

Australian Veterans Vietnam Reconstruction Group, Inc

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Licenced NGO Vietnam - #AT149/UB-HD



NEWSLETTER - July 2006

President - Kevin Erwin

Welcome to both an ending and a beginning. June 30 marks the end of the financial year, and so July is the beginning of the membership year. If your dues are currently unpaid, I urge you to again support AVVRG. June 30 also means that the Annual General Meeting is close and the Management Committee (MC) office bearer positions will again be put to election. Should you have any interest in becoming a member of the MC I'd urge you to join the team.

The MC brought Paul Murphy - who is now resident in Vietnam - home to discuss future directions for AVVRG, and bring us 'up to date' with the local politics within the BaRia/Vung Tau Province. At the same time, the MC was able to discuss several possible future projects that have been proposed by the regional People's Committee.

The HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-Committee organised a delegation of Vietnamese health professionals to visit Brisbane for an educational interaction in selected Brisbane Hospitals. Kath Parker, the HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-committee secretary organised a reception at Victoria Barracks for the medical delegation. All members of the delegation expressed their appreciation and assured us that they would put their new found knowledge to good use back in Vietnam.

A supporter from Victoria, Peter Barnes (ex 4 Cav SVN) and a couple of his mates (also ex 4 Cav SVN), organised a motorbike ride from Melbourne to Townsville to raise funds for the HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-committee. Fred Olsen (MC member) and I met up with Peter and his group over lunch at the Geebung RSL where we expressed our sincere appreciation for their efforts.

The Australian Government has recently released a "White Paper" relating to the Australian Overseas Aid Program budget for then next financial year. Vietnam has been allocated \$85m, which will be made available to NGO's. We will endeavour to access this Program to help fund future projects.

I take this opportunity to again remind you that it's membership renewal time, please give this your immediate attention because without your support, the AVVRG cannot function.

Cheers, Kevin Erwin

Vice-President - Paul Murphy

What a difference a day makes in Vietnam! Late last month Breaker Cusack and I had the pleasure of handing over the remaining 8 head of cattle to the families in Chau Duc. This was the last of some 12 cattle and 22 goats under stage 3 of our poverty alleviation program. In all some 44 families are running herds, now comprising 34 cattle and 73 goats, all breeders and the herd increases daily. Our thanks goes once again to AusCham in Saigon for their support of US\$14,000 to the last stage.

The success of the Chau Duc program has resulted in funds being earmarked by AVVRG for a cattle and vegetable project for poverty alleviation to be administered by the Vietnamese Veteran's Association and the Baria - Vung Tau Woman's Union.

Yet again the AVVRG/Long Tan Community Health Aid Project has been delayed. This time the delay is due to the price rise on the 300 septic toilets for Long Tan. In a perfect world, we would have handed over at least some of the toilets and would have had the Dental clinic and Physio units operational during the 40th Anniversary of Long Tan period. But at this point in time, we have nothing to show for our efforts apart from a fully funded project where the funds sit in the bank. I have asked the Consul General in Saigon to intervene on behalf of the AVVRG and AusAid, the principal donors. These delays are really frustrating.

A phone call from her Dad indicates that the operation on young Phuong Uyen has been a complete success and she is now recuperating at home for the next few months. We anticipate that she will be fit enough to undertake the orthopedic surgery later this year.....another success story!

The Australian Government has signed off on arrangements for Long Tan 2006 and notices have been posted on the websites of the Australian Government Embassy/Consulate, Dep't Foreign Affairs & Trade, DVA and AVVRG. All these notices request those intending to visit for Long Tan Day ceremonies to register with the Consulate in Saigon. The Final Order of Ceremony has yet to be released by the Consulate.

We here are flat out with a host of other social arrangements accompanying Long Tan Day. We have received some 100 registrations to date.

With many more tour places still for sale in Australia, we expect final numbers to increase over the coming weeks as tour operators convey their details.

The report from Colin Twelftree (later in this newsletter) advises on 'progress' for the sponsorship funds. The support of Dr Ken Morrison to find an interim solution while we continue to search for a long term resolution is greatly appreciated.

