

"Reflections of a Conscript"



"My" Journey -

The Long Road to Vietnam.

by

CFN. G.W.VENABLES 5714424

40 years too late?



2 RTB - Puckapunyal. Victoria.

ANGKOK



Nui Dat Base, Main Gates.

Phu Quoc Island



Long Tan Monument.

WORK IN PROGRESS – “Reflections of a Conscript.

DRAFT ONLY.

40 years too late?

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PREFACE

It is a warm, uncomfortable night, I have just completed a long walk along the Back Beach there is a threat of rain and it's now quite late. The conditions are uncomfortable, I'm uncomfortable I can't sleep the days events have unsettled me and to make things worse the air conditioning is not controlling my environment you see its 2008. I am in Vung Tau, Vietnam a place where many of my friends were and where I could have been 40 years ago. You see I'm an Australian National Serviceman (Nasho) and in some ways I have returned to Vietnam to try to understand why, I feel some sort of responsibility of my conscience, 40 years on.

I have never entertained the idea of writing an essay let alone an expose or book. Let me try to explain my journey to where I am today, for you see I'm a little confused but I had to walk *The (My) Long Road to Vietnam* For some, this could be to others a history lesson, tourist talk and some of you may even understand. I'm no hero, again let me try to explain.

On facing the Long Tan Memorial, these words came to me,

“I wonder why men came to die so far away from home?”

These words never left me and in some way haunted me through my journey through this Ancient Country. I initially intended to write an “ode” to the Vietnam Vets, but my poetry verse and memory is not a strong point and I never trained as an Author, so this may never be printed and maybe my family will have something else to throw out. This was never intended to be a book or expose but if I have these feelings then many others who have gone before may have and it may encourage them to express themselves and try to move on, but, not to forget.

This is reasoning for my visit; “My” journey too or from - I am not sure.

This questioning started for me some 10 years ago in Western Australia's Margaret River Region on an ANZAC Day weekend when I was reading the exploits of the Australian Forces in Vietnam....well..... that's not quite true the story really started in Sept 1965.

Australia had become involved in Vietnam and the Government was introducing a 2 year compulsory conscription for 20 years olds. This was inaugurated by the “National Service Act (1964).

This Conscription was not to be for all, but on *the luck of a marble draw with your birth date on*.

It is reported that around 63735 National Servicemen were conscripted from 1964 to 1972, of these 19450 “Nasho's” served in Vietnam 222 were killed in action 1279 wounded, of the Regular Servicemen, 202 killed in action with 1090 wounded. Not to mention the psychological traumas many suffered upon their return and still do, up to this present day.

This commenced a sorry divisive chapter in Australia's public history that today, still stirs emotions through *misunderstandings* of those who were and were not involved. Back then and now, who was right, who was wrong and even, who cares? You see, the whole Nation was involved..... Politicians, Regular Servicemen, Conscripts, Conscientious Objectors, Business Owners and the Public at large, all had an opinion.

Many graphic images and facts are to be found on the Royal Australian Regiments official web pages for those still not convinced, many eyewitness accounts are available through personal books written.

Extracts from a book entitled “Looking through an Infantry mans eyes” by Gary McMahon assists in understanding a combatants individuals thinking.

Quote. “We patrolled together, slept together, laughed together and we fought together. We even died together”and “It was a war where you learned to trust Fate or God. There were not many Atheists among Infantry men in those days”.

In addition, a respect of their enemy with, “He stood about 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighed about eight stone wringing wet, but in my opinion he was one of the best guerrilla fighters in the world.” *end of quote*

I would invite you to take the time at the end of this to reflect on your position back then and now.

The climate at this time was part of the Cold War with Communism, Domino theories and the defense of Australia's north. This may still be a challenge for Australians in the future with the vastness of open spaces with water in the Northern Territory and Western Australia's Kimberley Area. Except for a small, not less important, involvement in the Korean and Malayan Conflicts this (my) generation had not experienced war since 1945.

It is not my intention even try to judge or justify the merits of these decisions or the position that the reader may have been in at this time. I am trying to understand and invite you to rethink your motives and past judgments that tore the fabric of Australia apart. Our young Australians (most without a choice) fought, bore their Countries shame and given the burden to carry personally, then and now on behalf of those who did, could or would not *understand*.

I have chosen not to mention any names but all events to my understanding, can be verified.

“Australians” - “MY” Journey – The Long Road to Vietnam.



Road into the Australian Nui Dat Base Camp.

A very short history of Vietnam.

History shows that there were inhabitants of the now Vietnam in an era known as the Primitive age dating back 500,000 years. The Hung Kings circa 2700 years ago to 179 years BC, the periods of struggles for national independence from 2nd century BC to 10 century, Ly dynasty 11-13 century, 13-14th century, Tran dynasty, Le dynasty 15-18th century, Tay dynasty 19th century and the Nguyen dynasty 10-20th century. So now your up to date you will understand there is some history here to be reviewed.

Now to 1965, I did not know where Vietnam was nor understood any of its history. This was a sharp learning curve and partly revealed to me during my recent sabbatical to Vietnam in 2008. During this visit, it soon became clear this country, long before Australia was discovered, had seen little peace over many centuries. They experienced attacks from the Mongols, Chinese, Malaysian Pirates and the French (who held rule for 96 years) and then the American Allies.

As an aside most of these Ancient battles fought were over the North, the Southern region was only a swampland. These conflicts, between North and South Vietnam have been a battle that has spread over centuries as the different ideologies endeavoured to take control. American forces commenced as support of the French who then withdrew and the USA landed at Da Nang on March 8 1965. As my memory serves, the Australians and New Zealand forces were initially involved as trainers/advisors to the South Vietnam's forces as early as 1962, the ANZAC's were withdrawn in June 1973.

This Country has witnessed many outside Asian conflicts over the centuries and recent times. We can reflect on some of their neighbours struggles with ideologies such as Cambodia, Laos, China and Burma to name a few.

The Call up process Basic Training: 2 RTB – Puckapunyal. Victoria.

It all happened so fast, the Act was passed in 1964. My Registration papers were filed on the 27-7-1965. I was advised on the 23-9-1965 to attend a Medical Examination on the 21-1-1966 in St. Georges Terrace, Perth and then advised that I was required to report to Karrakatta the week of the 18-4-1966 to commence transport proceedings to 2 Recruit Training Battalion, Puckapunyal, Victoria. I was officially, enlisted on the 20-4-1966. From Civilian to Recruit in 31 weeks my apprenticeship finished in January 1966.

As a Conscript and after medicals tests were completed my involvement commenced on the 20th April 1966 when along other young Western Australians we boarded Two Planes (Boeing 727 and a 4 engine Electra) and flew out of Perth destined to the country Airport of Bangalore, Victoria. The flight was long and not without incident, that anyone on board the Electra would recall as we had some anxious moments when the plane lost altitude (air pocket) very quickly. Arrival in the very early morning to be greeted by “Grab your gearLine up in threes for roll call.....be quick about it ...your in the Army now.” Where was the greeting and a friendly, Good Morning Gentlemen, pleasant trip?

Loaded onto a bus we traveled to 2 RTB Training Centre at ‘Pucka’. Later that morning as a member of the 4th National Service Intake along with 15 other strangers we were posted to ‘D’ Company 18 platoon. (Hut 33). A few days later, we ‘celebrated’ ANZAC Day in uniform.

As the only one within my own personal peer group to have been conscripted this was the start of the unfairness of the situation. In hindsight, this was a horrifying moment, leaving home, wives, family and the security of jobs. Many of the Conscripted Recruits had just finished their 5-year apprenticeships and earning tradesmen wages for just a few weeks and others were breaking into their passions in what they showed a talent in such as Test and State Cricket, League Football, Musicians to name a few and myself, an A Grade Hockey player.

As Conscripts we were on Recruits wages of \$ 68.32 gross per fortnight and I was banking \$45 per fortnight. Yet an adventure was ahead as we were to find out very quickly the training was professional, personally challenging, haircuts severe (this was the age for long hair) and a bonding of complete strangers made you proud to be part of a disciplined team.

