contract. Without any future work, LMA was disbanded in early 2015.

Ken retired in March 2015 after 12 years as the CEO of SEITA and LMA. Later that year he was awarded the Infrastructure Partnership Association President's Medal for services to road infrastructure development.

As the CEO of LMA, Ken had close relationships with some of the leading politicians in Victoria and has a very high opinion of their endeavours to achieve the best outcomes for Victoria. Steve Bracks, John Brumby, Tim Pallas, Peter Batchelor and Terry Mulder were very supportive and helpful and he considers it an honour to have worked for these Ministers in the Victorian Governments.

Trooper Brian Gerard McNamara, 3789977

Brian McNamara was born in Seymour in April 1946 but his family moved to Melbourne while Brian was in primary school. He commenced work at the CRB in November 1963 in the Title Survey section and he received his National Service call up notice in 1966.

Brian commenced his National Service on 28 September 1966. He undertook the initial 10-week recruit training at Puckapunyal following which he was posted B Squadron of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment in Holsworthy, NSW. He was deployed to various locations in Australia as an Army Personnel Carrier driver.

On completion of his two years military service, Brian returned to the CRB and rejoined the Title Survey group. During the period he was in National Service, the requirements for qualification as a title surveyor had changed, making it difficult for him to undertake the required university studies.

Brian left the CRB and joined the Department of Civil Aviation in April 1969 and completed its sponsored training to become an air traffic controller. He forged his career in this field rising through the ranks to become the Southern Operational Safety Manager - covering the southern half of Australia. He retired from this post in 2007. He became a part time lecturer in Aviation studies at Swinburne University and retired in 2020.

Trooper Kevin John O'Keefe, 3794891

Kevin was born in Warrnambool and was working in the CRB laboratory in that Division when his marble was drawn. He was a member of the Royal Australia Armoured Corps and served in B Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment in Vietnam from July 1969 to November 1969, except for a fortnight's detachment to 1st Forward Delivery Troop in August 1969. He returned to his job on completion of his National Service.

Although not wounded, he suffered nerve malfunction in the feet and lower legs – possibly due to Agent Orange defoliant. I have made contact with Kevin via colleagues in Warrnambool. He

said that sometimes the Army 'stuff' is emotional. He is weighing up whether he will continue and we have to respect that.

2nd Lieutenant Noel Francis Osborne, 3789407

Noel describes himself as a veteran of the Vietnam War but not a Vietnam veteran – as you will see when you read on.

Noel was born in Bendigo in April 1945 and was part of the first group of young men to register for the compulsory two year National Service as part of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War. Being the first group to register, it was the largest group selected for any intake.

He was 19 when he registered in November 1964. At that time, he was in his final year of Civil Engineering studies at the Bendigo School of Mines. He joined the CRB on 4 January 1965 at Benalla Division and lived in a shared room at a boarding house four blocks from the Divisional office. A few months later, he received his call up notice in the post.

His roommate decided that he needed to celebrate, or commiserate, and they adjourned to the nearest pub. John, his roommate pointed to the bottles on the wall behind the bar and asked Noel which one he fancied. Noel had completed his civil engineering studies without ever having had a drink of alcohol. He chose a nice looking bottle solely because it had a colourful blue label. John bought it and they returned to their room. It was Blue Sapphire Gin and they drank it neat from the bottle. It was his first drink of alcohol and he has never drunk gin again.

The Army deferred Noel's entry for a year to enable him to graduate with his Diploma of Civil Engineering in April 1966. He reported to the Mollison Street Barracks in Bendigo on the 12 July 1966. He had driven his car home to the family farm, put it up on blocks for two years and his father drove him to the barracks. He remembered turning to him and throwing his arms around him in a hug before he realised that his family did not usually show affection in public. His father was a bit surprised before returning the embrace. Noel was now in the army.

He and his fellow recruits were then bussed to 2 RTB Puckapunyal, i.e. the 2nd Recruit Training Battalion. It was one of three established in Australia for the sole purpose of providing basic training to civilians for the Vietnam War.

The recruits split into sections with one section per hut. After two weeks in Puckapunyal, Noel was selected for transfer to OTU Scheyville in NSW. As mentioned earlier, the training was intense.

Noel graduated as a Platoon Commander for Vietnam in March 1967. After graduation, the Army instructed graduates to submit three choices for their posting. However two of them were compulsory, nominated by the Army. Noel submitted his choices and was duly posted to the RAE and CRE Works Popondetta in March 1967 as a 2nd Lieutenant. This was one of the compulsory postings nominated by the Army. In fact the other compulsory posting was not Vietnam. He had to sign on for another six months before the Army would even consider a posting to Vietnam for an RAE 2nd Lieutenant.

Popondetta is on the north coast of Papua New Guinea on the lower reaches of the Kokoda Trail. His posting was a Staff Officer Royal Engineers and Noel said it was the broadest exposure to engineering in his 50 years as a practicing civil engineer. The posting was a Captain's posting. Noel took over the role of the previous Captain who had been posted to Vietnam. Not only did he move into his role, but he also moved into the house his family had vacated just a week beforehand.

Noel's role was to undertake the design of civil works in the developing town and the survey task for the northern district of Papua. The unit had two National Service sappers (one of whom, Bob Smith, also worked for the CRB), three Papuan chainmen, and Marcel who was a 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel' from the Second World War. Marcel was the Papuan 'Boss Boi'. Noel spent half his time in the jungle surveying the road and other projects. The main airstrip serving Popondetta was at Oro Bay some distance away. It had been built on swampy ground by the Americans during the Second World War and was maintained as an emergency landing strip for large international aircraft. One of Noel's duties was to construct a new grass airstrip closer to the town to service the daily flights in and out.



2nd Lieutenant Noel Osborne – 1967.

There were many challenges. Noel's team spent days in swamp country infested with large 'pook pooks' (salt water crocodiles) that teamed up with leaches that entered boots through the eyeholes to attach themselves to feet and other body parts. It was also a malaria zone so that anti-malaria drill was essential and was monitored daily. Noel was also bitten by a spider that resulted in an eight day long extreme fever and coma. When he returned to work he had several weeks of twice daily treatment for the resulting gangrene in his leg.

Noel served in this posting for 15 months before returning to Australia to run the discharge company for his intake of Victorian national servicemen at Watsonia in June 1968. He marched out as a 1st Lieutenant on 12 July 1968. His last function was to go out with a group of fellow officers from Watsonia to celebrate their last night as Vietnam 'Nashos'. They went to a dance at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and there he met a lovely young lady, and he and Christine still celebrate that night together - their most recent anniversary being their 54th.

In the first few intakes for National Service, it was a requirement to do two years full time and one year in the army reserve. Noel continued to serve in the Army Reserve in the 22nd Construction Regiment sponsored by the CRB from which he retired in 1993 with the rank of Major.

