

Dear members of the Senate Committee on Defence Health relating to Australians who have returned from combat conditions in their duty to the nation,

I served with 1RAR in the first unit deployment to South Vietnam in May 1965. I completed the one year deployment with them, returning in June 1966.

I did not join the RSL until 1986 because of its demeaning attitude to Vietnam veterans. I was unaware of the DVA or its responsibilities until then.

Soon, I was diagnosed with LATE ONSET PTSD which is the point of my e-mail to you. I had been having flash-backs and a general depression coupled to anger which led my family doctor stating that I had ADHD and putting me on a treatment regime that made me feel worse and losing control to such an extent that I twice took my ride-on mower over the edge of my garden wall onto the rubble below, plus a bad temper which I did not normally have. My wife complained to my family doctor and I was put on a stronger pill that completely disoriented me. I had not approached the DVA because, as an officer, I thought one shouldn't show such weakness in character. My doctor approached the DVA and the DVA system sent me to a psychiatrist who classified me as a 'late onset' sufferer from PTSD. Before I joined the Australian Army I had previously served on operations in Malaya, Southern Rhodesia and the Congo. So I would not personally accept the finding. When an RSL advocate told me that my service as an Infantry leader in Vietnam in combat where I had had to commit my men to action that caused their deaths and then cut the dog-tags off our own dead that I would be entitled to RSL and DVA support I still hesitated because I felt ashamed. My shame was ameliorated when, 34 years after the events, I was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for 'Leadership in Action'.

My wife and I divorced. When I arrived in Canberra after my divorce the RSL advocate insisted that I was being foolish and submitted my claim now that I had reached the age that TPI status could not be granted, I accepted submission of my claim, I now receive very gratefully, but somewhat embarrassingly, a general rate pension for my PTSD which I now find more controllable depending on the circumstances.

The point I make is that many Infantry officers, like me, imbued with the principle of our Regiment's motto: 'Duty First' may be loath to accept our Nation's gratitude for their combat service. I do not know if this perspective has ever been researched. I note, however, that many officers even at the most senior levels now have no compunction in claiming that they are suffering from PTSD.

I doubt, if any man, who experiences the fear of death, and seeing his mates die in combat can avoid suffering, for all time, the awful emotions of close combat; only lessened by teamwork, team loyalty, sense of duty, plus massive stoicism and, often, sensible inspiring leadership.

Thank you, Australia.