West Australians, South Australians, Tasmanians and Victorians trained in Puckapunyal and the remaining States and those joining the Regular Army trained at Kapooka, New South Wales.

Seven Royal Australian Regiment (7 RAR) were just over the road in the Yellow tin huts preparing for their tour of Vietnam a sobering thought as some were in our shoes in the 1st and 2nd intakes just a few months before. The physical training was tough as many of the recruits were unfit for the job that we were “chosen” for (by a marble). Chin-ups, climbing the ropes, running to the top and back of the infamous “Tit Hill” in boots, inside 12 minutes, (who will ever forget it) doing our own laundry, making our own beds, (Army style, so tight you could bounce a 10c coin on them) and the dark cold early morning roll calls. Let me assure you the ‘Pucka’ breeze is very lazy, it did not go around you it just went through you. Then the military side, kick in the rifle range, grenade throwing and parade ground disciplines. Boy we thought we had it tough and to think of those back home who were ‘missing out’ on these experiences.

For those that can remember Mellow Yellow, Kaleidoscope Eyes, were on the hit parade. On hearing these songs I still get a touch of De Je Vu.

I believe that all young Australians should experience some form of National Service, as if this was all that we were to endure it would have assisted us in life. The Discipline, fitness, Self Confidence, although we did not understand then we were being trained in “Life Skills” as it turned out for some, to the nth degree.

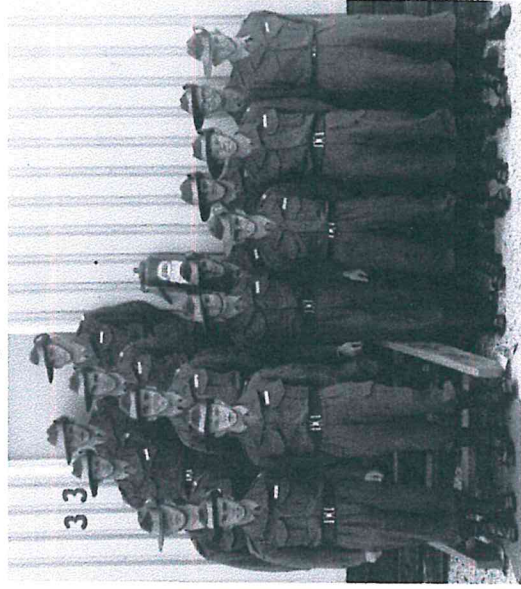
I recall as if it were yesterday, a Vietnam Vet Training Sergeant gave us a dressing down (a nice word for bollicking) for fooling around during an SLR Rifle rebuilding exercise when he exclaimed “when you are face down in mud under fire from the VC (Charlie) you won’t think this exercise is funny (well, words to that effect). We finished training that day saying “He can’t speak to us that way.” Well, one, he could and two, he did and



about 4 months later we understood a little more of his words when we were reading about the exploits of those who fought in the Battle of Long Tan.....over there.

The training was hard, the discipline tough but most of us saw it as firstly our Duty as our Country required and secondly an opportunity to adventure..... we were only 20 years of age.

At the conclusion of our initial 12 weeks basic training and passing out parade, each Recruit was posted to a Corps Training Base (eg. Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, etc) around the Nation. The bonding of a common cause from basic training was over, but in many cases still carries on today for we were proud "Conscript's."



2RTB. 'D' Company 18 Platoon.

Ask any 60 plus year old. Were you a Conscript?

This is where my story finished, (for now) as along with 21 others' we were posted to the Western Australian Midland Workshops of RAEME (Royal Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineers) and we were forgotten about as we remained on Recruit wages for many months. This was, finally rectified after some dissention within the ranks.

One of our jobs in the Armory Section was to make safe some captured VC



weapons that the SAS had brought back from war....over there

Twelve months later I married my girl, Maureen in the April of '67 still not knowing my fate, we had a shortened honeymoon at the military establishment on Rottnest Island 20 km off shore from Perth. I basically had an 8 to 5 job, represented Army in the Inter Service's sports and I saw my mates off to Vietnam then went home each night and like most Australians gave lip service to "I hope our boys will be safe"over there.

Upon my discharge, I was not sure of my future for the past 2 years I was under orders and did not have to think much about anything as I had little chance of changing my destiny that was in other people's hands. As under the directions of the Conscription ACT (1964) I returned to the family business in the engineering workshop as a Fitter and Turner. Within 12 months, I had decided to push myself into being a Company Representative (Salesman) and 6 years later with my Father went out into our own business. Business life was tough and many lessons were learnt but they were exciting times.....But that's another story....

We move forward to 2004 As I mentioned this story is certainly not about me, the journey is, as I am no hero. Up to this time, my life had been pretty good. So maybe this is where this story really did start for me, that is, "40 years late" ANZAC weekend in Margaret River a sense of an unsettling guilt set in as I read the articles in our local "West Australian" newspaper on Vietnam, Long Tan and recognised soldiers, real or in my minds eye from photos of the front line.

The Media's Involvement.

We quickly learned that Service Personal did not contact the press as the media outlets would take any complaint and turn it into a story. The English language at the best of times can be misconstrued and distorted even with no malice intended.

If you review some of the press commentaries, you will witness the reports from bystanders whose reported judgments were reflected onto our troops and the Government of the day as we had not seen war like this. The Vietnam War was the first covered by television where incidents that happened today were reported and shown directly into our homes with little discretion as to and a degree of censorship. These actions may have placed our troops in danger. It certainly infected the Nations psychic. After a few weeks of witnessing the actions, from our lounge rooms, was this the catalyst that assisted in turning this conflict into a media manipulated event Political and along with the Conscientious Objector's statements which, in my opinion were given more than warranted time, tore into and eventuated in the destruction and dignity of the troops.

The American public were constantly bombarded with nightly, on the spot reports from names such as, The Rockpile, Hamburger Hill and Khe Sahn to name a few along with the mounting casualty tallies.

Mind you, the reporters suffered as documentation shows that 134 war correspondents from 11 nationalities were killed in action.

For the public at home the War had become laesae and an everyday event as it was happening. over there.

What's the Cricket score?

Back to my journey.

Arriving at the Saigon Airport from Kuala Lumpur my journey had commenced. I was first struck by the war plane hangers at the airport surrounds and my mind started to try and connect with 4 decades of what might have been..... We were transferred to the 1930s built Grand Hotel, Dong Khoi St. District 1. This old comfortable hotel, refurbished to its previous glory with mod cons added set the mind going as to the changes in Saigon it had witnessed. Early night, as tomorrow we will travel in comfort 130 km southeast of Saigon to Nui Dat, Long Tan and the coastal City of Vung Tau.

Saigon Veteran's Return Tour of Nui Dat Base Camp - Long Tan Memorial - Phouc Tuy Province.

The car journey was uneventful as I envisaged what it would have been like in the back of a truck as a 20 year old. We stopped for a stretch and were a little bemused, when we changed guides and continued.

Today is 2008, along way from 1966 but part of my reflection, was, this visit to Nui Dat Base Camp and I'm a little disappointed at the condition and the lack of recognition given to the site but this is from my understanding not the Vietnamese Government or the people who are now trying to rebuild their livelihoods.

Maybe something can be done or are we imposing on the Vietnamese?

The Nui Dat Base Main Gate is now three decaying brick pillars, just inside the gates and 30 meters to the right are the remains of the bunkers used for protection from the VC mortar and rocket attacks.

I would have liked more time to walk around with a Vet and reviewed the layout as it was.

This Base Camp was home for the Royal Australian Regiments' (RAR) and their attachments from the mid 1960s..