In July 1968, Noel returned to the CRB and worked continuously there until his retirement in 2015, except for a 12 month stint in 2000 working as Asphalt Project Manager for CSR Emoleum on the Princes Freeway. Most of Noel's career was spent in Major Projects Division in construction management of the Hume Corridor, North East Region, South Western Region and the Princess Freeway.

Corporal Trevor Robert Osborne, 3790458

Trevor was born in Bendigo in December 1945. He was educated at Strathfieldsaye Primary school and Bendigo Technical College before studying Civil Engineering at the Bendigo Institute of Technology. He graduated with a Diploma in Civil Engineering in 1966 and joined the Country Roads Board at the Benalla Regional Office.

Trevor was called up for National Service in February 1966. He was granted a deferment to complete his year of onsite training to finish his Civil Engineering Diploma. He enlisted in February 1967. After his initial two months of the basic training at Puckapunyal, he was posted to Royal Australian Engineers and undertook Corp Training at the School of Military Engineering (SME) at Casula NSW

He was then posted to 202 Works Section in Swan Street Melbourne before joining the staff at Victoria Barracks where he completed his two-year military service. Trevor, along with all National Service members, was awarded the ADM and ANSM medals (Australian Defence Medal and Australian National Service Medal).

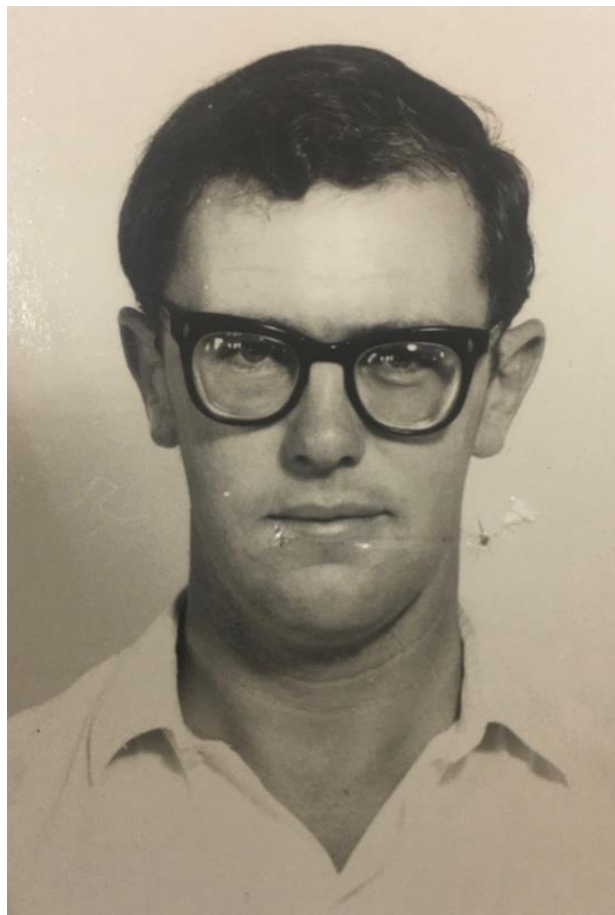
After discharging his National Service obligation, Trevor left the CRB and joined Cementations Company (Australia) in its Melbourne office. After a stint in Sydney, Trevor transferred to the company's Perth office in December 1969 for six months but stayed for 30 years, working initially in specialist geotechnical contracting before moving to a consulting role with primary interest in mining geotechnics - particularly mine tailings management. He joined MPA Williams and Associates in 1992 to establish a Perth office for the Melbourne-based company specialising in tailing management.

In December 1999, he moved back to Victoria after he purchased the historic Kamarooka Estate homestead north of Bendigo. After several years of working from Kamarooka (including frequent commutes back to Perth) and managing the development of tailings management facilities for the Bendigo and Fosterville gold mining projects, Trevor was appointed Managing Director of the company now named ATC Williams Pty Ltd - based in Melbourne. He also had a stint managing overseas operations with principal interests in Peru and Chile.

He now lives with his wife, Kay, alternating between Melbourne and Kamarooka where the decades long project of restoring the homestead and associated buildings continues.

Gunner David Mitchell Patterson, 3798752

David was called up in the National Service ballot. He was born in Melbourne in October 1945 and, like Mike Butler above, he served in the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery in Vietnam. However, they didn't know each other. David's tour of duty was from 5 February 1971 to 30 October 1971.



David Patterson's enlistment photograph – 24 April 1970.

David attended Carey Grammar and, after completing his matriculation, he entered Monash University to study engineering. He was called up in April 1970 immediately after completing his BCE (Hons). At his first interview it was noted that he was “*Good pleasant type. No ‘qualms’ at all.*”

David joined the CRB after completing his National Service and was, for many years, a design engineer in Bridge Division.

Captain Peter Mervyn Robinson OBE, 340180

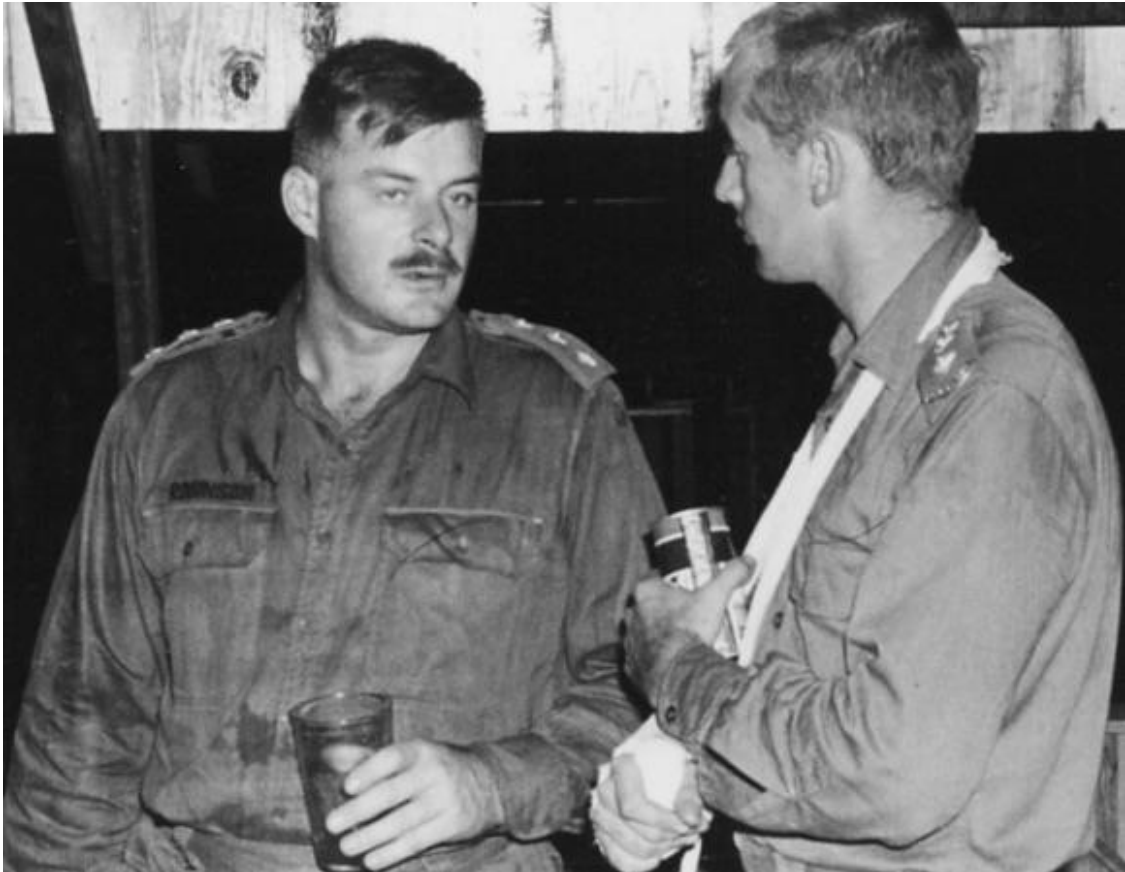
Peter was not a National Service recruit. He was a permanent member of the Australian Army. He was Chief Mechanical Engineer in VicRoads during the 1980s and ‘90s and was involved in the privatisation of its functions. He was born in Melbourne in 1938 and died in 2004 after a long illness.