A personal thanks to all those recent donors. Without that support, we could not continue our work here in Vietnam.

Hope to see you here in August, Paul Murphy.

Secretary - Dr Bruce Moon

Welcome, doesn't time fly by so quickly. It seems only yesterday that I was elected to the Management Committee at the 2005 AGM. In a few weeks it'll be the 2006 AGM; which is to again be held at the Geebung RSL, on Sunday 17th September at 10am. The agenda is on our website - www.avvrg.com.

At the 2005 AGM, members voted to adopt a new set of Rules to govern AVVRG. As the Queensland legislation requires, the adopted Rules were submitted to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for review. OFT rejected the Rules on the basis that the membership criteria were invalid. The 'offending' section has been revised, but needs member approval. The revised component will be displayed on the website (with the AGM Agenda) and will be presented for consideration at the AGM. Please visit the site and have a read.

For some time, AVVRG have been pursuing the goal of gaining tax deductibility for those making monetary donations to AVVRG projects in Vietnam. Rightly so, the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and the Dep't of Foreign Affairs & Trade require the applicant organisation to meet stringent and detailed criteria. To gain approval, the applicant organisation needs to show its accountability (especially for ATO) and administrative transparency in both structure and process. This has meant that AVVRG has had to restructure itself to meet the required criteria. We are hopeful the end is in sight.

Recently, the Management Committee decided not to seek funds with a raffle accompanying the membership renewal form. In part, this was a reflection that many may be finding their income needing to 'go further' this year. The membership funds are directed towards managing the administration of the organisation. This year, indemnity insurance will cost around \$700, the audit about \$450, registration to ACFID \$900, bank fees \$300 (mainly for overseas transfers) and postage (incl newsletter) \$750; in all some \$3100. To just cover these basics, we need over 150 members.

Regards - Dr Bruce Moon

Treasurer - Peter Oudyn

Since the last newsletter, we have received quite a few substantial donations. The **Hon Jacinta Allan** from the Victorian State Government visited Baria/Vung Tau for the Spirit of Anzac Awards with the recipients (eleven high school students) and donated \$9,632. This money has been earmarked for the Women's Union Poverty Alleviation Scheme.

I again the tireless effort of **Bob Wood** and the **WA Branch of the RAR Association** for their latest donation of \$4,681. A fantastic effort. This money will support the *Long Tan Community Health Aid Project*.

We are also appreciative of a donation of \$1,000 from **Jim Dixon**. The **Southern Highlands Branch of the Australian Vietnam Veterans Association** has donated \$2,375. Again the **Australian Civil Affairs Unit Association** submitted an annual donation of \$500. We are also in receipt of a \$1,742 donation from **6 RAR Association** for the Long Tan Cross Memorial Fund. **Dick Smith Foods P/L** has generously donated \$3,000 towards the Long Tan Day celebrations.

Peter Barnes is currently motor-biking with friends, having departed Melbourne and heading north while at the same time raising funds along the way for the HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-Committee. To date, Peter has submitted \$1,000. This is a great effort and the HealthCare team is most grateful.

Wendy Coad organized a sausage sizzle which resulted in raising \$1,610 to boost the HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-Committee. Four nurses worked tirelessly from 7am to 3pm and must be commended for a tremendous effort.

We are grateful for the generous donations and support. The contributions will play a vital role in the AVVRG's work to improve the life of many Vietnamese people through our ongoing poverty alleviation schemes, community development programs, and medical and health care services.

I would personally like to thank all the members who promptly paid their membership fees for the 06/07 financial year. Many included donations along with their membership renewal. Each of these contributions add up and together have a powerful impact on our capacity to continue program development and support.

If you are reading this newsletter on pink paper, it means your membership 'dues' have yet to be received by us. If you believe your dues should have been received by now, email me to alert me to the situation. I encourage those who may have overlooked their renewal that it is never too late to remit your payment (a renewal form is included).