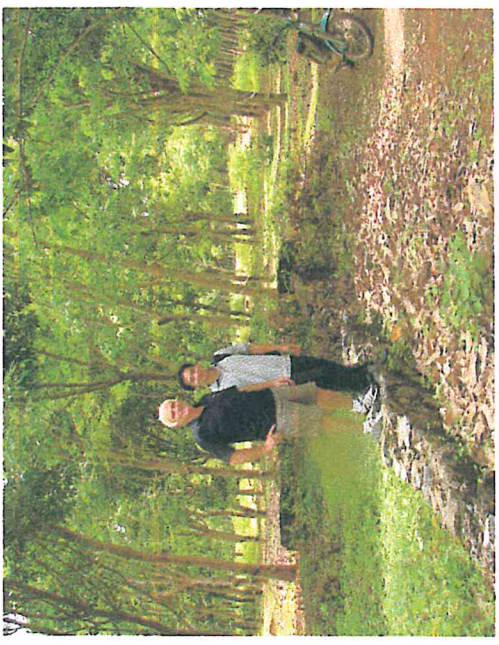
Rex Hotel Saigon from where the Media covered the last days of the war.



*Rumoured that they are to be torn down to widen the road
the pillars*



Remains of the Bunker.



Foundations of Head Quarters Nui Dat.

These scenes would have been very different in the mid'60s.

Another short distance is where Head Quarters was located and where the painted "ROCK INSIGNIA'S" lie nearby show the signs of wear.



This is our history and if they are not of interest to the Vietnamese then they could be brought back to Australia.

Signals were out the back, Pearson Rd, SAS Squadron, Kangaroo Pad (Helicopters), the hill where the radio masts stood, Luscombe Field where the Caribou and C130 landing strip was situated, along Hughes Rd to the Dust Bowl (where the visiting entertainers performed) onto Eagle Farm..... All is so quiet now. Rubber plantations, small Vietnamese homes, a Soccer pitch on the runway is in need of repair and of course, all where our boys stood.

There were 16 Battalion tours to Vietnam encompassing all 9 Regiments from May 1965 to March 1972. 1 RAR through to 7 RAR did two tours. Each tour was approx 12 months and consisted of almost 800 personnel.

In the true Aussie spirit of lets do something the Children's Kindergarten building that never really saw any use as there are no pre-school programmes, no teachers, few children, nor use for this monument, done for all the right reasons by members of 4 RAR, but maybe not of *understanding* of the Vietnamese culture and lack of services.

a childrens Kindergarten was built, it was.



Kindergarten. Now empty.



Kindergarten Plaque.

Maybe this could be used in future as a Memorial Museum/Tourists office, when the new International airport is built near by. This area is a must, for Australians who wish to understand more.

A short drive brings you to another Rubber plantation and the Long Tan Monument.

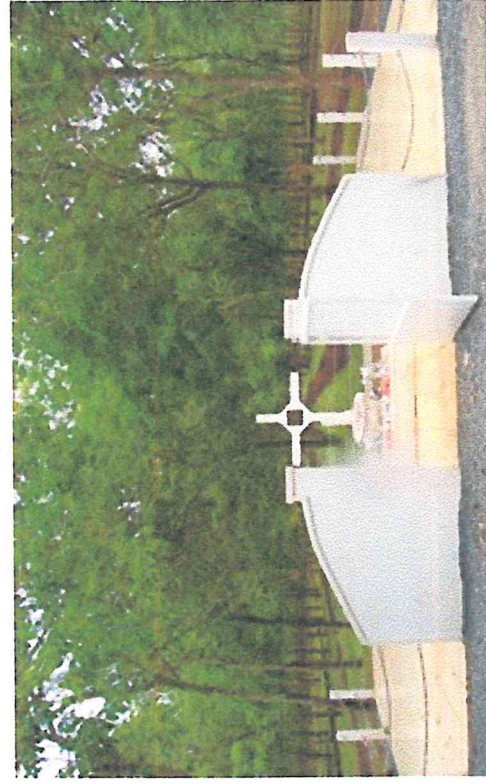
Long Tan Monument.

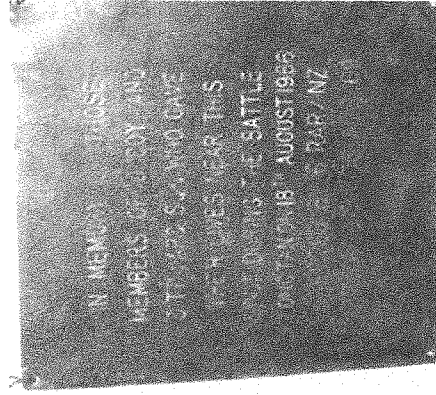
The visit is coordinated through the local Police Authorities and an officer meets you with a simple small plaque to hang on the Cross.

Many Aussies on their visit have commented to me “It is confronting, emotional, challenging to the mind and spirit and I was not involved with the War or Conscription.”

Imagine the impact for those that were there or even indirectly involved like me, Yes the reports of this struggle is what set me into reflection mode some 10 years ago.

This battle is well documented in other publications (see details) yet, this battle when our Australian troops, were proportionately outnumbered by more than 10 to 1 fought valiantly and on the arrival of back up troops from the Nui Dat Base Camp the VC disappeared.





The Prime Minister John Howard commissioned this Monument in 2006 in recognition of those 18 soldiers who fell and fought at Long Tan in August 1966.

The Plaque simply reads:

“IN MEMORY OF THOSE MEMBERS OF D COMPANY AND 3 TP 1 APC SQD WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES NEAR THIS SPOT DURING THE BATTLE OF LONG TAN ON 18TH AUGUST 1966 . ERECTED BY 6RAR / NZ C ANZAC D BN 18 AUG 69”

“Can you hear Australia’s Heroes Marching?

I placed a supplied Red Poppy in absolute quiet, you take your photos, no one around but you and your thoughts..... Thoughts of what might have been, thoughts of mates who were there, the now silent gunfire in your mind, the dust and mud, the slow realisation that I was a bystander to history, maybe not on the scale of the WWI-WW2 but of an event that took place in mine and ~~probably your~~ ^{a probably yours} lifetime.

This was Australia’s longest war.....This is, part of our Country’s history.

Documented reports show that 108 soldiers took part in one of the most intensive battles fought on 18 August 1966. These soldiers were serving with 6 RAR ‘D’ Company. Out numbered by at least 10 to 1 cut off from assistance from the Nui Dat Base. These Infantry Soldiers fought valiantly until help arrived some hours later. It is reported that 17 were killed in action from 6 RAR, 11 of these were National Servicemen and the 18th was from the Armored Personal Carriers (APC). The youngest was only 19 – the eldest 22 years of age.

Then I ask myself,

“I wonder why men came to die so far away from home.....?”

Later, I experienced a different emotion. WHY weren’t these boys recognised upon their return neither as victors nor heroes but of those who answered their Nations Call to duty. WHY, did Aussie’s turn on them? Government’s that were slow in at least recognising them even the Returned Servicemen’s League (RSL) were subdued, even opposed in their comments at the time. No one wanted to know.

This lack of Recognition paid to the Australian Veterans by the Australian Government, had been the subject of extreme criticism for this lack of acknowledgement. This was partly rectified when in November 2006, John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia visited Long Tan, the first Australian Prime Minister to make the journey.

It was at Long Tan the Prime Minister acknowledged the poor treatment that Aussie Vets had received.

We travelled from Long Tan to a town called Baria and were advised that this was where many Australians sort some refuge from the patrols and camp life and..... we had a quiet lunch.

The afternoon journey onto Vung Tau City with our original guide whose father fought with the South Vietnamese Army advised me that he was not accredited to take tours to these sights and that the tour guide was a ^{local} Government employee.

We booked into the Four Star, DIC STAR Hotel.

The vista from our window includes the high land peninsular with an impressive 30 meter high statue of “Jesus Christ” with arms outstretched to the sea, to the right a Lighthouse built in 1910 which all serves to differentiate the Back Beach from the downtown Front Beach.

I had achieved my main reason to visit Vietnam and now for the tourism side of the country..... So I thought for this is where it started.....Again.....as I spent that restless night just thinking of what it would have been like 40 years ago for the boys I had trained with at 2 RTB. These boys really did not have a choice.

While I now struggled with the air conditioner and to sleep 40 years later on.

The questions would not stop in my mind;

How did they cope away from their families, at a war that their Country had sought their involvement?

What were the conditions really like?

Why were they personally ridiculed, mistreated?

Was it because we did not win?

Was it a ‘shame’ thing that as a Nation we could not face?

Was it the conscientious objector saying “I told you so”?

