



THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MIVAC TRUST

Patron: Col.Sandy MacGregor (Ret.)

Vol.1

Issue 2

THE TRUST:

Launched in Tasmania in March 2002, MiVAC is a non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian charity. The initiative of former soldiers, who served in Vietnam, saw first hand the results of landmine explosions and were aware of the trauma created for civilians who lived and worked close to minefields, as well as the danger to their fellow soldiers, including mine-clearance teams.

MiVAC initially appealed to Tasmanian Vietnam Veterans but it now has members from many fields and all political persuasions.

Although members have undertaken to promote landmine awareness, MiVAC is primarily a fundraising body that raises funds to assist landmine survivors.

TRUSTEES:

Our present Trustees are Gillian Paxton, Robert Rands, Eva Ruzicka and founding member, Rob Woolley. They bring their own particular skill and experience to the Trust and spend many hours over and above the call of duty dealing with administration, promotion and project evaluation.

MEET THE TRUSTEES :



INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE:

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STATE NEWS

Gillian Paxton

Gillian is a retired woman in her early sixties. Before she retired she was a Counsellor at the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service in Hobart. It was here that she learned more about the horrendous effects of landmines and cluster munitions, and heard some of the magnificent stories of survival of victims of landmines. She is particularly disturbed when

innocent children and animals are injured or killed.

When she heard that an organization (the Mines Victims and Clearance Trust or MiVAC) was newly formed and operating in Tasmania, she was keen to be involved. She is now the Secretary of MiVAC and a Trustee.
(cont.)

She is also involved with the Australian Network to Ban Landmines (ANBL), being the Tasmanian Coordinator. Gill travelled to Zagreb, Croatia in November 2005 on behalf of the ICBL to attend the 6th Meeting of the countries who had signed the Mine Ban Treaty.

She believes that banning the use, spread and stockpiling of landmines is a good first step, but there are many people who need assistance now, and will do so for a very long time. So the work of groups like MiVAC is just beginning.

Apart from being indiscriminate killers, landmines affect many aspects of community life. For instance, if a family loses its breadwinner the mother may be forced to work, with many ramifications for the family and the community. Gillian is therefore particularly interested in the far-reaching community effects of landmines, and is glad that MiVAC offers the opportunity to address some of these.

Gillian has a daughter who is married and living in San Francisco and she has visited several times. She has met and talked with US Vietnam Veterans, many of whom suffer from similar problems to those of Australian Vietnam Veterans.

Her interests (apart from peace issues) at the moment are writing, reading and woodwork. She is also teaching English to refugees and trying to learn Spanish

The following article, GIANT STEPS FOR MANKIND, is written by Dave Sturmer who served in Vietnam in 1969 – 70 with 1 Troop, 1 Fld Sqn as a Combat Engineer and was wounded twice by landmines in Vietnam. The first incident (described below) was in the Light Greens in July 1969. Dave also survived another landmine explosion in December of that year. Dave, now retired, lives in Sydney with his wife and children. All his energies these days are aimed at helping others where he can. He is an active member of MiVAC, is involved with the Australian Army Cadets and enjoys his artwork. Currently he is painting a series on Vietnam to exhibit and help raise money for MiVAC.



Sapper Dave
Sturmer –
Vietnam 1969

GIANT STEPS FOR MANKIND:

On July 21st 1969 Man landed on the Moon, taking one giant step for Mankind. At about the same time that morning many thousands of miles from the Moon's surface, 3 Platoon, Alfa Company, 6 RAR Anzac Battalion were about to take a giant steps into a suspect mined area of the Light Green, South Vietnam

After days of scrub bashing and contacts 3 Platoon crossed a small track and were ordered to harbour up. The ground was rumbling from a B52 strike on the Long Hai mountain range, combined with Aussie Artillery and from miles away off the coast and out of sight the USS New Jersey offered a pay load that you didn't want to be on the receiving end of.

As we were the Engineer Sappers acting as a splinter team to the infantry platoon we downed our gear just to the side of the track and were asked by the Lieutenant to clear up the track for mines. No easy task as there was more shrapnel in the ground than the mine detector operator cared to listen to. Every step was a "ping", every step was a possible mine, every step and ping was prodded. This slow dangerous task that would keep your nerves on edge every split second.

Phil, my No.1, was close behind me, covering with an arc of fire and offered advice should I find a mine. We gently passed the gunner who was also ready to unleash his firepower should the VC decide to take a shot at us.