Peter Oudyn

HealthCare Team (Qld) Sub-Committee Norma Stanley

On the 3rd July, we had the pleasure of hosting a visit from six Vietnamese health professionals for 15 days. After a few missed flights from Melbourne we were off to start our memorable journey. The health professionals were:

Mr Tinh Baria A&E Department
Miss Ha Nurse; Le Loi Intensive Care Unit
Miss Houng Le Loi Intensive Care Unit
Dr Tuan Ba Ria Pediatrics Department
Dr Dat Baria Intensive Care Unit
Dr Heip Le Loi A&E Department

Each team member was placed in their areas of interest. The hospitals involved were the Holy Spirit Northside, The Royal Brisbane Hospital, The Royal Children's Hospital and The Prince Charles Hospital. All the visitors responded favourably to their visits to these hospitals. It was our pleasure to see their enthusiasm and keenness to learn. Their home stay families had excited visitors returning every day from their work environments, and at this point the Sub-Committee would like to thank the Parker and the Hazelwood families.

The visitors also attended Redcliffe Public Hospital, Logan Hospital, and the Ipswich Public Hospital. Thank you to the members who helped with transport and the hospitals for their involvement. The medical book shop trip was most rewarding for the Sub-Committee as we were able to identify books that would help them in their environment.

The visitors said they had all their objectives met whilst visiting the hospitals. New skills they said they had developed were:

- How to keep equipment clean.
- Infection control, prepare workplace – keep clean, tidy, & ready. Wash hands.
- Care of patient ventilation, head injuries, and multitrauma.
- Organise care for patients.
- Unite in work (relate with colleagues & patients).
- Asthma diagnosis in children, identification and management of Cystic Fibrosis.
- Coronary care – myocardial infarction.
- Patient care in ICU
- How a modern emergency department works.

When asked what changes they would make on their return to Vietnam, the following were some responses: *I'll be interest in controlling infection; Organising my ward-clean, tidy and ready; Share experiences and knowledge with our colleagues; Proposal for more instruments; I think we try to do as good as possible with my equipment; I felt more confidence about my work in Vietnam.*

The AVVRG and Queensland Health hosted a welcome dinner for the visiting professionals and hosts at Victoria Barracks. This gave the health professionals the opportunity to practice their English. Each member gave a wonderful speech, informing the audience about themselves, where they work and what they hoped to achieve whilst visiting Australia. Mrs. Joanne Miller MP was the guest of honour and without her support and enthusiasm for this visit, it would have not gone ahead.

All six members experienced the Australian way of life and the food we eat (rice was missed by them all). Miss Ha and Miss Houng took over the kitchen duties very quickly (our food was not a huge hit). The boys also joined in with the household chores, and we informed them that we would pass onto their wives the new skills they have learnt. It was an enjoyable experience to watch their enthusiasm in clothes washing, a task that we find most boring. The washing machine did not get the chance to stop, before it would be started again.

On the Thursday, they even learnt how to take the Australian "sickie", so the afternoon was spent resting and sleeping. It was a very sad moment when they all wanted to have a drive of Norma's car and we had to decline. So maybe next time when can take them out four wheel driving on a property!!!!

The Sub-Committee has organised many sausage sizzles as fundraisers. The first was held at Bunnings Maroochydore and raised over \$1600. What a wonderful job and a BIG THANKS to all AVVRG members who helped out. The second was held at Bunnings Booval and raised \$300, a great effort for the four hours spent on a Friday. Thank you to ALL members who helped. The next will be held at Booval, Saturday 5th August at 0700.

Presently the sub-committee is organising a 'Christmas in July' to be held at the Goodna RSL on Sunday 30th July. It is a lunchtime function and the fund commences at 11.30am. Cost is \$30 per ticket, so please contact Kathleen, Norma or Barbara for your tickets. FUN HAS BEEN ORGANISED. A basket of wine will be drawn on the day with tickets only \$1. If you would like to buy a ticket or help sell a book of tickets please contact Norma, Kathleen or Barbara.