I still don’t understand..... WHY?

I guess NOW, in hindsight, it is up to the individual to answer.

One requirement is that you must come and at least, partly experience, reflect on this time of Vietnams and Australia’s history before progress obliterates it from the landscape.....or your mind.

On leaving Vung Tau we took a ^{returned by car} car-ride back to Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City, Metropole Hotel where we met up with the main tour group of 20 plus our tour guide, Thom.
The Metropole Hotel situated on Tran Hung Dao Ave, District 1.Saigon was bombed on numerous occasions, it also served as a place where American Officers stayed during the war.

The tourist tour begins ~~today~~.

An air-conditioned bus, new people to get to know, sights to see, weather is good, but my questions remain, with a new one added for my tour friends..... Why did you come to Vietnam?..... Their replies differed from mine and I still felt, that I was ^{U A’s} still, on my own journey.

Ho Chi Minh City - Saigon.

In 1975, the new Government quickly renamed Saigon, although they soon realised that the proud ‘Saigonese’ would never stop calling it Saigon. It is, now accepted that Ho Chi Minh City refers to the greater Metropolitan area, while the older and central suburbs known as Saigon.
Once the main port of Cambodia’s Mekong Territory, it became Capital of France’s Cochinchina, then Capital of the Republic of Vietnam until 1975. Saigon is a cosmopolitan city, with a history, culture drawn from France, ancient China and the America’s of the 1960s. Everything is within walking or short taxi fare distance.

Today we visited the Notre Dame Cathedral, built 1886-1890 and across the street the very French style Central Post Office then it is off to the obligatory Binh Tay markets that will test your resolve, whatever that may be.



Notre Dame Cathedral.



French Post Office.

Next stop and back to My journey

The former Presidential Palace, renamed the Reunification Palace in 1975.

This modern Building known as the Independence or Presidential Palace was to play an historic part in the final days of the war. This building was once the symbol of the South Vietnamese Government with the furnishings left almost as it was on that day in 1975.

Who will ever forget the crashing of the gates on April 30th by a North Vietnamese Tank a scene that flashed around the world.

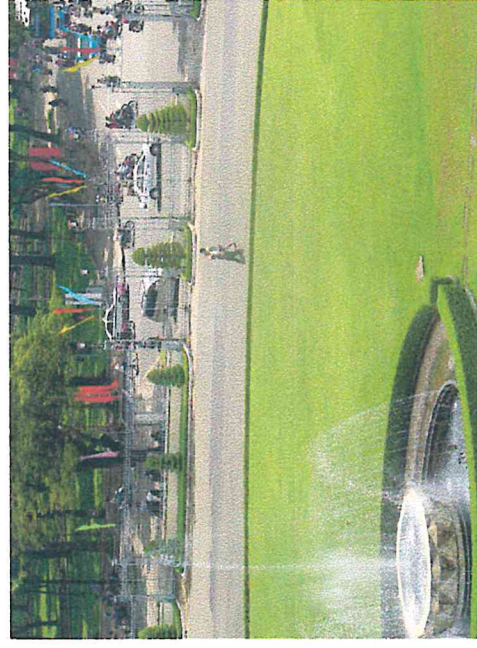
Reunification came with wide spread political repression and for anyone wishing to understand deeper the world of politics have a web of twists and turns as the Republic became Communists to Socialists in South Vietnam that had become Capitalistic... What would Ho Chi Minh say?

This scenario will be fascinating to watch as it unfolds for Vietnam, the world and the political columnists/commentators over the next decade.



Reunification Palace

This set the scene for our next stop a visit to the War Remnants Museum.



Those same gates, today.

War Remnants Museum.....The Atrocities of War.....

I realise that the winner of any conflicts gets to tell the storyI am not condoning our allies actions, maybe as our ideology did not prevail we lose the right to write the history where the truth or bias becomes a victim as a visit to the War Remnants Museum graphically reports on the atrocities committed by the allies.

To explain this not too many war crime trials were held by the allies after the 1st and 2nd World Wars. On visiting the Museum that opened in September 1975, you can not ignore that war is brutal and this display really does capture the atrocities of the war and past histories of Vietnam's "Historical Truths" as they put it, at least from their perspective.

As mentioned earlier this country has seen it's share of conflict over the centuries.

If you are endeavouring to understand the Vietnam History of conflict over this time it is imperative you visit this Museum which is presently undergoing some re-construction.....**Beware!**..... The photo's and descriptions are very confronting and disturbing, yet it is a moving experience of just what mankind can inflict on it's own race.

Almost 60000 Americans and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese (many civilians) were killed in the action, trying to save the Republic of Vietnam. The Americans departed Vietnam in 1973 leaving behind a small contingent of advisors. Bombing of the North stopped, US prisoners were released but the war continued with the South Vietnamese fighting on their own.

In January 1975 the North started what was to be their last push South. The rest is history as the North Vietnamese entered the now Reunification Palace on April 30th where General Duong Van Minh, who was President for barely 42 hours formally surrendered.

There is little reported or recognition, not surprisingly of the South Vietnamese Soldiers involvement anywhere in Vietnam and many cemeteries have been destroyed by the bulldozers.

This is not my place as an ^{Tourist} amateur reporter to delve too deep into these stories.

This should assist us non-combatants to recognise some of the reasons for the difficulties the Vietnamese people and our Troops have endured.

The War Museum is arguably the cities major tourist site, which caters for over 400,000 local and foreign visitors per year.

The tour continues tomorrow to the Mekong Delta.

Mekong Delta.

The Mekong Delta was once part of the old Khmer Kingdom and the last to be claimed by the Vietnamese.

Cambodia controlled this area until the 18th century and tried to regain ascendancy by raiding the Viet villages and massacring the inhabitants. The Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia in 1979 and ousted the Khmer Rouge power.

After a two hours bus drive we embarked onto a boat where we cruised the delta passing fish farms, island hopping, local markets, cuisine and a family business that manufactures Coconut Candy.

This area renowned for its richness with only 50% under cultivation can produce enough rice to feed the whole country with a surplus. Other commodities are Coconut, Sugar Cane, exotic fruits and fish. The Mekong Delta is primarily rural and is the reason for Vietnam claim to be the worlds' second largest exporter of Rice after Thailand.

This area is one of the most densely populated areas in Vietnam.

Although playing a major roll in the conflict there appears to have been little lasting impact on the region.

Ben Duoc – Cu Chi Tunnels. - The other Side.

Today we visit the amazing tunnels that I have heard so much about and again one of my points of interest for being here.

During scenic bus drive of 70 km to the North West of Ho Chi Minh City and takes you through villages which probably have not changed much since. This area that saw much fighting and our guide made it clear that not only the Aussie Servicemen were shunned of reward or recognition, the VC on cessation of hostilities were simply informed that they should return to their rice paddies and their fishing nets.

The New Military Government celebrated for the Country with 'Reunification Day' ?

This area was known as the Iron Triangle on account of the strength of the Communist Insurgency. It was also the conclusion of many of the supply caravan paths that traced down from the Chinese boarder, across mountain boarders with Laos and into the Mekong Delta. This path became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The Cu Chi Tunnels, constructed over a 25-year timeline to be part of a 200 km complex over an area of 420sq km, is a necessary excursion. It is an experience to witness the ingenuity of the guerilla VC, who took shelter in the extensive multi level tunnels systems. These tunnel systems are at several levels, interconnected and containing accommodation, meeting rooms, hospitals and preparation for battle areas for example the Tet Offensive in 1968. The Americans built a military base right on top of a tunnel complex which caused some problems with the VC firing on them and then simply disappearing.

These tunnels gave some comfort from the devastation of the jungle area by the use of Agent Orange, Napalm and the B29s constant bombing. Although it is reported that only around 6000 VC survived from 16000 who fought in the tunnels.

There are tunnel systems all over Vietnam and many are available with local tour guides especially around Danang.