He was a Captain in the Royal Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME) and was attached to the 161 (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight unit. He became a Member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1968. The information below is a summary of his citation for the award of the OBE.

Peter was commissioned in the Australian Regular Army in 1959 and from March 1967 he served with 161st (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight as the Flight Engineer. On his arrival in Vietnam, 161st (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight was preparing to move from its location at Vung Tau airfield to Nui Dat. Captain Robinson, as the first Engineering Officer posted to the Flight, was confronted with the move of the Flight as well as maintaining the serviceability of the unit aircraft which were carrying out daily observation and reconnaissance duties. Under his supervision the move to Nui Dat was efficiently carried out and the serviceability of the unit aircraft was increased, allowing the aircraft to fly 881 hours during the month of March.

By his insistence on the highest engineering standards and close supervision of all technical work on aircraft he maintained the availability of aircraft between 90 and 96. His high standards are further reflected in the aircraft safety record with only three technical defects in over 8,000 flying hours. His workshop has always been able to respond to demands for support and his technical advice has been consistently sound and always given in sufficient time to maintain the operational efficiency of his unit.

By his skill, determined leadership and willingness to work extremely long hours he has supervised the building of suitable workshop facilities, aircraft protection bays and stores facilities and has increased the serviceability rate of the unit aircraft, thereby allowing them to fly an average 825 hours per month during the period March to November 1967.



Captain Peter Robinson (left) at Nui Dat airfield.

Later, he served in command of the 5th Base Workshop Battalion at Oakey in Queensland and, as Colonel, commanding the 3rd Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Group in Victoria, before joining the RCA.



Peter Robinson – on his appointment as General Manager – Plant in 1985.

Lieutenant Brian Terrence Scantlebury, 3791210

Brian was born in Melbourne in December 1945. He left school after completing Year 11 and joined the Lands Department but after a year there, he joined the CRB where he worked for nearly three years before being drafted into the Army in April 1969. He was called up in 1966 but he was granted a deferment as he was studying part time for a Diploma of Civil Engineering at Caulfield Technical College. However he changed his mind - comments on his enlistment papers were: "Does not desire to apply for deferment – interested in Engineer or Survey Corps. Clean, neat appearance. Quiet type of lad."

In the Army, Brian graduated from OTU, Scheyville in December 1967 as a Second Lieutenant and was posted to the Chief Engineer's Branch, Southern Command where he served out his National Service commitment.

On returning to the CRB, he joined a survey party and joined the CMF Supplementary Reserve where he was attached to 107 Plant Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers. After a few months, he resumed his studies and completed Year 12 and was admitted to Monash University where he was awarded an honours degree in civil engineering.



Brian Scantlebury's enlistment photograph - 1969.

As a junior engineer, Brian worked in private enterprise in Canberra in land development and infrastructure projects before returning to Melbourne on project management. He became a partner in the consulting firm, Loder and Bayly, before moving up to Albury-Wodonga to take up the position of Manager Major Projects with the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation (AWDC). He later became Chief Executive Officer and retired in 2006.

During his time at AWDC he obtained a M.Sc (Strategic Foresight) from Swinburne University of Technology. After his retirement he continued his studies in strategic foresight and future studies, and was awarded a Ph.D in 2022 on the application of this work to regional economic development.

Brian lives with his wife, Catherine, in Mount Martha.

Sapper Robert Mervyn Smith, 3788192

Born in Sea Lake on 30 March 1945. Was working with the CRB prior to being called up for National Service. Commenced service on 2 February 1966. Served his 2 years and returned to the CRB and returned to the south west - either Geelong Division or Warrnambool.

He was still with the CRB in 2005. Noel Osborne thought he was with the Horticultural section at that stage.

He was at Popondetta with the unit that Noel was posted to when he arrived in April 1967. Served with 19 CRE (Works) RAE Popondetta PNG then 26 ESS Coopers Plains Qld.

I have yet to view his archive.

Sapper (later Private) Geoffrey (Geoff) Leonard Symons, 3795705

Geoff was born in Melbourne in February 1947 and, in 1967, his marble was drawn for National Service.

At that time Geoff had completed the first two years of a Civil Engineering Diploma at the Swinburne Institute of Technology. He was working as a Cadet Engineer at the City of Hawthorn continuing his studies with lectures at night. Geoff was granted a deferral of National Service to continue his studies but after two years decided it was better to do his Army service and resume his studies afterwards.

In January 1969, he boarded a bus at Swan St Barracks to alight some hours later at 2 RTB (Recruit Training Battalion) Puckapunyal in 105 degree F heat. For the next six weeks the recruits were

“broken in” to the Army way of doing things with no leave or visitors allowed. They were well fed and mentally and physically challenged. During basic training Geoff was approached to go to the Officer’s Training Unit (OTU) but he chose not to accept. He had done some research and decided if he was to spend two years in the army he should try as far as possible to gain some engineering experience relevant to his future. He thought being a sapper in the Royal Australian Engineers Corps (RAE) would be more suitable for that aim. During this time he indicated his preference for Corps training and was accepted for the RAE.

Corps training for the RAE was undertaken at the School of Military Engineering at Casula, near Liverpool NSW. Training included small boat exercises to move troops, vehicles and materiel across waterways, building, launching and securing Bailey Bridges, using different types of explosives and learning how to destroy bridges and other structures, anti- tank and anti- personnel mine use and clearance techniques, safe treatment of available water and supply to troop positions, map reading and plane table surveying and training in the whole range of military weapons and tactics.

Nearing the completion of Corps Training he was asked again about his future deployment. After reiterating his preference for gaining further experience in civil engineering, he was told no such role was available and was posted to 21 Construction Squadron at Puckapunyal – as a storeman. His vision of advancing his civil engineering knowledge in the army was now severely dented.