With headphones on, silence prevailed, as I scanned the track for mines and did not hear the approaching Lieutenant. He pulled the headphones from one ear and joyously stated the Yanks have landed on the Moon, and then let the headphones go. Phil and I just looked at each other and continued on with our task and the Lieutenant turned and walked back, stepping over our packs and directly onto a deadly M16A1 landmine.

“Bouncing Betty or Jumping Jack,” it doesn’t matter what you call it, it is a nasty piece of work. The M16 A1 is designed to jump out of the ground once stepped on then explode under your bum. The M16 A1 is also designed to have a 360-degree maiming radius. It is true to say the mine sometimes acted out of character, sparing lives by not detonating or creating mass devastation.

In the case of 3 Platoon, the mine created mass devastation. The first I knew of it was the thick smoke that passed me, and Phil pulling me to the ground telling me I was bleeding from the back of my legs. As my headphones were removed the screams of pain ripped through my ears and I could not imagine what I was about to witness. Phil who had been covering me had been hit all up the back and legs, if not for him I would have worn the lot.

We had never trained for such a moment, our job was simply to find mines and destroy them. What to do when one went off in the middle of a platoon, didn’t fit in the training manual. From here it was all commonsense and pray you don’t step on another one, now it was all about survival.

Phil was quick to react, and we both started clearing from where we had started - back through the devastation and the path which we knew was safe. (cont.)

Our first stop was the gunner, a piece of shrapnel had pierced a smoke grenade and was burning into his back, and to add to his problems the smoke grenade was flanked by two fragment grenades. By removing the smoke grenade he calmed down and we moved on to a sight that I could not believe possible.

The Lieutenant had been cut in half by the mine and was still alive. To our amazement the Lieutenant was in control. This brave man not only bought calm to the wounded to his immediate front, he passed on command to a young Corporal to his rear.

Phil was now feeling the effects of his wounds, I sat him down and he began advising me what to do next, we were a team and we would work together to do whatever we could in this maze of blood and torn flesh.

As Phil guided me, I carved a safe path to the brave Lieutenant who was now very much in command but growing weaker. We had not been trained to deal with such wounds and when I finally reached the Lieutenant I placed my hand on his shoulder to comfort him, we spoke quietly and he passed away. I will always remember this brave man.

From where time seemed to standing still, everything seemed to happen at a more urgent pace. There were wounded everywhere and everyone did their best to help each other. When support arrived, it would unfortunately result in more mines, more death and more wounded.

This was truly a remarkable day in history from a world point of view and a day the Sappers of 1 Troop 1st Field Squadron and men of 3 platoon, Alfa Company 6 RAR Anzac Battalion will forever carry in the hearts and I will be forever proud to say I knew these brave men.

The song "I was only 19" was written about the men of 3 platoon on that fateful day and has since been re-released as youth of today take ownership of our military history.

Landmines are one evil the world is better off without. If you can support any organization that is trying to rid the world of landmines, please step forward and give whatever you can.

Sapper Dave Sturmer
1 Troop. 1st Field Squadron
Royal Australian Engineers

JOHN SCHUMANN'S TASSIE VISIT:

MIVAC BENEFIT CONCERT WITH JOHN SCHUMANN

John Schumann coming to Cygnet was more like a happy homecoming than special guest concert. He seemed so utterly at home. After a day of informing schools and radio listeners about the horrors of landmines and the work of clearing them up, John charmed a near full house at the Cygnet Supper Room with his heartfelt songs and general presence.

Supporting musicians were amazing as well. The highly acclaimed singer songwriter, Leanne Delaney, warmed the audience through before Mat Woolley took to the stage prior to joining 'John Schumann and Friends' for the main event. John's 'friends' showed what truly skilled musicians can pull off with very little prep. Because of an array of commitments and John's brief Tasmanian visit, The 'Fab 4' got together just an hour ahead of the scheduled benefit concert to learn the songs!!

Incredibly, if we, as the audience, hadn't been told we never would have guessed that they'd never played a note together before! In all, it was a merry and satisfying night; food, music, wine, good company and all for a very good cause. John's visit was a great awareness raiser, attracting a full page Mercury article. School groups, through their concern and generosity have made links with MIVAC which will carry into the future and many who have heard John Schumann's songs both past and current, have had their hearts and minds opened to humanitarian and social issues, so often absent from popular commercial music.



**Steve, Mat,
John and Ross –
the “Fab Four”.**

It was a privilege to have John Schumann perform for us and represent MIVAC in this public way. Many thanks to all who made it possible and to those who ventured to Cygnet for a truly affirming get together and memorable, heart warming concert.

Julie Alderfox

RAPID PROGRESS AT BATTICALOA, SRI LANKA:

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Orphanage to Be Built by March -

Construction has begun on the orphanage at Dutch Bar, and if completed on schedule, will be finished by March.

