

Productivity Commission

Introduction

I served in the Royal Australian Navy from Feb. 1959-Feb. 1968 with another 7 years in the Emergency reserve.

I am a Naval Historian and researcher registered with the Naval Historical Society NSW.

I served in four deployments in HMAS Melbourne, 1961-1963, 1965 and 1966:

Submission

Productivity Commission inquiry into the system of compensation and rehabilitation for Veterans (serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members)

The inquiry by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References committee into suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel was seen as a vital avenue for a resolution with regard to my on-going work to secure due process for the men who served in RAN ships that made passage through the Sunda Strait on 6th March 1962 and 20th May 1963.

The ships that took part were HMAS Melbourne and HMAS Voyager (both 6/3/62) and HMAS Melbourne, HMAS Supply and HMAS Yarra (20/5/63).

I seek qualifying service recognition as well as the award of the Australian Active Service Medal for for all who served in those ships in the Sunda Strait at that time.

I made three submissions to the inquiry while the emphasis was on my submission to various ministers and Defence, the resolution of this inquiry did not provide a positive outcome, moreover it did effect my mental health to the extent that, in consultation with VVCS, I was referred to consultant psychiatrist Dr. RG Hyde who diagnosed me with PTSD and Depression.

Sadly there was no contact by anyone within the government whatsoever to resolve the issues that so severely impacted my mental health.

Late last year I made a submission to Defence Honours and Awards with very relevant supporting documentation, which was disallowed. There were errors of fact in their determination as follows:

In the response dated 19/4/18, I was noted as serving in HMAS Melbourne on 6/3/62, but I served in HMAS Melbourne in the 1963 South East Asian deployment.

I subsequently sent an email to DHA and received an apology by return email and a copy of the records used to at their determination, but it failed to contain any substantive depth of research of their own records, nor any comments with regard to the documents supporting my submission.

I must question the diligence of those who conducted the examination of my submission, not only for myself, but on behalf of my shipmates because it appears the examination was cursory at best. Some examples:

1. Recently I sought to look at the Royal Australian Regiment on-line and came into the conversation of RCB Recognition of Service 3 – Senate Questions on Notice: Senator Brian Burston. Within the ongoing conversation there are ten pages with a comment by Peter Kelly (Highlighted) that needs investigating as well as the opening question on page 1.
2. On 11 May 2017 I sent an email asking for an update on a submission that I had sent to the Defence department and received a response on 16/5/17 which reads, in part, that HMA Ships Melbourne, Supply and Voyager were determined as being on peacetime service.
3. An automatic email response from the Foreign Minister dated 27/09/2016, with no other contact back to me.
4. On 1 March 2017 I sent an email to the Prime Minister's office seeking a response, understanding that my previous emails to his office were passed onto the Foreign Minister, sadly no response.
5. An automated reply from Minister Dan Tehan's office, again no response.
6. A letter to the Hon. Kevin Andrews MP from Senator Richard Colbeck giving details of my ongoing work with regard to recognition for service rendered.
7. A response from Hon. Darren Chester to Senator Richard Colbeck via Kevin Andrews, which again gave a repetitive response, considering the information that his office has received.
8. Response from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, again a matter has been passed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, no contact with myself was ever made.
9. Response from Darren Chester (19/1/2014) gives a very confusing response to my detail that was first processed by Senator Michael Ronaldson and as well it

tells me that he has a very limited knowledge of naval matters.

10. Senator David Feeney, again shows a lack of naval matters and provides a 3-page explanation (7/6/2012)
11. A response from the Vice Chief of the Defence Force. His response demonstrates a clear lack of knowledge of naval matters, also.
12. This response from Dr Kelly AM MP shows he is confused with events and time frames. I have never sought to have Exercise Sea Serpent included in my quest for qualifying service as it was outside the Sunda Strait area as indicated by the Report of Proceedings for the month of May 1963 (HMAS Melbourne)
13. A letter from Senator Rich Colbeck to Dr Kelly which needs to be read and compared with the ships log and Report of Proceedings as well as the letter from Dr Kelly (13/8/2009)
14. A submission that I made in 2006 that gives the main detail of the incident of 20/5/1963.
15. I also enclose a copy of a comprehensive report put together by Mr Jim Bush of the Western Aust. Div. Fleet Air Arm Assoc.
16. One of the submissions I made to the inquiry of suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel.
17. My recent submission to Defence Honours and awards appeals Tribunal.
18. Instrument for Determining Eligibility under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* Malaya and Singapore 1 August 1960 to 27 May 1963.

Summary

It is now some 55 years since the Incident of 20 May 1963 in the Sunda Strait and it appears that that time line gives way to "What If" as well as the "The Hindsight Factor".

Far too many times I have seen and heard the rhetoric that politicians use to praise the veteran community. Sadly it cannot be seen as sincere or authentic and usually coincides with a vote-winning attempt. It is hollow and without merit.

There is one missing from all the responses above. They seem to demonstrate a quest for "Operational Service", which sadly shows a lack of research by those who should know better. "OPERATIONAL SERVICE" status was granted some years ago.

When one dons a uniform of our Defence Force they undertake to make a commitment to subject themselves to the risk of serious injury, including death, fully expecting their employer to exercise a duty of care. That duty of care is absent in this case and the government is negligent in its failure.

In saying that, my local Member Senator Richard Colbeck is the only politician that has supported my submission/s, along with the Western Australian Division of the Fleet Air Arm Association.

It does irk me that I have to go to this extent to air my views, but given the nature and tone of responses I have received, I believe this is the only avenue now available to me.

Yours faithfully,

Avelon Richard (Tas) Browning

18/6/18