He had to undertake some additional training for his storeman role and was sent to central Sydney where moratorium marches and demonstrations were frequent. To avoid trouble he was told not to identify as a soldier. The trainees were told not to wear uniforms and not to use army vehicles. Unmarked cars were used as transport. The Army thought that they would escape identification as soldiers because they were wearing “civvies”, had short back ‘n side haircuts while everyone else their age had hair to their shoulders and the unmarked cars had Commonwealth Government number plates!

Geoff spent the latter half of 1969 as a storeman at 21 Construction Squadron at Puckapunyal and as he had done extra training, could see no change coming for his second year in the Army. He was keen to resume his part time studies and, after enquiring about roles in Melbourne, he discovered an administration position was available at HQ Watsonia Barracks to which he

transferred. It meant he needed to change Corps - becoming a private rather than a sapper - and he was able to resume his part time studies with the support of the Army for which he was grateful. As his discharge date approached he was asked by the Commanding Officer at HQ Watsonia if he would consider continuing in the army to complete his studies and then go on to OTU. He appreciated the offer but had no desire to accept.

At the time he had mixed feelings about his two years in the Army. He felt his skills could have been better used to the benefit of both the army and himself. However, he accepted that he had chosen not to apply for OTU training so bore some of the responsibility for his misgiving. On the positive side, he had met and worked with men from different backgrounds, and was able to observe their reactions under pressure and the management techniques used in such circumstances. He also had the opportunity to lead teams in field training exercises enabling him to gain confidence in his management capability. They were lessons learned for life.



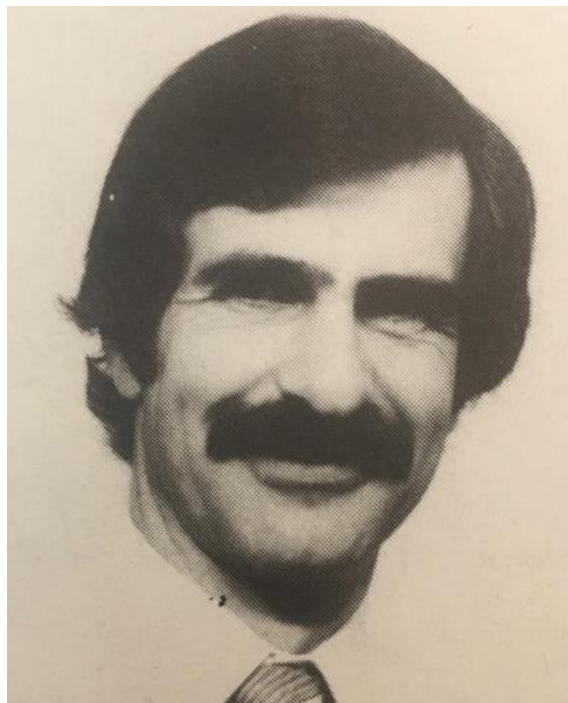
Geoff (bottom left hand corner) and other trainees at
the School of Military Engineering at Casula.

He was not keen on going to Vietnam and was not disappointed when he was not sent. Army training provided a detailed understanding of what those veterans faced. Geoff said, “I have an

everlasting respect for those who served in Vietnam, the courage they showed, the jobs they did and the dignity they showed after their return despite not being properly recognised for their service for many years afterwards”.

On a lighter note, Geoff learnt to touch type when training as a storeman. He thought it was a total waste of time and effort at the time. But 25 or so years later, when the magic of the internet arrived, and everyone did their own typing, he discovered he still retained his touch typing skills. He could churn out documents without looking at the keyboard – much to the chagrin of his colleagues!

After discharge, Geoff resumed his career in local government moving to the Shire of Croydon in 1971 and completing his engineering studies in 1972. In his early years he undertook all aspects of municipal engineering including survey, design, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, buildings and sporting facilities by both direct labour and contract. He moved to the Shire of Eltham in 1974 and in 1978 was promoted to Assistant Shire Engineer – Design responsible for managing the survey, design, financing and monitoring of municipal engineering projects and also introducing a computer aided road design package.



Geoff Symons – circa 1984.

In 1984, Geoff was appointed to the position of Manager Traffic Design with the Road Traffic Authority (RTA), a new Authority and one of VicRoads predecessor organisations. He managed the design and approval of functional layouts for traffic management works to improve road safety and operation, introduced a computer aided drafting system to the design process and was Project Co-ordinator for the State-wide Blackspot Program. As the RTA developed its processes and operations it moved to a regional model. In 1986 Geoff was appointed as Regional Traffic Manager – Rural responsible for delivery of services to regional Victoria.

With the formation of VicRoads in 1988, Geoff was appointed Regional Operations Manager at Metro South East Region. He continued managing traffic management teams and added strategic and statutory planning. In 1993 he was part of a Project Team which successfully outsourced VicRoads Plant Department (4,000 items of plant, 9 depots state wide and 200 staff) as an on-going business. He resumed managing traffic and planning functions as Program Development Manager in Metro North West Region where his group was also responsible for the delivery of the M80 Ring Road from Greensborough Highway to Edgars Road. Traffic management plans to facilitate development in inner Melbourne were complex with many stakeholders having competing needs. Projects included City Link, major residential/commercial developments in inner city locations (such as Crown Casino), Docklands precinct road layout and events such as the F1 Grand Prix.

In 2001 Geoff joined the Department of Infrastructure where he managed a team developing masterplans, designs and business cases for major and minor infrastructure projects for both heavy and light rail including a suite of projects and traffic management plans for delivery of the 2006 Commonwealth Games. His team undertook pre-construction planning for William Barak pedestrian bridge across multiple railway lines between the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the city. He chaired the Traffic and Transport committees for both the Motorcycle Grand Prix and the Rugby World Cup. While working with Major Projects Victoria in 2004/2005, Geoff was the Technical Stream manager for the \$101m re-development of the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds as a Public Private Partnership and chaired the Technical Evaluation Panel.

In 2005 he moved to the Public Transport Division within the Department of Transport. He continued managing teams working across planning and development of all aspects of heavy and light rail and spent several months managing delivery of state wide bus operations and country rail services.

After a varied and enjoyable career spanning 43 years Geoff retired in 2009 and eased out of civil engineering with a number of short term contracts over the next 12 months.

Lieutenant Owen Thomas, 3803032

Owen joined the Australian Army via the National Service program in 1970 - during the third year of his Civil Engineering Diploma at Caulfield Institute of Technology. His marble was drawn from the barrel – one of only two dates in the month of December.

He was allowed to defer enlistment to finish his course, which he achieved by the end of 1971. On graduation, he obtained a position with the CRB having just turned 21 years old. In early January 1972, he reported to Kelvin York in the Materials Research Division and was placed in the site laboratory on the Mulgrave Freeway.

His career with the CRB was short-lived. After only three weeks, he had to report to Victoria Barracks in St. Kilda Road. He was then transferred to Puckapunyal for recruit training with intake 1/72.



Owen Thomas' enlistment photograph – January 1972.