Helped by grants from the Tasmanian Government and the Cofield Foundation MiVAC has pooled resources with Ayubowan, a Dutch organisation, and signed an agreement to rebuild the orphanage at Dutch Bar which was destroyed by the tsunami, in December 2004. The Agreement is with The Agro Human Development Welfare Society in Kallady, Batticaloa

Province, Sri Lanka. The proper name for the orphanage is Jesu Ashram. We call the project “Batti”.

Ayubowan is funding Batti to the amount of \$40,000, and we are funding to \$64,000+. Donations are still coming in. Our volunteer Project Manager in Sri Lanka is delighted with this result. He has never seen such rapid progress, once a building is begun. The Board of AHDWS is also very pleased. The Board includes Father Joseph, who wrote originally of the damage documented on the MiVAC website. We have hopes that the building may be finished ahead of schedule.



“Jesu Ashram - Foundations laid, ready for slabs 28 July

We sincerely hope progress continues like this through to the finish. There are risks. Sri Lanka is experiencing more conflict, and the conflict is widening.

Children have very recently been kidnapped from Eastern Sri Lanka, by a Tamil Tiger faction. The orphanage has served in the past as a refuge for children whose parents want them safe from this danger, and the sooner we are finished, the better we can meet this need. Also, the LTTE still use Claymore-type mines, a danger to all in current and former combat zones.

If you want to know more about Ayubowan, our partnering organisation, visit www.ayubowan.org. The quote below puts it in a nutshell:

“What does a writing parent mean for a child?

Just imagine: you are a child, but you have nobody special, nobody who cares especially for you. Research has shown beyond doubt that such a situation is harmful for the psychological state and development of a child. Regular contact by postcards or letters will support the child in this. He or she is not alone anymore, somebody cares... “

We are hoping to be able to send one of our MiVAC people to Batti in October, but it remains to be seen whether travel will be possible. We can only hope for the best. Your support for Batti is sincerely appreciated.

Robert Rands
Chairperson,
The MiVAC Trust

LANDMINE ACTION WEEK:

Yabbo Thompson, a member of both the Australian Network To Ban Landmines (Tas.Branch) and MiVAC, coordinated Landmine Action Week in Tasmania this year, which prompted the following speech in Parliament by the Hon. Terry Martin M.L.C.

Extract from Hansard – Legislative Council, Tasmania

Thursday 1st June, 2006

MINES VICTIMS AND CLEARANCE TRUST

[11.15 a.m.]

Mr MARTIN (Elwick) - Mr President, I just want to take this opportunity to briefly outline the activities of a very dedicated and passionate group within the Tasmanian community, MiVAC. Last Thursday I had the pleasure of attending the launch of Landmine Action Week, which is going on around the world conducted by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, but in Australia by the Australian network, but specifically in Tasmania by MiVAC, which is Mines Victims and Clearance Trust. The week, which has the theme this year of Playing Fields, not Minefields, was launched by the Deputy Lord Mayor of Hobart, Alderman Eva Ruzika, who spoke very passionately about the subject last week. She was joined at the launch by students from both The Friends' School and Sacred Heart College, who also spoke very passionately and very articulately about the horrifying facts in relation to this issue. One of the highlights was a very moving performance by a 14-year-old Sacred Heart student, Prairie Nischler, who performed a self-written song that I think very emotionally said everything there was to say about this issue, much more than any words and speeches can ever do.

A few of the horrifying facts about landmines include these: there are, extraordinarily, 45 million to 50 million landmines actually in the ground, in fact ready to explode, ready for innocent people to step on, scattered over 80 countries throughout the world, places like Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Vietnam and so on. Every year landmines cause an estimated 15 000 to 20 000 preventable casualties, and the victims normally are not military people as you would expect. They are actually innocent civilians, innocent men, women and, tragically, quite a few of course are innocent children. Over half of the landmine victims die from the initial explosion at the mine. Those who survive, of course, are badly maimed, often requiring amputation and often with substandard medical procedures. The impact on communities goes far beyond that even. People in landmine areas often cannot carry out their normal daily routines like we are used to in this country. They often cannot

return to their homes. They risk their lives every time they go shopping or during other parts of the daily routine. Children cannot play safely because, incredibly, there are some countries that actually target the installation of landmines in playground areas, soccer fields and so on, so that the intended victims are actually young children. Families cannot farm, they cannot fetch water, they cannot take produce to market, things that we take for granted. A landmine incredibly can cost as little as \$3 to make, but they take up to \$1 000 to remove.

