



VIETNAM VETERANS' FEDERATION

Incorporating
Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association NSW Branch
Vietnam Veterans Federation Queensland Branch
Vietnam Veterans Federation ACT Branch
Vietnam Veterans Federation Victorian Branch
Vietnam Veterans Federation South Australian Branch
Vietnam Peacekeepers Peacemakers Federation of Tasmania
Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Federation of Australia WA Branch

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
2 March 2010

Email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

We are concerned that the government intends to legislate to establish one superannuation board to oversee both civilian and military schemes.

Military and especially war service are unique. Those overseeing the disability and death benefits of military superannuation schemes must have an insight into this uniqueness.

Unfortunately, the Departments of Finance and Workplace Relations as well as Treasury have form denying the special nature of military service. Take, for instance, the 2003 submission of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to the Clarke Review of Veterans Entitlements^[1]. In it the department equated the danger faced by firemen and policemen with that faced on the battlefield by our troops. The department did this by saying that, like firemen and police, our troops could be paid danger money up front and should not be given more favourable treatment when being compensated for war caused injuries, illness and death.

Here is what the department said:

^[1] Submission 2466 to the Pearce Inquiry, Repatriation Commission of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission to the Review of Veterans' Entitlements by the Repatriation Commission of Employment and Workplace Relations*, 13 June 2002

"There are similarities between the civilian compensation schemes and the military scheme in that both provide compensation benefits for persons involved in high risk activities. Police officers and firefighters employed by State governments are just two examples of civilians whose occupations involve high risk activities...No distinction in benefits is made under either the State of Commonwealth compensation schemes for those workers involved in hazardous work."

The department went on:

"... ADF members should be adequately remunerated in their employment to reflect the nature of their service."

So, like firemen and policemen, the department argued, members of the armed forces should be (and presumably are) compensated for the risks they faced in their job in their up-front pay and allowances. It followed that:

"The likelihood of injury from such activity and any subsequent compensation payment, does not, and should not, form any additional, yet hidden, component of remuneration arrangements."

Or, in plain words, members of the armed forces should not be given special consideration when being compensated for war caused disabilities and death, because they have already been financially compensated in their wages for the risks inherent in their job, just like the firefighters and police.

Of course, this departmental claim is ludicrous.

Whilst the pay and allowances soldiers get nowadays is more generous than those of the Vietnam war era and may go a good way towards compensating for discomfort, physical pain and exhaustion, frequent family separation, requirement to obey orders under stringent military law, requirement of be on duty 24 hours a day when required, and so on, **the pay and allowances come nowhere near compensating for war-time risks.**

When troops are despatched on war service, they are required to fight an often well armed, well trained, well organised, numerous enemy who are determined to kill them. It is not just a dangerous environment like a fire or a building site. The fire has no malice towards the firemen and the building site has no intention of harm towards the construction worker. And whilst it is true that occasionally police may have to face an armed criminal, these occasions are infrequent and the criminal's first priority is usually escape, not the death of the policeman.

Not only do members of the armed forces not receive pay and allowances which includes up-front market rate compensation for the risks of the battlefield, but governments could simply not afford to pay such amounts to the numerous members of any national army in any moderately serious armed conflict. For instance:

- What would be the market rate for someone to follow a wounded Viet Cong down a narrow tunnel system sporting only a pistol and torch? Many Engineers did similar things time and time again.
- What would be the market rate for a medic to go to the aid of a soldier just blown-up on a mine, prodding his bayonet into the ground as he goes in the hope of detecting the side of an anti-personnel mine before treading on its

prongs and himself joining the scatter of badly wounded and dead? Medics had to be prepared to do this and, in fact, did it on many occasions.

- What would be the market rate for a helicopter pilot balancing one skid on a rock whilst casualties are loaded, so he does not risk detonation more mines? This and similar situations were commonplace.
- What would be the market rate for a medic to go to the aid of a wounded soldier under fire? Medics did this time and time again.
- What would be the market rate for an infantryman carrying out his everyday duty of cutting his way through bamboo infested jungle in areas of known enemy bunker concentration knowing that if he misses the well hidden sign of their presence and approaches close to one which is occupied, he is as good as dead? Not a few soldiers died in this way.
- What would be the market rate for the common requirement of infantrymen crawling out from a night ambush position after the ambush has been sprung to attach ropes to the legs of the (hopefully) dead enemy so they can be dragged back and saved from being retrieved by their comrades? This was a common requirement.
- What would be the market rate for taking part in a counter attack when your mortar platoon has been half over-run by North Vietnamese regulars? Or what would be the market rate to cross the start line of any attack on the well entrenched enemy? This was the infantryman's bread and butter.
- What would be the market rate for repeatedly driving a truck from the port and stores depots to the forward operational base on roads which could very well be mined and under the surveillance of snipers? This was normal driving duties.
- What would be the market rate for driving an armoured personnel carrier into the teeth of well-constructed bunker system with well-trained enemy determined to cut short your advance with their pattern of criss-crossing anti-tank grenades? This happened on not a few occasions.
- And so on...

Troops discharged after an Iraq or Afghanistan tour have returned to the theatre of war and done the same job for civilian contractors at three or four times the pay. This is because the contractors pay market rate danger money.

Of course, our troops have never expected to be paid danger money at market rates. They have fought Australia's wars for mainly other than financial reasons. But what they have expected is that should they die as a result of facing Australia's enemies, their families would be well cared for and that if they should be wounded, physically or mentally, the Australian government would care for them with excellent medical care and compensate them with more than standard generosity. This assumption is one of the reasons Australian service people fight so well.

That the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations believes that members of the armed forces *are or could be* paid market rate danger money for the battle-field risks in their up-front pay and therefore should not be given special consideration when being compensated for war caused disabilities, is disturbing. It shows just how out-of-touch the department is with the realities of military and especially war service. It is disturbing, too, that the Departments of Finance and Treasury have a similar view.

No doubt, representatives of these departments would carry this ignorance of the special nature of military service into any superannuation board of which they were a member. It is therefore imperative that any board overseeing military superannuation schemes should be a separate board having a majority membership of veterans and military personnel, members who understand the special nature of military service. To do otherwise is to risk jeopardising the morale and fighting effectiveness of our armed forces.

Yours sincerely,

Tim McCombe
National President