After about three weeks at Puckapunyal, Owen was selected for the OTU at Scheyville, NSW. It was a demanding course which tested cadets to their physical and psychological limits.



Owen Thomas at OTU, Scheyville - 1972.

He graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant from OTU in June 1972. By that time the Australian Government was getting cold feet about its military involvement in Vietnam and to Owen's knowledge no OTU graduates in that intake were sent to Vietnam, although they did not know that at the time. He was pleased that he did not end up in Vietnam and has great respect for those who did.

After OTU, he was posted to the Army Headquarters Survey Regiment (AHSR) in Bendigo which was part of the Survey Corps. It was essentially a mapping agency carrying out geodetic surveying of large land masses for the purpose of producing topographic maps - as opposed to engineering surveying which civil engineers and surveyors are more familiar with. There were three squadrons at the AHSR – Air Survey, Lithographic and Cartographic Squadrons. Owen was in charge of small groups in the 'Litho' and "Carto" squadrons and undertook numerous training courses in both disciplines. He learned a lot about printing, photography and map making – all areas in which he had no previous experience or training, but which he found extremely interesting.

In June 1973 while still posted to AHSR, he was offered the opportunity to be part of a survey operation in Sumatra, Indonesia. The operation was called 'Gading 3' which translates to 'Ivory 3'. As part of Australia's Foreign Aid program, Australia had been sending detachments each year from various Survey units to map Indonesia, as the only existing maps were those produced by the Dutch colonialists. Owen was promoted to Lieutenant and joined Detachment 5 Field Survey Squadron (located in Perth) and was sent to Medan, in northern Sumatra. He spent half his time in Medan and the other half as the Forward Base Commander at Pekanbaru in central Sumatra. He had Australian Army, Army Air, RAAF and civilian elements under his command.



Owen (left) about to set off on some mapping.

Back in those days mapping was achieved with horizontal control (a system called "Aerodist" installed in a civilian Beechcraft Queenair) and vertical control via aerial photography to produce stereo pairs. It was Owen's job to ensure that all technical, personnel and logistical aspects that were needed for the task met operational requirements.

The aerial photography could only be shot in clear weather conditions. When the weather was unfavourable, the RAAF Iroquois (helicopter) crew would use the down time to carry out "training exercises". On a few occasions, this involved conning a certain Army Lieutenant into taking part in the training which was mostly the crew practising its winching procedure.



Lieutenant Owen Thomas – winching training over the Straits of Malacca.

Owen spent about four months in Sumatra which he described as a wonderful experience for fresh-faced 22-year-old.

In October 1973, Owen was discharged from the Army and resumed work with the CRB in the Highway Signing and Delineation Section. During his 49-year career in the CRB, RCA and VicRoads he worked in many divisions including rural and metropolitan regions and a number of positions in Head Office. From 1989 to 1992, together with a number of other RCA colleagues, Owen was seconded to Fiji to work on an Asian Development Bank funded road and bridge maintenance project – another unforgettable experience for him and his young family.

Owen said that the most important lesson his Army career taught him was the wisdom and value of learning from experienced people around him – a principle that served him well in life after his military career.

Sapper Peter William Townsend, 3792873

Peter was born in Melbourne in December 1945. He completed a Diploma of Civil Engineering at Caulfield Technical College at the end of 1967 and had worked as an Assistant Engineer at the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works for eight months before being drafted into the Army.

He impressed the officer who had drafted him – he said about Peter: “*Good appearance. Well spoken. Serious type.*”



Peter Townsend's enlistment photograph – 10 February 1968.

He served in the 17th Construction Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers whose nickname was the ginger beers. The squadron served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1971 and was involved in a wide variety of engineering tasks. Peter served in the 17th Construction Squadron between 3 September 1968 and 3 September 1969.

The first Troop of the Squadron was deployed in 1966 to Vung Tau which is located in Phuoc Tuy Province on the coast south of Ho Chi Minh City (then Saigon). Not long after, they relocated to the 1st Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat which was further inland. At Nui Dat, elements of the squadron took part in the defence of the base during an attack the day before the Battle of Long Tan. Early tasks undertaken by the squadron included clearing operations, construction of helipads and land marking operations. The squadron also completed a 300,000 gallon dam to provide the Australian contingent with an alternate water supply. They also established a quarry at

Nui Dat to supply crushed rock, gravel and fine sand for the pavement of roads, airfields, helipads and other hard-standing areas.

By his own admission, Peter was a mess when he returned from Vietnam. He did not realise it at the time but he suffered from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - as many Vietnam veterans suffered. PTSD is akin to the term 'shell shock' which was used to describe the same condition during the First and Second World Wars. People with PTSD feel a heightened sense of danger. Their natural fight-or-flight response is altered, causing them to feel stressed or fearful, even when they're safe.

According to the National Center (sic) for PTSD in America, it is estimated that about 15 per cent of Vietnam War veterans and 12 percent of Gulf War veterans have PTSD.

Peter worked in the Bridge Design Division as a design engineer and later, worked in the newly formed Landscape Section where he developed a great interest in botany. He later left the Board, and with his partner, he established a landscaping company which his children run today.

I spoke to Peter about submitting his personal story but did not receive one – and I didn't want to press him as I felt it might have revived memories of a time he would prefer to regret.

Lance Corporal Gerald (Gerry) Douglas Turner, 3796209

Gerry was born in Swan Hill in December 1948. He was drafted into the Royal Australian Infantry Corps 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), and served in Vietnam from February 1971 to June 1971.

After earlier service in Vietnam in 1967/68, 3RAR battalion returned to Phuoc Tuy Province early in 1971. By this time American and Australian forces in Vietnam had reduced significantly and U.S and allied forces undertook the process of handing control of the country back to the South Vietnamese Government. Communist forces took this opportunity to try and re-enter areas that they had been previously forced out of earlier. This included the Australian and New Zealand area of responsibility of Phuoc Tuy Province. During the second tour the battalion took part in several actions and saw fierce fighting particularly in the Battle of Long Khanh against well-trained North Vietnamese forces before returning to Australia by the end of 1971 after an eight-month tour.

Gerry wrote the following account of his experiences and I have decided not to alter it (or reduce it) because one day this may be a valuable record for his children and grandchildren.

The 'Call to Arms': Barely 12 months after joining the Country Roads Board in February 1968 as a Technical Officer in the testing laboratory at Kew, I received notification that I had been conscripted into the Army as a national serviceman for two years. For some reason I was initially embarrassed about this and kept it secret for as long as I could (apart from my family and closest confidants). Before departing I hurriedly joined the State Superannuation Scheme. My memory recall is that joining was voluntary at that time and that I needed to continue paying my personal contributions on a quarterly basis during my period of absence.

In April 1969 I was sent to Puckapunyal to complete ten weeks of basic training. The military discipline and physical training were a hell of a shock and my body struggled to keep up with the physical rigour required. Towards the end of our basic training, we had the opportunity to nominate our preference for the various military disciplines. Infantry was last on my list of ten but this made absolutely no difference. Infantry it was.