In Tasmania we are indeed fortunate that a very dedicated, passionate group of people formed MiVAC back in March 2002. The MiVAC Trust is the initiative of Australian Vietnam veterans who personally cleared landmines in Vietnam, and who of course have seen first-hand the devastation caused by these totally indiscriminate weapons. Initially comprising veterans, the group has now broadened to include humanitarian aid workers, members of the peace-keeping forces, and numerous members of the general public, all of whom have the common desire to rid the world of these terrible weapons, as well as assisting the victims and communities affected by them. The concept of MiVAC is not only to bring relief to those people living in areas affected by mine warfare. It is also about providing a positive focus for those who served overseas and are concerned about what has been left behind upon their return to Australia. MiVAC is a non-profit voluntary organisation, which means that 80 to 90 per cent of the funds raised can be allocated towards the effective reach of projects. They have projects going on around the world in a number of countries, places like Cambodia and Sri Lanka at the moment, but time does not permit me to elaborate further.

I am very pleased to say that Australia was one of the original signatories of the Ottawa Mine Ban Convention, and as far back as 1999 Australian Defence Forces destroyed Australia's stockpile of antipersonnel landmines.

There is a lot of good news. A lot of good things are happening around the world in relation to this issue but there is much more that needs to be done, one of which is the fact that the United States Government is - and I find this incredible - one of the 40 countries that have not signed or ratified the Ottawa Agreement and as a result of that the United States maintains a stockpile of 10 million antipersonnel landmines and incredibly they are currently developing a new mines system called the Spider Mine.

Mr President, as I said, I just wanted to put on the public record my congratulations and gratitude to the volunteers who do such an incredible job educating the public through MiVAC and raising funds to help people in so many places around the world.

Hon.Terry Martin MLC

STATE NEWS:

Far North Queensland:

At the beginning of the year, I had a few friends around to dinner to celebrate Australia Day. One of my guests was Dr Joe Zhou, Associate Professor of the School of Business at James Cook University, and his wife. Also there were Dr Roger Kaus and his wife Wendy. Their daughter is Louise Kaus who is doing great work in Montagnard orphanage in Kon Tum Province, Vietnam.

It did not take long for the topic of conversation to get into MiVAC and similar issues. Everyone there showed great interest in the concept of MiVAC. And to top off a great night, it rained cats and dogs, something these days we all love to see.

Not long after, Dr Joe invited my wife and I to lunch at their home, and out of the blue, he gave me a cheque for \$200 for MiVAC. That was a wonderful gesture on his part. He has suggested that I might be able to speak about MiVAC to some of his students. This is 'work in progress'. I am very grateful to Dr Joe for his generous donation and I know that I will be able to build on this great link.

I was also invited to give a presentation on MiVAC and mines in Vietnam, to the Ravenshoe Masonic Lodge. For those who may not know, Ravenshoe is on the Atherton Tablelands and copped a lashing from Cyclone Larry. Anyway, although the Lodge there is small, they donated \$133 to MiVAC. Again, I think there are possibilities to speak to other Lodges in that area. It is a good 5 hours or so from Townsville, but well worth the effort to go there. Again, the generosity of ordinary Australians comes to the fore. Thank you Masons of Ravenshoe.

I hope that by the next Newsletter, I will have a few more successful presentations to report on. Tomorrow though, I am off to Sydney to participate in the RAE 40th Anniversary of Deployment to Vietnam. No doubt there will be some tall tales told there.

DEREK SMITH

New South Wales:

Sandy MacGregor escorted the first of a series of Tours to Vietnam, which have been organised by Kerry Phelan and John Pritchard of the NSW Branch and promoted as a major fundraiser for MiVAC and the AVVRG (Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group).

Sandy has sent the following article from Mary Anne Haines, one of the travellers who enjoyed the 11 day tour.

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY THROUGH VIETNAM JULY 21- AUGUST 2ND