Norma - nstanley@bytesite.com.au

Or phone 0428 297 677

Kathleen - kathleenparker3@hotmail.com

Or phone (h) 3263-4235/0422 426 281

Barbara - bcrawfor@disability.qld.gov.au

Or phone 0410 622 148

Thanks

Norma Stanley - Sub-Committee Chair

Victoria Health Education Team

Yvette Spero

Well here we are again, mid-year already, in the depths of a cold winter in Melbourne, planning for yet another Victorian Team visit to Vietnam. We haven't confirmed the dates as yet, but are proposing the 22nd January to the 5th February 2007.

Already, we have received requests for educational topics, presentations and conference themes from Vietnam, which is promising and exciting. It allows our team the potential to provide a program which not only meets the needs of the Vietnamese healthcare workers but also challenges the subject matter. Over the next few months we will concentrate on forming a team for next year.

Our dedicated and hardworking committee will formalise these programs, finalise travel plans, liaise with our Vietnamese colleagues and attend to the many other tasks, to ensure a triumphant and rewarding 2007 trip. To further guarantee this success, we would like to extend an invitation to all our Victorian members to join us at our Annual Meeting on Sunday 30th July, 2006, 1100, at Box Hill RSL, Nelson Rd, Box Hill. We encourage you to join our committee, support the team, have fun, participate and most of all, reap the rewards by being involved in a very satisfying venture.

We would like to congratulate Sue Kish on organising and achieving a very successful visit to Southern Health by Vietnamese Midwife, Mrs Vo Diep from Huong Vuong Hospital, Ho Chi Minh City. Mrs Vo Diep spent an intense two weeks observing midwifery practice at Southern Health in Melbourne. She also enjoyed the many and varied tourist attractions that Melbourne and Victoria has to offer and went home enriched and exhausted.

Hoping to see many of our members at the Victorian Annual Meeting and looking forward to enjoying a drink at lunch afterwards.

Yvette Spero

Sponsorships - Colin Twelftree

When Vietnamese officials decided not to allow our sponsors to continue sponsoring a child at the Baria Orphanage, we thought we could find a replacement institution reasonably quickly. We were mistaken. Paul Murphy advises that changes in the way the Vietnam government are running the nation are having reverberations right through to the local level. It would appear that officials in the Baria Vung Tau region don't seem to want to support international donors sponsoring orphans.

Faced with this outcome, Paul Murphy sent out 'feelers' seeking alternate opportunities. Unfortunately, while the responses produced some worthy projects for AVVRG, none were considered by the Management Committee to meet the criteria necessary for sponsorship.

Some months ago, Ken Morrison had advised the Management Committee that his involvement with the Ben San Leprosy Hospital in Saigon revealed an unmet need worthy of AVVRG consideration. Ken was asked to investigate and has submitted a proposal that many sponsors may find appealing.

Given limited budget provisions, the Ben San Leprosy Hospital has been faced with a steady loss of its doctors. Ken Morrison noted that while the injection of aid funds would assist in doctor recruitment, this would mean that future doctor provisioning would always be dependant on overseas aid. Ken understood that the Hospital was keen to find ways to be self-supporting; especially in funding its doctors. Essentially, Ken married the successful concept of the AVVRG Chau Duc goat and cattle breeding program to the Ben San Hospital 'dilemma'.

The essence of the proposal is that a small cattle breeding enterprise will be commenced to provide ongoing funds for the Hospital.

Leprosy is a chronic bacterial disease caused by a bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae*. *M. leprae* multiplies very slowly and the incubation period of the disease is about five years. Symptoms can take as long as 20 years to appear. Leprosy is not highly infectious and mainly affects the skin and nerves. If untreated, there can be progressive and permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes. Loss of fingers or toes can occur and chronic ulcers are common. Early treatment with multi-drug therapy results in total cure, but once the disease is well established cure may be impossible. Transmission cannot occur once treatment is started.

Ben San Leprosy Hospital houses about 150 leprosy sufferers plus several hundred family members in various types of accommodation within its five hectares. Because of the stigma of leprosy, sufferers and family members are often not welcome in their villages. For the same reason, sufferers often hide from authorities and many cases are not first brought to medical facilities until the disease is advanced.

Sponsors will have received advice of this 'cattle breeding' proposal for their consideration. As well, we will still be seeking alternate programs for sponsors, both now and in the future.

Colin