Infantry training took place in Singleton, NSW. Many of our exercises were in the beautiful northern sections of the Blue Mountains and the equally scenic Barrington Ranges. I'd never seen close-up such beautiful scenery before with lush ferny gullies and sections of sub-tropical rain forest.

At the end of the Infantry Corp training, we were again offered preferences. This time it was a Battalion going to Vietnam in two months, another going in six months and another going in ten months. I chose the latter and this time was lucky. It meant that I would serve a maximum of nine months in a war zone rather than a full twelve months. I was relieved about that.

Posting to 3rd Battalion RAR based at Woodside: In September 1969, I made the long drive to Woodside in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia to join the 3rd Battalion. The barracks were old and basic but were set in an idyllic part of the rolling hills with large magnificent red gums scattered everywhere. Adelaide wasn't far away (30km) to spend time socialising on the weekends.

Training in the Flinders Ranges and the broomstick incident: I'd often heard people speak glowingly about their holiday in the majestic Flinders Ranges of South Australia. My experience was vastly different. Our first training exercise was arduous in harsh, hot, dry, rugged and rocky conditions. As a novice I copped the worst job possible, that of being the assistant to the machine gunner. The role was essentially that of a 'pack horse'. In addition to your own equipment, it required carrying as much ammunition as possible plus a 10 kg spare barrel for the machine gun. The spare barrel was a killer, literally, hanging around one's neck in a poorly designed bag. We were regularly jumping down from the armoured personnel carriers. On the jump your equipment would initially fly upwards and then as you hit the ground the spare barrel would belatedly come down and pile drive you into the rocky creek bed. Excruciating. And for the whole two weeks of the training exercise the machine gun never looked like overheating (and jamming) and the spare barrel was not needed.

For the next training exercise, I badly needed a solution and this was achieved by cutting a broom handle to length and doing a subtle substitution. With the spare barrel safely stored in my locker, the next exercise was much less onerous. I was very pleased with the equipment innovation. But as luck would have it, during the big finale shoot-out with a 'mock enemy', the gun did overheat and the barrel did jam. Needless to say, I had trouble producing the spare barrel. The surly sergeant failed to see the humour in the broomstick incident, and I copped a hell of a berating and punished by being confined to barracks (cancellation of weekend leave) for 3 weeks on our return.

Mass Protest in Adelaide: In the mid-1970s, mass marches were planned around the country to protest against the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War. Following a major training exercise, we had just returned to our base in Woodside and were given a couple of days leave which coincided with the large Adelaide protest march (probably the largest ever in that city). Two or three hundred young soldiers descending on Adelaide for some relaxation, socialisation and frivolity was never going to lead to a good outcome. Inevitably, skirmishes and fracas occurred when over-refreshed young soldiers clashed with the protesters. It was an afternoon of chaos on Rundle Street. Afterwards, things quickly went south when it was discovered the daughter of the Brigadier (the most senior officer in South Australia) was accidentally injured in the fracas when she was hit on the head with a placard.

All hell broke loose back at the Woodside camp and our 3RAR Lieutenant Colonel was not pleased. A forensic style investigation was undertaken examining TV footage and newspaper

photos resulting in about 20 soldiers being charged. The events of the day received widespread media attention nationally and internationally (US and UK) and was raised in the Federal Parliament. Presumably, as result of some 'right wing' lobbying in Canberra, the charges against the soldiers were later quietly dropped. There was plenty of excitement that day and it's one I'll never forget. Yes, I was involved but not in any of the 'heavy stuff' and was not subsequently identified or charged.

Postponement of 3RAR's Vietnam Tour: We were initially scheduled to serve in Vietnam in late July 1970. As opposition to the war increased the Government started to wind back its commitment and as result our tour was postponed initially for three months and then a further three months. Early February 1971 was set as the new date. This meant that everyone from my national service intake would not go to Vietnam as we were due to be discharged in early April. Unfortunately, my dad died suddenly in August 1970 and our fruit farm needed to be managed at a crucial time. I approached the Commanding Officer and requested three months leave without pay to work the farm and support my mother. He'd not heard of such a request before but after some thought readily agreed as he knew he would have significant problems getting the Battalion up to full strength prior to departure. He obtained the benefit of having a fully trained soldier to take to Vietnam, my family got the benefit of keeping the farm going while other arrangements could be made. A win-win situation. I was annoyed in later life when guru management consultants would sell this style of win-win negotiation as a new concept in management training programs. Really! A young kid without any training could do it.

After managing the farm for three months I re-joined the Battalion in early 1971 having missed all the final training exercises. I was re-allocated to a slightly different group and was very surprised by how much things had changed and just how many new faces there were. I served in Vietnam with many that I'd not met before and obviously not trained with.

Trip to Vietnam: In early February 1971 our Battalion proceeded to Outer Harbour, Adelaide, to board the troop carrier HMAS Sydney for the 10-day voyage to Vietnam. Some of my family members were able to travel to Adelaide to farewell the ship but they had trouble identifying me amongst the 600 identically dressed young soldiers vigorously waving from the deck. It was my first voyage, and I had many brief bouts of seasickness. On arrival in Vietnam waters, we were helicoptered to the large military base at Nui Dat. Within days, our four rifle companies (each of approximately 120 soldiers) were kitted-up and separately dispatched to patrol various parts of

Phuoc Tuy Province for which Australia had sole responsibility. Overall, we spent very little time at Nui Dat and didn't get the opportunity to attend any of the concerts provided by visiting Australian singers and entertainers. The modus operandi for our group was basically six weeks out on active patrol followed by two days leave at the coastal town of Vung Tau, followed by a further six weeks out on patrol.

Within a week, D Company (I was in B), located some four or five kilometres away from us were engaged in a significant contact in the early evening. In the eerie stillness of the night, we could hear the distant gunfire and were able to follow progress via radio communications but could offer no support. The first killed, among others, was a young 19-year-old regular soldier who I had previously spent six months training closely with, and socialising with, when I first joined the battalion some 18 months earlier. It was quick introduction to the horrors of war. It was a sad and scary moment.

The short periods of leave in the coastal town of Vung Tau were, in my opinion, grossly irresponsible by the Army. Allowing 100 or so young men to roam the streets and bars for two days with six week's pay in their pocket was a recipe for disaster. Additionally, security could not be guaranteed as the Viet Cong could easily have been present in the local community. Our first foray on leave resulted in one death (accidental) and two in hospital as a result of beatings (when inebriated).

Operation Overlord and the Battle of Long Khanh: A nine day offensive named Operation Overlord, including the initial Battle of Long Khan, was the last major activity of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. It was a significant undertaking and ranked in the top ten of Australian engagements in the war.

My time in Vietnam was starting to draw to a close and I was wondering when I'd be withdrawn from active patrol. We then got word that we were to immediately proceed to the neighbouring province of Long Khanh (quite a distance away) to engage the North Vietnamese Army in a large bunker network. We were told it was going to be 'a really hot area'. The mood of our group quickly changed as the tension became palpable. I was shocked that this was about to happen in my final days of duty. How unlucky!



