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## RAAF Association (ACT Division)

Patron: Air Marshal David Evans AC DSO AFC (Retd)

President: Lance Halvorson MBE

www.act.raafa.org.au



## NEWSLETTER

January 2009



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**AIMS** *To foster the spirit of friendship formed on service and to preserve the memory of comrades who have died, to make provision for the sick, to take care of their dependents, to provide for periodic reunions and to foster aviation and the conservation of aviation heritage.*

### Activities Ahead for 2009

**Monday 16 February 2009 - GM**

1300 Southern Cross Club - no lunch.

**Monday 16 March 2009 - AGM**

1130 Southern Cross Club

Followed by lunch at 1230

Guest speaker: CAF, AM Mark Binskin AM

**Tue 31 March 2009 – RAAF 88<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary Commemoration**

Venue – probably RAAF Memorial Grove  
To be confirmed

### ***Looming Crisis for ACT Division***

Our slowly dwindling and aging membership is creating a looming crisis that threatens to future of the ACT Division as an independent entity. In simple terms, we need more volunteers to help run the show. The current committee has no secretary, is two directors short and is just managing by load sharing, chiefly among three or four members.

Our current President, Lance Halvorson, is not standing for re-election as President because of his heavy and increasing workload as a National Vice President, the editor of Wings magazine and his current tasks in identifying strategies to increase RAAFA membership across Australia. Unfortunately, neither of the current Vice Presidents is available to step up into the

position because of conflicting demands on their time – and Arthur Skimin has done more than his fair share in the past.

If we cannot get a President and Secretary at the AGM, the Division will have difficulty in operating as a separate division and faces either disbandment or absorption into the NSW Division. Should the latter occur, we could continue to run social functions (assuming someone volunteers to organise them), but we would otherwise simply be members of the much larger state division headquartered in Sydney.

We are financially viable and with appropriate manning of the committee could continue indefinitely as we have in the past. The key is a properly manned committee. The duties are neither onerous nor particularly time consuming but they need to be done and that means someone needs to volunteer.

The time is past to expect someone else to do it and, if there is insufficient interest amongst the members to keep the Division going, then perhaps it is time to wind it up. The future of the ACT Division is at stake and will be decided, one way or another, at the March AGM. If you care, be there ready to put up your hand.

Now for some good news.

### ***Maintenance of Memorial Grove Assured***

Arthur Skimin's efforts have born fruit once more, this time with the ACT Government agreeing to do future recurring maintenance of the Memorial Grove. The maintenance will be done by Territory and Municipal Services and will include landscaping,

general maintenance, clearing and the removal of dead wild life if required.

This is very good news. The RAAF Association contribution to maintaining the grove is now much less than it otherwise would have been and, in this critical area at least, the future of the grove for the years ahead is virtually assured.

### ***National Welfare Coordination Centre***

Many readers will recall the old saying: 'if the RAAF wanted you to have a wife, you would have been issued with one'. In vogue during the 1970s, it drew wry smiles from the many members who felt their families received far too little support for problems associated with service life. Today, things are much improved. Considerable effort now goes into family support, especially when serving members are deployed for training or operations.

One important initiative is the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC). Its mission is to help maintain operational capability by coordinating provision of welfare support to families of personnel away from home. To do so it acts as a central coordination point for referral to welfare and family support services - it does not actually provide the support - and monitors the results.

The NWCC in no way lessens a commander's responsibility for the welfare of personnel under command, but instead provides an external support, information and advice base. Most communication is by telephone or email and the NWCC passes on messages and requests from families to deployed members when other communications links are inadequate for any reason. Common messages refer to the birth of a child, a death in the family, accommodation problems at home base, situation reports after natural disasters like floods and fires, or the need to ring home for any reason.

The NWCC has been operating since 1999. Between 800 and 1000 calls are handled every month by the 19 full time and 11 part

time staff, all of whom are volunteers who have undergone psychological profile testing and interviews to ensure suitability. Calls are free, family information packs can be provided, welfare planning advice is given and briefings are held from time to time on ADF bases. Contact details are:

Free Call: 1800 801 026 24 hours/day

Email: [nwcc:australia@defence.gov.au](mailto:nwcc:australia@defence.gov.au)

### ***Defining Areas of Operations***

You may think that defining a military Area of Operations, or AO, is an esoteric matter, something only Governments and operational commanders care about. And this is so for most people involved in military operations, who worry about their own jobs and leave such things to the higher-ups. It is only when they later seek repatriation benefits that many people find out how important AO boundaries are. They then discover that, unless they were actually based in the AO, their eligibility for benefits can be very difficult to prove.

This situation has arisen with RAAF personnel who served in Ubon, providing allied air defence during the Vietnam conflict, but not based in the AO of the times. Concerns are now held that a similar problem could arise with the Middle East Area of Operations (MEOA), which, if it defines only the area of ground operations - in this case Iraq and Afghanistan - will not include all air operations and aircraft based elsewhere.

The National Council, mindful of the problems with Ubon, will express its concerns to the RAAF regarding the MEOA and future AOs. Just one of many reasons why RAAF veterans need their own organisation to represent them.

### ***Far East Strategic Reserve Memorial***

The National Council has also decided to support the establishment of a Far East Strategic Reserve Memorial in ANZAC Parade. This matter is in its early stages and members will be kept posted on progress.

### ***Veteran's at Risk Research project Targets ex-service personnel***

While many veterans enjoyed Christmas with friends and families, ate a little too much, and had

a well earned rest, spare a thought for those in the ex-service community who were less fortunate and did not spend Christmas with families, or enjoyed any sort of Christmas festivities.