The bomb craters and collapsed tunnels are still visible and nature is now showing it is resilience to overcome man's destruction and is retuning these areas to the new jungle that was home for the North Vietnamese. Cu Chi was awarded with titles of "Iron Land" and "Bronze Citadel"

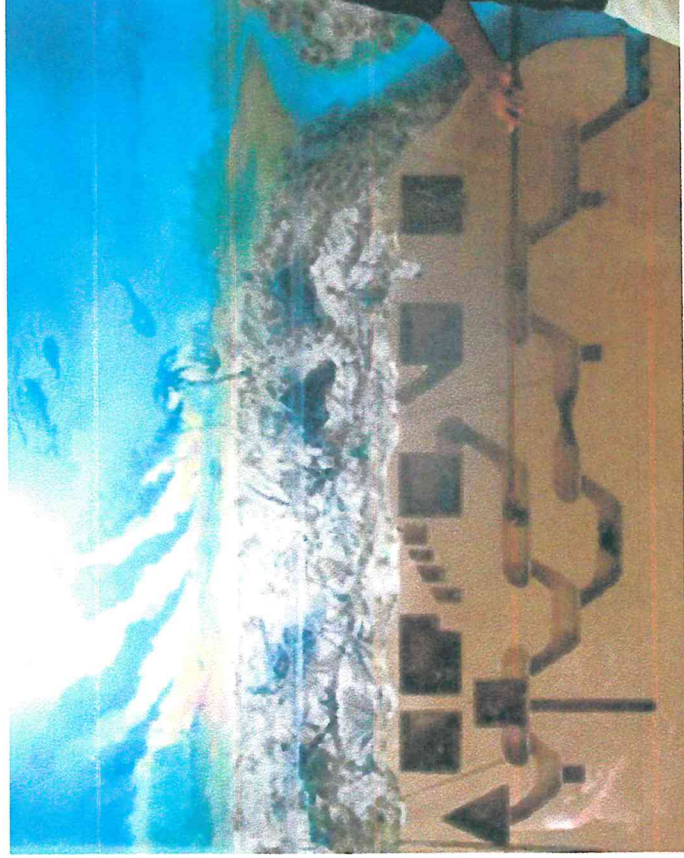


Diagramme of a VC tunnel layout.



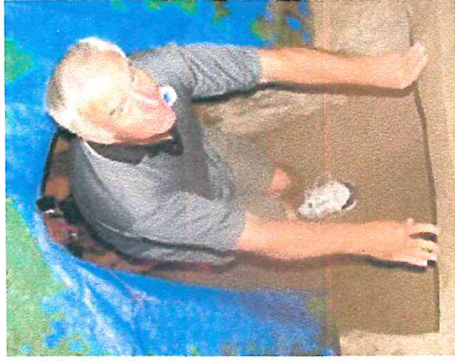
Entry to a tunnel



Where did he go?



Air vent disguised as a termite mound.



This isn't the smallest tunnel.



VC Command Centre.

If you consider going into the tunnels, which is very interesting but be warned, it is a very tight claustrophobic squeeze and a strain on the back.



Crude traps set by the VC.

Some of the traps and weaponry set for the Allies were crude, through to the latest technologies from the then, USSR. (Russia)



Russian Mig Jet

The locals believe each house has a soul and the new houses built are blind, since they do not have eyes. This adds to the charm of the tour of the ancient streets that are short, narrow and historical at every turn. The climax was a visit to one of the oldest homes of at least 200 years and lived in by descendants of the original merchant family. The Matriarch (pictured) is 93 years old and quite a character.

Onto the traditional Market and the Chinese Covered Bridge originally built by the Japanese in the 1590s to link them with the Chinese quarter is in itself is a story of the early regions history.

In 1996, the town was declared a World Heritage Site

A relaxing afternoon in the pool, time to reflect on a trip that has had so many twists and turns.

Hue - our next stopover point.

Pressing onto Hue the bus tour continues via China Beach where the Americans had a huge R & R base during the 1960-70s.

The area of China beach has 'tourist potential' written all over it and one of the sights for the film of the same name.



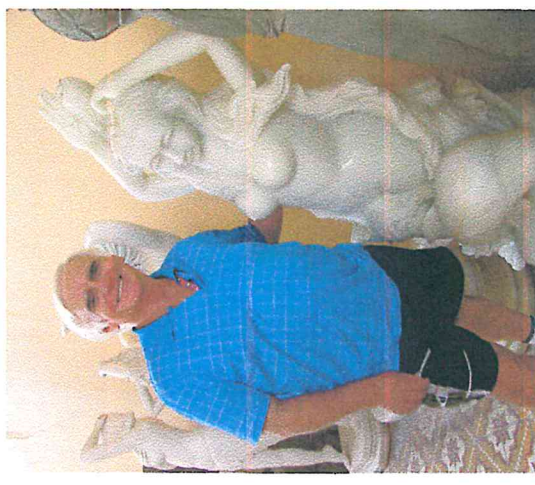
China Beach.



Next the phenomenal Marble Mountains- five hills of solid Marble that jut up from the coastal plain and this marvel of nature is enhanced by a visit to view the craftsmen plying their trade in the carving shops they are artists, with angle grinders. This does come at a cost to the visual surrounding area.



Artists -Craftsmen at work



I really wanted to take this one home.

Alas, we must keep moving North through Danang and area that saw very heavy fighting which has been documented in the chronicles of the Conflict. Then over the Ben Hoi River the start of the so called Demilitarised Zone Area (DMZ) set up in 1945 at the end of WW2 for political and logistical reasons.

This is where military unexploded ordnance,(UXO) that is live shells are still to 'be cleared.' It is reported that there could be up to 3 million mines and a staggering 400,000 tonnes (and more) of unexploded bombs in Vietnam. The warning is there not to touch any left over ordnance. If the locals have not removed it for scrap then it is dangerous.

The devastation around the Cu-Chi Tunnels through the B52 bombing and deforestation by the Chemicals used are still visible today.



B52 bomb crater nature is fighting back.



Remnants of bombs dropped on Cu Chi.

The aftermath to the conflict is that bomb and landmines are still creating problems for the local and still claiming casualties.

On our return trip to Saigon, another change to the senses as we visited the Coa Dai Great Temple ('Holy See'). This Religious Sect was formed by a Vietnamese man in 1926 and promptly elected himself 'Pope'. His idea was to combine most religions of the World. Those included were Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism and today has around 2 million followers. It is a striking truly remarkable colourful Temple and sprawling surrounds.

Danang - Hoi An (Hoi An OldTown is a Unesco World Heritage site)

For me I thought the reasons for coming to Vietnam was over, but the tour continued today as we fly (Passports required again) to Danang. On passing through Customs and awaiting our departure a few of us had a chance meeting with an Aussie '2' tour Vet who now runs tours throughout the world to Australian battle sights and other points of interests. After some prompting, he shared some graphic stories that will probably never see print and maybe they never should, but for me only added to the reasons I was here, in an effort to understand.

Danang, Vietnam's fourth largest and the main University city is situated on the Western Bank of the Han River. Our bus transfer is via the Cham Museum built by the French in an attempt to protect the Indigenous Art treasures from the people of Central VietnamPassing progress, with large hotels / golf courses developments.....onto the quaint town of Hoi An. This town has an



Running street repairs.

The river is subject to severe flooding the street (pictured) has been covered up to the level of the awnings. This was the life style of centuries past the main reason for this cities demise as the river silted up and the large boats could not get into the harbour to trade.

The Chinese influence is prominent in houses that display the eye formed from the Yin Yang symbols.



This total area is being restored to its former glory following the destruction by the street fighting, bombing during the French⁴American wars. This area saw some of the worst house-to-house fighting with a very high total casualty rate of around 10000 killed.

The reports or accounts of the retribution carried out on the locals, are not found in the War Museum The Restoration Programme is a slow process and being carried out by very skilled artisans using traditional methods.

A cruise on the Perfume River, Thien Mu Pagoda, Fourth Emperors (Tu Duc) Tomb that took 4000 men 3 years to build and he had 104 concubines.....Royal Tombs.....
.... the history goes on and on.

The evening meal was a delightful occasion of a cooking class and a selection of local dishes, cuisine designed for the Royal Courts of Hue in a very up market Restaurant lavishly furnished in the local décor and fittings.

Again, although a very impressive evening the tour must go on.