On patrol in Phuoc Tuy – Gerry is in the centre.

As we proceeded on the long route towards the 'hot area' the choppers flew in with a major resupply. Without prior notice two of us were ordered to jump on board and were flown back to Nui Dat. No chance to say good-bye or wish our mates good luck. Given the nature and scale of the impending Operation, the senior commanders took us out early as they weren't sure that they could get us out once the offensive started.

At the time I was a Lance Corporal in charge of a small machine gun group (three in total). As I was packing my packs for the flight home, the Battle of Long Khanh was in full swing and could be heard over the radio system at Nui Dat. My small gun group came under intense fire and the assistant gunner was badly wounded. An artillery officer embedded in our group was killed, and many others wounded. A helicopter providing urgent ammunition resupplies was shot down and crashed close to our group. Under difficult circumstances, my close friend was involved in trying to save the crew. Two were saved and two perished as fire engulfed the helicopter and ammunition started exploding. My friend still suffers PTSD from the events of that day. The two soldiers in my gun group were so traumatised, they withdrew into themselves and never wanted to attend reunions, see any of their colleagues or have involvement with anything military. In addition to

those killed that day, another two lives were significantly ruined. It was a very sad day in my life even though I was not directly involved. I was to find out later that the artillery officer killed was a first cousin of a close work colleague at the CRB.

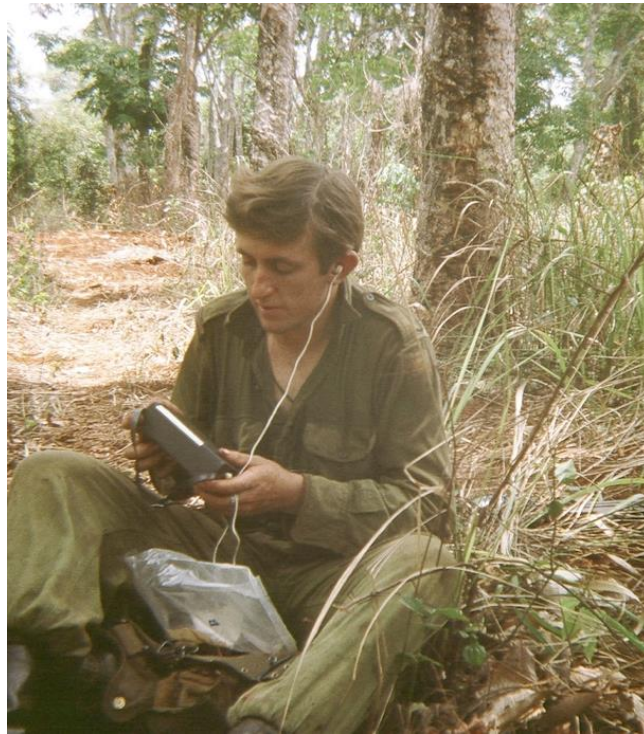


Gerry looking whimsical at Nui Dat just prior to coming home (on the same day as the Battle of Long Khan).

Despite being fully exposed as a front-line soldier I felt very lucky during my 4 months in Vietnam. For me personally, apart from some minor skirmishes and scary moments, what could go right, did go right. However, I do have a feeling of guilt of letting my mates down in not being there that day. I keep wondering how I would have reacted under intense fire and whether the decisions that I would have been forced to make would have saved my gun group colleagues or made matters worse. I will never know.

Some Minor Non-Compliances: I regarded myself as a reliable, compliant and capable soldier except for a couple of minor blemishes. I didn't care much for short military style haircuts and managed to avoid detection for almost four months in Vietnam. But, much to my chagrin, I was 'sprung' the day prior to departure and in no uncertain terms ordered to get a 'short back and sides'. I was not happy. The second non-compliance was, as an AFL footy tragic, I would always listen to the Radio Australia broadcast of the match at the MCG each Saturday afternoon whilst on active patrol. With the radio in my backpack and the lead and earpiece carefully disguised, I

was able to enjoy a weekly dose of footy. It was easy to flick the earpiece out at the first sign of trouble as we moved single file through the jungle. My colleagues following appreciated the innovative hand signals that provided updates as each goal was kicked, but they were somewhat apprehensive about my fully loaded rifle swinging around in their direction as I tried to imitate the goal umpires' actions. Senior officers were not impressed when told about this years later.



Gerry tuning into the footy during lunch break on patrol.

Letters from home: Every four or five days, helicopters would ferry out supplies including the eagerly awaited mail bag bearing letters and parcels (often small fruit cakes) from home. On one occasion, everyone seemed to have a heavily perfumed letter from their girlfriend which they would wave around with great glee. My solitary letter was one correctly addressed (3RAR, Nui Dat) from the Country Roads Board which I happily waved around as being from my 'caring and sharing' employer. My jaw dropped when I discovered that my personal contributions to the State Superannuation Fund were in arrears and that I would be in default of the scheme if I didn't pay by the end of the month. Wow. What hope did I have to pay in the circumstances, given that my cheque book was safely in storage back in Australia. The coldness and insensitivity of the letter still irks me a bit to this day. No warm handwritten note to wish me well in a war zone and to sort the matter out when I returned. I regret that I didn't have the foresight to keep the letter rather than burying it in the jungles of Vietnam.

Return Home: An issue that still really rankles the Vietnam Veteran community to this day, is the hostility, anger and blame directed towards the returning soldiers (many of whom were young national servicemen) by those in the community strongly opposed to the war. It was a shameful period in our history. In many cases returning soldiers retreated and ‘disappeared’ back into the community. What was probably worse (to our own detriment), is that we disconnected from each other as we scattered to our homes across the county and returned to civilian life. Whilst I never personally experienced any direct hostility, I did experience a discernible level of coolness and indifference which at times was uncomfortable. This included elements of the then CRB which prided itself on its military support.

On returning home I was discharged from the Army quite quickly and immediately returned to my job as a technical officer in the main Kew laboratory. In hindsight, I was hopelessly prepared for the sudden transition from a front-line soldier in a war zone in a tropical country to civilian life back home in mid-winter Melbourne. Likewise, the then CRB was also ill-equipped to handle such transitions. There was no warm welcome back. It was just ‘suck it up mate and get on with it’.

At the time, the Federal Government rhetoric and repeated promises was that no national serviceman serving their country would be disadvantaged. I was young and somewhat naïve and believed these promises literally. But the actual reality was that it simply meant that employers were expected to hold their job open if they were able to do so.

I was already quite annoyed about the financial disadvantage resulting from the disparity between the military pay and my the previous CRB pay over the two-year period. This annoyance increased further when I was more-or-less regarded as a new starter at the ‘bottom of the pile’ and assigned to do the most basic work. Colleagues that I first started with were now receiving their first promotion based on their experience and skills while I was a ‘long, long way off’. Whilst understandable, it just didn’t seem fair and appeared contrary to Government promises. The chip on my shoulder grew bigger by the day and I was probably considered to be far, far less than a ‘model employee’. As an aside, and adding fuel to the fire, an Italian born friend of mine had completed an electrical apprenticeship prior to his Vietnam service was then denied a job at the SEC because he wasn’t an Australian citizen. So much for the Government rhetoric and community attitudes of the day. He could fight for his adopted country but not work for it.