A research study done 10 years ago for DVA by Thomson Goodall Associates, estimated that on any given day there were at least 1,000 homeless veterans and another 2,000 who were at risk of homelessness.

A new 'Veterans at Risk' study is underway to update the previous study. Early feedback confirms that there are a number of ex-service community members 'doing it tough' because of housing, health and other problems. Some are living in substandard accommodation, such as some rooming and boarding houses; others are finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet because of high rents and are facing eviction.

For some, housing problems might be related to severe or untreatable health problems, including heart disease, back pain, arthritis, diabetes, loss of sight, osteoporosis, or other problems associated with ageing and disability. Some might be suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorders or other mental health problems that affect their ability to maintain their accommodation. Others may need assistance with drug and alcohol issues or gambling and face homelessness in the future. There are also some younger veterans finding it difficult to sort out suitable housing and maintain relationships with family and friends.

Many of the people described above are extremely socially isolated, with little or no contact with family or other support networks, and have difficulty in accessing mainstream programs, including health, aged care and other services. Some may not be in receipt of all their available benefits from DVA. Importantly, vulnerable living situations such as substandard housing, and lack of carers, and isolation might actually place their health at risk. The current research project was due for completion in February 2009. The project consultants, Thomson Goodall planned to contact a wide range of people in the Ex-Service community and health, housing and

homelessness services, as part of the study.

If you have any thoughts or ideas on the study, please call John on (03) 9592 5868

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### ***Googling is Good for You... No, really!***

Are you annoyed by advertisements on TV that include the phrase "For more information, see our website"? When somebody says they 'Googled' themselves, do you recommend they see a doctor? Think that the internet is for a younger generation? Think again.

A team of scientists from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) has found that searching the internet stimulates brain activity in middle-aged and elderly people and may help to keep their minds sharp. According to a recent study carried out by UCLA, searching the internet (or "web") triggers parts of the brain that control decision-making and complex reasoning and may even help to improve brain function.

Researchers note that their findings are the latest to suggest that complex activity that keeps the mind engaged, such as crossword puzzles, may help to keep the brain healthy.

The UCLA researchers tested 24 neurologically normal volunteers between the ages of 55 and 76, half with experience searching the internet and half with no experience. Study participants performed web searches

whilst undergoing functional MRI scans, which record brain circuitry changes. They showed significant brain activity during web searching and book reading, but the internet-savvy group registered a twofold increase in brain activation during web use.

The most striking finding was that internet searching appears to engage more of the brain than reading- but only in those with prior internet experience. Scientists say that this demonstrates that our brains are sensitive and can continue to learn as we grow older.

So take the opportunity to head down to your local library and book yourself into a short training session on internet use. Most local libraries will run these for free for members. Alternatively, ask your Grandchildren to show you how to use the 'Net' - after all, if anyone should be familiar with how the internet works, it will be teenagers!

[Googling good for geriatrics: study, AFP, Sydney Morning Herald, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/10/16/i223750i68833.html>. Accessed 16/10/08,1

#### VIETNAM VETERANS' FAMILY STUDY

## SIGN-UP TIME

### RECRUITING FAMILIES NOW

The Vietnam Veterans' Family Study is now recruiting. The study will look at the impact of war service on the health and well-being of the families of Vietnam veterans.

The study is inviting randomly selected Vietnam-era Army personnel and their families to participate — 10,000 each of those who served in Vietnam and those who didn't. They have all been mailed an invitation to participate in the study, with extra registration forms to pass on to their kids and family

For the study to go ahead we need those invited to participate, and to encourage their families to get involved as well.

#### TELL YOUR MATES

Even if you haven't been invited, you'll know plenty of people who have been. It's time for Vietnam veterans to help their mates again.

Talk to your mates, those who went to Vietnam and those who didn't. Tell them how important this study is. Find out if they've been invited and get them involved. Tell them to pass on the registration kits they received with their invitations to their families so their families get involved as well.

The success of the family study relies on a big response from those invited. Not just Vietnam veterans, but their families too and the Vietnam-era personnel and their families — for comparison.

#### THE SCIENCE

There are two main study groups:

- 10,000 randomly selected Vietnam veterans and their families: including their partners, ex-partners, children, step-children, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews.
- 10,000 randomly selected Vietnam era veterans who didn't serve in Vietnam and

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their families: including their partners, ex-partners, children and step-children.

These two groups provide a comparison based on randomly selected families where the main difference is a parents' military service in Vietnam. FAMILY STUDY

This study is about families. There are a number of studies of veterans already, but not of families. Participation of families is vital. If you know someone who served during the Vietnam war, whether they went or not, talk to them see if they've been invited and get them involved. Spread the word to their family too.

#### HOW DO I REGISTER?

If you have received an invitation to participate in the study you can register by:

- registering online at: [www.dva.gov.au/wfs](http://www.dva.gov.au/wfs);
- phoning DVA's Health Study Line on freecall 1800 502 302; or
- mailing your completed registration form to DVA.

Forms are available on the website or by phoning freecall 1800 502 302.

Participation in the study will not in any way affect your pension, benefits or any health services you are entitled to from DVA. Any information you provide will be confidential and be used only for the research.

### VIETNAM SERVICE OR NOT, IF YOU'VE BEEN INVITED, PLEASE PARTICIPATE

### PLEASE ASK YOUR FAMILY TO PARTICIPATE

Find out more about the Vietnam Veterans' Family Study program at [www.dva.gov.au/wfs](http://www.dva.gov.au/wfs)

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