Tomorrow – Hanoi City.

Hanoi City.

This was the Capital for the North Vietnamese with a population of 4 million (all with motorbikes) and its centre is an architectural museum piece, with its blocks of Ochre buildings retaining the air of a provincial French town of the 1930s. To my mind Hanoi lags a little behind Ho Chi Minh City where old Asia meets a more recent Asia. The “Old Quarter” has been in existence for 1000 years and is necessary visit for people who wish to experience Old Asia. It is imperative that this City can retain its charm in the changing times ahead.

This City experienced the war through the U.S.A. bombing raids, as officially the allies’ troops did not set foot over the De-Militarised Zone. (DMZ)

An afternoon performance of the Water Puppets that the Vietnamese invented over 1000 years ago by farmers in the Red River region to entertain themselves when the rains flooded their paddy fields.^{was enjoyed.}
Hanoi is the home of Ho Chi Minh (Uncle Ho) the Father of the modern Vietnam passed away in 1969 and now lays in state at the specially built Mausoleum that sits in Ba Dinh Square where Uncle Ho first declared

Independence from the French in 1945.
The crowds are large yet they move quietly and reverently passed the body no talking or cameras allowed.
Thousands visit every day it is open, especially the school children who attend ceremonies to recognise their achievements with awards for their efforts. We visit his humble House on Stilts and from where he ruled Vietnam.



Ho Chi Minh is said to be one of the great figures of 20th Century history so its onto the Ho Chi Museum where many of his quotes are on display. Interestingly there is one that talks about Independence, Freedom, Liberty and Democracy for the People of Vietnam.

Other quotes that are not out of place in the context of my story are,
“I only follow one party: the Vietnamese party.”

“It was Patriotism, not Communism that inspired me.”

“I’m very moved to be here today. Our lives are now much better, but Vietnam remains a very poor country. We need to work much harder.” (Ho Chi Minh.)..... The last quote is very applicable for today.



Spectacular Hai Van Pass or 'Cloudy Pass' (*Below*) takes you to a very different Vietnam from the Mekong Delta region. As you can see from the terrain, the bus had some interesting turns to make on this leg of our journey. Today, motorists have an alternate route but not as scenic or challenging..... it is through the mountains..... via a tunnel.



We stopped for a short rest, (Happy room) refreshments and pressed on to Hue.

Hue (Pronounced Whey) was the Imperial City from 1802 -1945, with the abdication of the last Emperor, despite this, today Hue is recognised as the seat of Vietnam's culture and religion. The Imperial Citadel, is reported to be modeled on the Forbidden City in Beijing dominates the City of Hue. This is an impressive sight; all built by hand, the outer fortified walls and the Forbidden Purple City (Imperial family, concubines and eunuchs).



The Citadel. Flag Tower.



Man dug Moat and walls surrounds the Forbidden City



Recently restored section.



Undergoing restoration.

So what of “MY” Road to Vietnam?

Vietnam Today.

This account has been my through my eyes as this visit was never meant to be as a tourist but in reflection of a time, had circumstances been different if I had been posted to, 40 years ago.

Attempting to incorporate the past history, present, and a view to the future is a daunting challenge. Accepting my inadequacies as an author, please keep in mind that this has been a simple personal learning curve for me, with no intent of attempting a major production of Vietnam’s history. It is only a challenge to encourage the individual to visit Vietnam, for there is more here to explore and offers something to everyone, whatever your reasons.

The people are friendly (all 84 million of them) and inquisitive but their opportunities are limited. The southerners appear to be more acceptable to change than their northern counterparts this is probably from the influence of the Western Allies.

Vietnam’s major cities today appear as you would expect it was almost 40 years ago except, everyone has traded the bicycle for a motorbike and organised chaos reigns on the roads. If our Vets returned today they would see one thing has changed and that is the noise of the motorbikes and consisting horn tooting, as 40 years ago locals were lucky to have a bicycle with a bell. Five on one scooter is not uncommon. Mobile phones are a necessity, not a luxury item especially for the young.

The challenge is how to maintain the Traditional Heritage and culture, yet improve the Vietnamese peoples’ living standards, Social infrastructures and improve the economy of this poor country, for the future. The social structures will be a paramount challenge for the Government to prioritise the agenda for the people with the economy that was running at 8% but in recent times has retracted somewhat. The potential is there but lags well behind world standards.

A sleeper for Vietnam is that 50% of the population is under the age of 35 years, this could be a major issue for the Government in a few years, as this generation will demand access to the things of our world and progress that will have a cost to their Culture.



First charge of the motorbikes - this was good.



The new tunnel / freeway under construction.

Saigon (Now Ho Chi Minh City) was the Capital of the South until the end of the war. It is not a vibrant city, and for me it was quite depressing yet very industrious in some aspects although it is in line with the rest of the country. The congestion should be eased with the completion of the tunnel and freeway under the Saigon River.

The signs of change are there as the “Old Communist Party” now refers to itself as the “Peoples Republic of Vietnam” struggles to be a player in the world economies yet hang onto their own political agenda. They are cautiously embracing change, on a much smaller scale to what we are witnessing in China, but in Vietnam not much has changed Yet! But, it is changing,

Remember these quotes were, first uttered at least 45-55 years ago and to my mind, many apply to the Vietnam of today that I am experiencing.

Then it's on to the First Vietnam University dating back to 1070, ¹⁰⁷⁰ Bấy we do live in a young country.

Before dinner, we went on a Cyclo tour of the Old Quarter. What an experience. This area of crowded, market alleys is, as it was, laid out over 300 years ago, correctly known as the "36 product streets" Traditionally all the shops on a single street were devoted to one product. We all survived and the scenes are from a comfortable position and at the level where the action of the street markets is experienced.



The city does suffer from air pollution with many of the locals wearing facemasks. Who knows what it will be like when the car becomes the mode of transport. This city shows more of the French influence through the building architectural and has a very distinctive difference in the old and new quarters.

All the major Cities have a high standard of food and the tours set by Trails of Indochina are of a high quality. The markets are based around the "COPY" market and buyer beware!

The tour is coming to an end Last stop....Halong Bay tomorrowthis was planned to be as a treat.

Halong Bay.

Early start for a 3.5 hour bus trip (160 km) to Halong Bay "The Jewell in the Crown". The dock area is extremely crowded and busy and at times you need to clamber over boats to get to yours. The Junks are comfortable and we are reminded that these served the Orient for centuries as both home and working vessels.

This area really is remarkable and tourism is taking its toll but the 1500-2000 limestone islands are quite spectacular and can be compared to the Guilin in China and Krabi in Southern Thailand.



The comfortable Junks are Diesel powered adding to the pollution problems, the Dau Go Caves visited have been used for centuries by invading and defending armies thus they have circumed to this human interference and although still historically interesting are not living testament to their formations.

The early morning small boat trip to Luon Cave was the highlight of this tour. The lack of commentary on the Junks was of a disappointment.



A swim is optional as this fragile area does need to watch for the noticeable oil slicks, sewage and general plastic / rubbish all where the locals fish.

The local authorities need to protect this World Heritage listed area.

Our Mini van took us back to Hanoi, to its intensity of the human senses a walk around Hoan Kiem Lake just soaking in the Vietnamese people observing their activities, we felt a bit intrusive as there were few westerners around..... then believe it or not.....a Gloria Jeans Coffee shop.

Well the tour, guide and company has been an all round great experience, it ends tomorrow, then its another flight to KL and then home.....



Five on one scooter is, not uncommon.

This visit was more emotional for me than I ever could have imagined or considered and thus stirred my thoughts as to personally asking myself Why, What if ???

A young Westerner I spoke to remarked “But its all about the oil.” I reminded him that the oil was not discovered until 1986. Just another, *misunderstanding?*

It was a most enjoyable enlightening time and from a tourist point of view GO NOW before it changes into... well who knows? Experience Asia as it was many years ago and get moving whilst the opportunity is there.

Having said that.....Please take a pause to ‘Remember our Aussie Vets’ as it is part of your history whatever your point of view was, is, or will be.