Vocational Retraining: Things improved markedly some six months later when I accessed a 12-month vocational retraining program offered to eligible war veterans and commenced a three year Diploma of Applied Science (Geology) at the Bendigo Institute of Technology. Initially the CRB granted leave without pay to commence the course, but indicated that I would need to resign if I wanted to complete the final two years full time. Fortunately, that decision was later reversed after some ‘argy bargy’ and lobbying. At last, my CRB/RCA/VicRoads career was underway. On successful completion of the course, I joined the Geology Section for four or five years before eventually progressing into a number of diverse organisational positions ending up as the Manager of VicRoads Property Department. I much appreciated the ‘kick-start’ that the vocational retraining program provided, and the subsequent opportunities VicRoads offered over my career. What started badly ended well.

Veteran Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA): A significant side benefit arising from my service in Vietnam has been to join fellow veterans in a large sub-branch of the VVAA in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Like many others, I was a ‘closet veteran’ for 30 years before finally ‘coming out’ in 2001 and joining the organisation in 2006. I regret not reconnecting much, much earlier.

We have over 200 active service members in our sub-branch, and have diverse range of sub-groups catering for bike riding (my passion), caravanning, arts and crafts (i.e. woodworking), coffee groups, breakfast groups etc. as well as more formal functions and activities. Wives and families are a key part of the group. The Sub-branch does excellent work with ‘grass roots’ welfare for those who are ill or need support. Unlike other organisations, we are not burdened by the need to run a clubroom, liquor licence and in some cases pokies, enabling our organisational energy to be better directed to welfare, socialisation and community connection. The companionship, camaraderie and special bond that exists between fellow Vietnam veterans, from all walks of life, is something that I treasure.

The need for such an organisation was spawned in the 1980s when it became evident that there were significant health issues affecting veterans that weren’t being adequately addressed by the Government, RSL or other veteran advocates. The use of the chemical Agent Orange (linked to cancers) and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were the main issues of concern. This led to

the formation of the fiercely independent Vietnam Veterans Association that fought vigorously, tirelessly and successfully for these conditions to be addressed, accepted and treated.



Gerry with a home-made wreath for Vietnam Veterans (pre-Anzac Service 2021).

50th Anniversary of the Battle of Long Khanh: On the 7 June 2021, a commemorative service was held in Canberra to recognise and acknowledge the 50th anniversary of Operation Overlord, including the Battle of Long Khanh. The ceremony was televised live on the ABC. It was a major reunion of all the units involved in the multifaceted operation. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend as Melbourne was in COVID lockdown at the time and I missed the opportunity to catch-up with colleagues from other states who I may never see again.

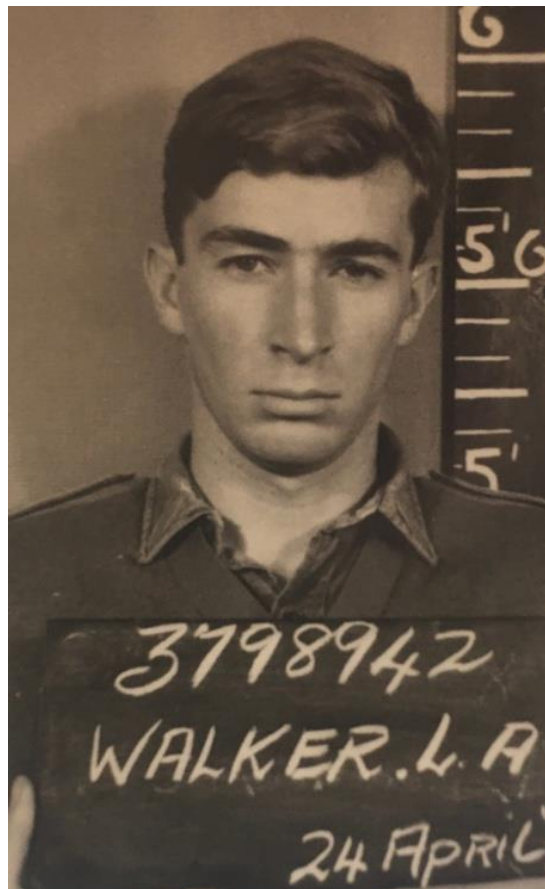
When Gerry submitted this story to me, he said:

Up until now, I had strongly believed that my military service had had little or no adverse impact on my life. However, in preparing this seemingly benign document I become very emotional and sad. It did have an impact. I have edited out some of the things that were troubling me.

I previously prepared the document as an email four months ago, but it was wiped out in a major glitch when I lost all my emails and email addresses. Redoing the document brought back the same memories and sadness.

Gunner Leonard (Len) Alan Walker, 3798942

Len was a National Serviceman who served with Mike Butler (above) in 131 Divisional Locating Battery in the Royal Regiment of Australia Artillery. Len came from Ivanhoe and was born in September 1949. He was a survey draftsman at Ballarat Division of the CRB for two years before being drafted. He was studying civil engineering part time at the Ballarat School of Mines at the time of enlisting on 24 April 1970.



Len Walker's enlistment photograph – 24 April 1970.

Len served in Vietnam in 131 Division from 17 December 1970 to June 1971 after which he was transferred to the 12th Field Regiment. His tour of duty in Vietnam ceased on 30 October 1971. He was wounded in action on 3 February 1971. Len was in the Land Rover that ran over the landmine described in the entry above on Mike Butler. He was hospitalised for two weeks.



A couple of CRB signwriters. Len Walker in the background with Mike Butler in the foreground - showing off the sign they made.

Tragically, he drowned in 2007 as the result of a fishing accident.

2nd Lieutenant Douglas Brian Welshe, 3787350

Douglas was born on in Melbourne 17 December 1945 and he graduated with a Diploma of Civil Engineering from Bendigo Institute of Technology in 1996. After graduation, he joined the CRB at the Bendigo Regional office. He was called up for national Service in April 1966 and he commenced his basic training at Puckapunyal before being selected for officer training at OTU as part of the second intake of 1966. In his enlistment papers, it was noted, “*Attitude to National Service – good. Could be officer material.*” This proved prescient. He graduated from OTU in December

1966, as Second Lieutenant and he was posted to the 7th Field Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers where he served the remainder of his two years of National Service.



Douglas Welshe's enlistment photograph, April 1966, and after being commissioned, December 1966.

On his discharge from the Army in April 1968, he returned to the CRB and was posted Traffic and Location section at Head Office in Kew.

He left the CRB to take up an appointment with the City of Toowoomba in Queensland where he worked for twenty or so years before shifting to the Sunshine Coast City Council.