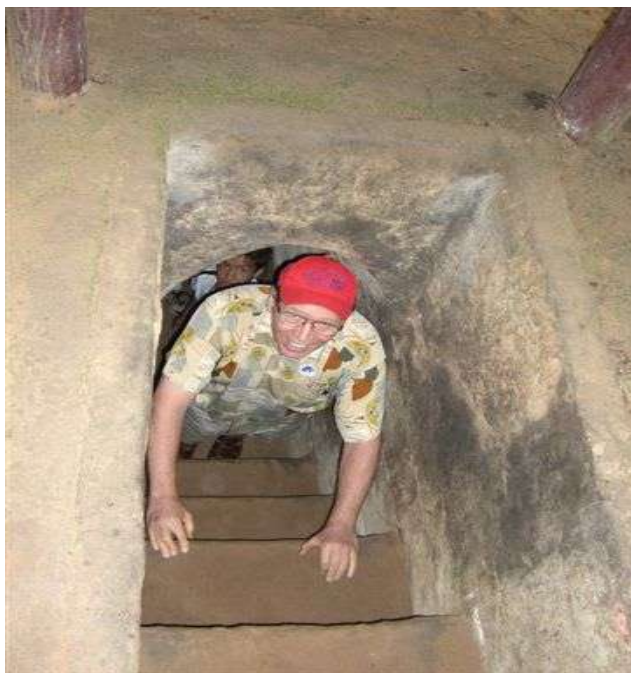
Travelling through Vietnam was an experience that two months ago I never knew would be happening. I had read about the proposed tour and thought that it would be impracticable due mainly to teaching commitments, however there was the pull to seize the opportunity and so began the preparation to participate in what would prove to be a most remarkable and inspiring journey!

The Tour focuses mainly on Hanoi in North Vietnam, Hue and Hoi An in Central Vietnam and then Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in South Vietnam. The cultural diversity and historical sites were truly remarkable and the countless number of motor bikes in the larger cities, seeming to come from a number of different directions, made Sydney's traffic system appear mild! Throughout the journey, the local guides were courteous, friendly and shared the many fascinating aspects of their region. They were able to point out details in relation to the best sites to visit, traditional customs, good shopping areas and even the most appealing restaurants.

One of the significant highlights for the Tour group was our journey to the former military sites. Using Vung Tau as a base, we went into the Long Phuoc Tunnels and then onto Nui Dat (former Australian Military Base) and of great importance visited the Long Tan Memorial Cross, where there were very moving and dignified speeches, the reciting of the Ode and the placement of roses and lit incense to honour the soldiers whose lives were so tragically cut short. For the Vietnam Veterans who were part of the Tour, this day was particularly poignant and for those of us who had never experienced warfare, it gave us a glimpse and a greater appreciation of all that was sacrificed by those who served their country in Vietnam. In addition to this, an important visit was made to the tunnel system of Cu Chi, situated about 30-40 km from Saigon and which was the site of the former Viet Cong headquarters. Amazingly there were over 250 km of tunnels in this area which included living areas, weapons factories, kitchens, field hospitals and many well camouflaged trapdoors. The site is very well maintained and really gave an insight into the life of the tunnel network.

As our journey drew to a close we felt a sense of real gratitude for the opportunity to experience and enjoy the beauties and uniqueness of Vietnam. For those considering a really worthwhile and fascinating journey, Vietnam is highly recommended!

MARY ANNE HAINES



Sandy MacGregor (MiVAC's National Patron) revisiting the Tunnels of 'Cu Chi during the July/August Tour of Vietnam

TASMANIA:

MiVAC members have been active in Tasmania over the past few months. John Schumann visited Tasmania in May and was kind enough to give a presentation about landmines to Sacred Heart and Guilford Young Colleges in Hobart before travelling to Cygnet to speak with students of three Primary Schools from the District. Staff & students were rapt when John agreed to perform "I was only 19". We finished the evening at a Concert in the Cygnet Town Hall – very capably reviewed by Julie Alderfox earlier in this issue.

We received generous donations from both schools for the Orphanage at Batticaloa, Sri Lanka and several students have asked for ongoing information about the orphanage and the children who will be living there.

Many thanks to John Schumann for taking time from his already busy schedule to support MiVAC with this whirlwind trip. The students who participated in our Schools Program have been able to look at the landmine issue through different eyes, and the audience at the Cygnet Town Hall experienced a wonderful night of music, food and wine with the added ingredient of a very talented singer/songwriter and wonderful support from local musicians.

We were also invited to give talks to three Rotary Clubs around the Hobart District on behalf of MiVAC and I would like to thank them for the opportunity to explain the concept behind the MiVAC Trust. They expressed interest in our overseas projects and have offered support for our fundraising efforts.

December will see us once again holding our **"Day of 1000 BBQ's"** as part of Human Rights Week. After such a great day last year and with tremendous support from our parliamentary members right across the board, we are looking forward to once again enjoying the company

of our friends and supporters who made the last “**Day of....**” such a success. As this is our National fundraising day we hope our Reps and members will get behind the Trustees and help us to exceed last year’s effort. Look for more information in the next National Newsletter – due out in November.

Rob Woolley

All correspondence and donations to -
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For further information about MiVAC,
Membership Forms, and details of our
Projects – past and present – go to

www.mivactrust.org