“The Boat People”

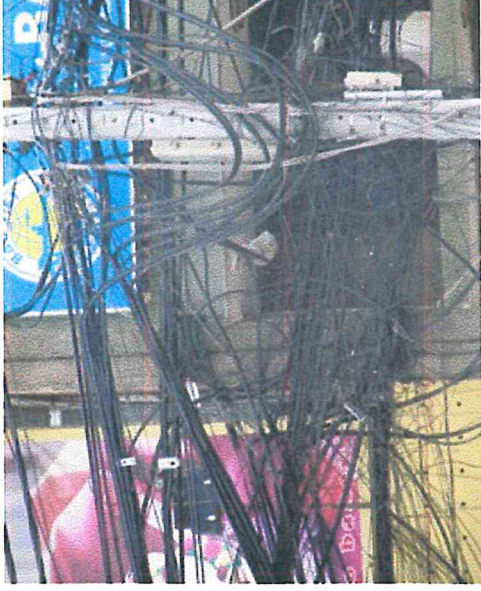
“These people too, have a story to tell.”

The plight of our boys was the catalyst for my visit but I recognised another victim that the Conflict introduced into this messy scenario..... “The Boat People”

Many of these people had worked with the allies and had no choice as with reunification of the country the new regime was not looking on with much forgiveness and many fled from these areas for Australia and the U.S.A. Many fled breaking up families from the City of Vung Tau, South of Nui Dat, many others fled from North Vietnamese Territory of Ha long Bay. (Now a tourist attraction and has been awarded World Heritage listing.) It is reported that since 1975 over 3 million have left Vietnam of which 840,000 were seeking asylum in the Western Countries. Of these 248,410 were accepted by the Western Countries, 81,000 safely returned to Vietnam and Thousands were robbed, killed by Thai’ Pirates and their boats sunk.



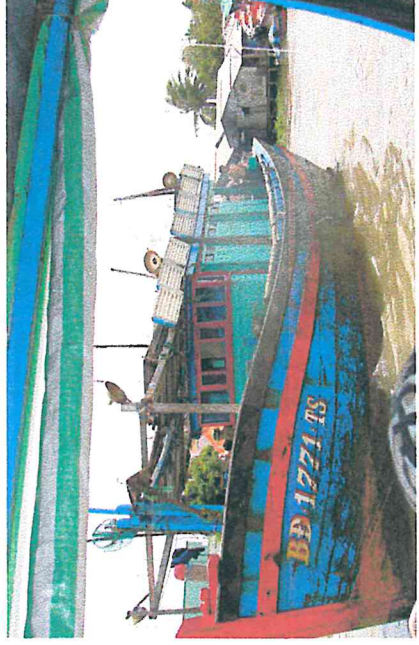
Vaug Tau fishing harbour where many left seeking a better life.



Example of the Cities electrical wiring.



*Vaung Tau Back beach a modernised area
Oil Rigs 220 km off shore.*



Typical fishing boat used by the “Boat People”

No one really knows how many perished it is said to be in the hundreds of thousands.

WHY- *“Because we want freedom and there has been no freedom in Vietnam”*.
 Theirs is another story.

When you enquire about the war the Vietnamese reply “It is not our problem, only other peoples problem”. This is true as they endeavour to rebuild their country from the poverty.

However, What if the result was different, I believe their reply would be “It is not our problem, only other people’s problem”. These people have suffered a great deal and are now 30 years behind the rest of the world.

Closure?

Maybe a Ho Chi Minh quote can shed some light: *The object of my relationship with Vietnam has been to heal the wounds that exist, particularly among our veterans and to move forward with a positive relationship, ... Apparently, some in the Vietnamese Government don’t want to do that and that’s their decision.*

Have we recognised the efforts of all the Servicemen of all sides for their sacrifices, the errors of the war, understand a little more of the circumstances each one of us experienced at the time.....reflect.....rebuild and move on and visit Vietnam as a little more than a tourists destination. We could visit the Aussie base camp at Nui Dat – Long Tan and other not so recognised areas of interest and this would assist in completing the challenge of the opening/closing paragraphs.

This challenge may be difficult for, as in 1975 you may now, as then, still lack a little understanding so visit Vietnam for your own pilgrimage as many Australians throughout Europe do every year.

Past Heroes - Treatment of our Vietnam Heroes.

Australians are proud of their fighting mate-ship past. Just mention the feats of the Gallipoli, Tobruk, and the Heart and Mind swells with pride and we visit in our thousands on ANZAC Day each year.

Why is it to celebrate defeat for most of these battles we lost, although WE, the Allies went onto win these Wars. At this same time those Australians who were not accepted for service for differing reasons, as was my father who with my mother maintain essential services ie. manufacturing products for the war machine many of these people received sinister, anonymous “White feathers” in the mail.

Those of our Soldiers who returned did so as Heroes as they had earned this title for and on behalf of their young Nation.

What went wrong with the ‘Vietnam Conflict’.

Why did the Australian Public disown their troops?

Why did the publics dissention, paint throwing and general humiliation of our troops?

As if, it was their personal fault.

I can only ponder the answer's.....

Was it because we lost the war?

Was it politically motivated?

Was it all a misunderstanding?

Why has it taken 40 years for a little too late recognition to be presented to the now over 60 year olds.

Only those effected then and now can shed light on these answers and try to get them to talk about it is difficult, for many, even wishing to return to visit the scene is a of a traumatic emotion. And we ask why?

It was 40 years ago and they have carried these memories, emotions, disappointments, ailments from physical wounds, minds and the environmental warfare.

The lead up to the cessation of the war is well documented elsewhere. This came in 1975 with a North Vietnamese tank crashing through the gates of the then Presidential palace (now the Reunification Palace).

So started a new chapter with the return of our Servicemen (maybe this is where the story for those involved really started) and a reception, home coming that is still a disgrace, to the Aussie Spirit that we are so proud of.

Unfortunately, for many there will be no closure only memories that they cannot forget, of scenes and mates who were left behind and the Nations humiliation upon their return.

For me closure has really only effected me over the past few years as I complain about getting older then to witness first hand the difficulties of my mates of the torments and sickness that has set upon them.

For the Vietnamese they live a simple life, in comparison to the Western World and the emerging Asian Countries they (Government) have a long way to go to serve their people better with infrastructure, training and other services we take for granted.

The other question that now bothers me is why didn't the Vets speak out and be heard? Maybe they did their best but we, as a nation were not listening.

Remember, no one wanted to remember 1965-1975 let alone recognise the service rendered by our fellow Australians.

The young 24 year old guide who escorted me around the old Nui Dat Australian Base and the Long Tan Memorial on our departure, I said to him;

“I'm glad I never met your Father and Grand Father 40 years ago” he replied with a hint of a tear in his eye, “Me to sirMe too”.

Maybe, a little understanding was created that day.

I am certainly not asking Australians to forget Gallipoli or Tobruk but as these era's slips into folk law of our heritage REMEMBER VIETNAM AND THE BOYS WHO WERE SENT TO DO SERVICE and in many cases had no choice, as with the conscripts, those who did not return and those who suffered then and now.

This expose is not a personal account of the conflict as I did not go, but my opportunity to explain and try to understand why.

Meanwhile I encourage others to write a more explanatory report as to how it really was (for you).

Unfortunately, ideologies are what most wars are fought over and each of us, have to be prepared to choose.

Maybe you should experience this and go on a Pilgrimage to these places.....

There are many tours available.

Challenge. So what's your story?

I trust that this commentary does not come across as some sought of self righteous, indignant crusade from my past or even judgment of the general Australian public as to the treatment of our Vietnam Veterans I would ask is that you accept this as an account of my 'journey to Vietnam' and to pause and reflect of what might have been in your life. Maybe write something down it has brought some understanding for me.

Whether you were a

Regular Serviceman.....Veteran or not.
Politician. Civilian not effected.

Conscript..... Veteran or not.
Business Proprietor. Conscientious Objector.

Please take a few minutes to reflect on your conscience and without any Judgement, complete the following:

40 years on I will Remember Vietnam for

If you wish, you could send your comments/replies/thoughts whatever they may be to gmnvenables@westnet.net.au

What now for the rest of the Australians, there are many stories still to be shared?

I think of those who fought the Military and Personal battles?

The Army Chaplains who tried to assist with many of these shared moments weighing heavily on their minds.

The Officers who under duress made decisions based on the battlefield information.....

The spaces left are for their story, your storyAs we all have a story to tell.

Personal Comments.



The Medals. At of this time I have not applied for my Service Medals as I considered my effort was not of any importance or deserved. Although 40 years on I am considering applying as it is history and may remind my children and grand children of a time past, that we hope they will not witness but if it does be prepared to at least try to understand that Freedom comes at a cost and complacency has no place in a Democracy.

We live in a free Country, in a Democracy that allows us to aspire to great heights in our chosen fields but we must accept the challenges and not forget the past sacrifices of others, even if we cannot understand the reasons. A start is to recognise the efforts of those who served their Country, who won and lost, in conflict, body or soul.

My Road to Vietnam was one thing but then to try express my thoughts has been difficult and was not a consideration at the commencement of my tour, if it had I would have taken more time on the details and photo's. I have endeavoured to portray my observations, feelings, from information gathered to make it interesting and ask for your forgiveness if some small detail is incorrect.

When the opportunity recently presented itself for me to do a trip with my Golf Club to Malaysia, we took the opportunity to extend it further and chose Vietnam as previously expressed.

Right from my arrival, it reminded me of my first visit to Singapore many years ago, cooking in the streets, limited infrastructure and comparing this to what I was saw in Vietnam today. Many of the other tourists were there to tour and although many my age they knew very little of Australia's involvement in the war.

To my mind not much has changed in the passing of the decades for the Vietnamese people who, seem to hold no grudges towards Australians even trying hard to welcome you with a "G'day, ow ya goin Mate" in their own accent.

As previously stated, I believe that all young Australians should experience some form of a National Service, not only in the Services, maybe in the State Emergency Services (SES), Voluntary Groups on a voluntary full or part time service. The Logistics of such a programme would be a challenge.

Of our Nations involvement in Vietnam, well, this is for the individual to investigate, not sweep from your mind as there is much still to be explained. For instance, in 1983 the Evatt Report on the use and effects on the Chemical Agents on Australian Personal in Vietnam was released and has since been at least, discredited. This legacy will last a lot longer as the years pass.

Since the early 1970s, we in Australia have witnessed a change in 'Ideologies' at least 6 times on a Federal and State Government Level, without a shot being fired.

Maybe this is what we were fighting for.

Post Script: Since my return, I have heard of many Australians who are making a difference in Vietnam and I was disappointed that I was not aware of it when in Vung Tau. A group of Vets have organised an orphanage of which I am seeking more information. These people are making a difference. "They too have a story to tell"

I encourage you to visit and experience Asia as it once was across the whole region. There is something here for everyone.

This has been my journey What's your journeyhave you measured/considered your understanding?

Suggested questions to ponder.

Have you been to Vietnam?

Have you read accounts of the political climate of the time?

Should we have been involved?

Did we withdraw too early?

Consider the treatment of the Veterans by successive Australian Governments and Public warranted.

Have you read the books of those who were there? (Visit www.vvaa.org.au)

Without sounding condescending or self righteously indignant, it is for individuals to consider as to, what waswhat isandwhat might have been after visiting Vietnam and doing a little research.

'Really – What do you think?'

Visit Vietnam it will challenge many of your senses from the political, economic, history, culture, environmental, culinary and of course shopping as a tour it was a first class experience. Go and be challenged.

What can we do now Well, maybe it is too late. Although, if you know a Vet maybe just to say, **"Thanks Mate"** as now I understand a little more of how it was for youover there.

"No", it is never too late if you take some time to understand.

We live in a Great Country.....any arguments.....so at least let us be prepared.

The present generation appears to know more of Galipoli than Korea, Malaya and Vietnam yet these happened in our time.

What do we do about our present involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq? Now we are withdrawing our troops. Well, that is for the Government to decide on the timing etc.

However, let us learn from the Vietnam Conflict and give our Troops a welcome home that was denied to our Vietnam Veterans.

My final challenge, or is it?

Most importantly.....Although it may not count for much now.....

“To the Vietnam Veterans and their families, although I was “sort” of involved, Today, with a little more understanding, I offer my sincerest apologies for my lack of involvement in your plight upon your return and the subsequent years of your lives. It is my hope that Australia elevates your ‘Answer to your Countries Call to Duty’ with those who have gone before in the True SPIRIT of the ANZACS.”

CFN. G.W.VENABLES. 5714424. June 2008

Can you hear Australia’s Heroes Marching?

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching?
Can you hear them as they march into eternity?
There will never be a greater love
There just couldn’t be a greater sacrifice
There just couldn’t be.

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching
They’re marching once again
Across our great land.

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching?
The ones who fought and gave their all.

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching?
Can you hear them as they march into eternity?
There will never be a greater love
There will never be a greater sacrifice
There just couldn’t be.

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching?
Can you hear them as they march into eternity?
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There just couldn’t be a greater sacrifice
There just couldn’t be.

Can you hear Australia’s heroes marching?

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*“MY” Journey..... The Long Road to Vietnam..... even now that is it over?
Well at least I have tried and of the Vets who served in any capacity I have gained some understanding of ‘their’ frustrations upon doing their service, required by their country and being ignored on their return.*

Is forgetting an option?..... I still can’t fully understand why..... does that mean I have failed?

For further information contact Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) at www.vvaa.org.au

Their motto “Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living.

Further views of Vietnam.



*Transport has not changed much...
nothing is wasted.*



Motor bikes.



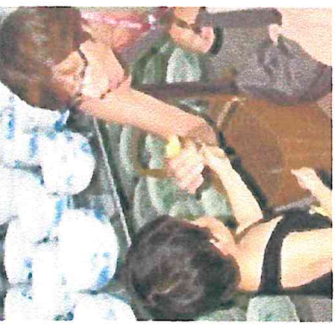
*Famous Ho Chi Minh Sandles
made from old car tyres.*



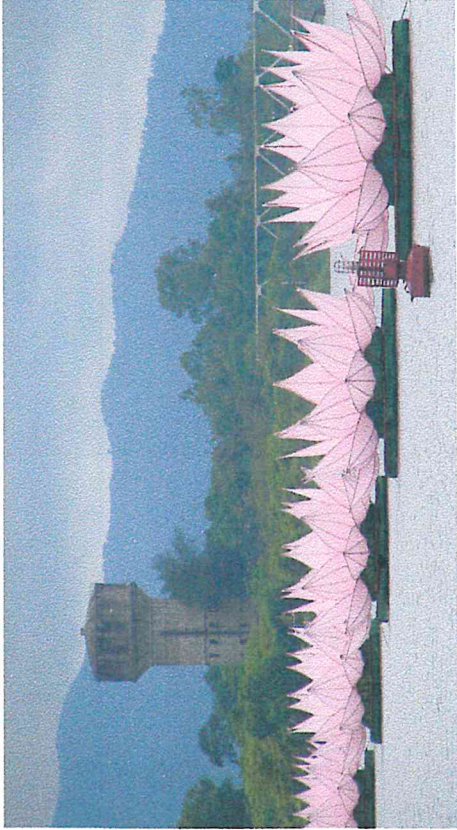
Typical Rice Paddy scene of Vietnam.



Stockpiling wood in the Villages.



*Hwaa - (Flower)
A small gesture,
We now understand.*



Lotus Flowers Display



*Max!
Did this bill get sorted out?*



*Thanks to you, for your understanding and trust my
pilgrimage did not interfere with your
“Journey to Vietnam”*



Thien Mu Pagoda.

Any comments would be appreciated, correct the facts that are wrong or, yes I did receive the DRAFT.
If you have better photo's I would appreciate a copy.
For my story still has more to it. What I now do with this? I will keep you informed.
Thanks again for the Memories and your patience. Geoff & Maureen Venables.

Acknowledgements.

Vietnam Veterans.

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Lonely Planet Guide Book/Map (information obtained).

Tour participants.

Royal Australian Regiments Websites.

Thom our patience Guide.

My patient wife, Maureen.