

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER  
OF THE  
**MIVAC TRUST**

Vol. 1  
Quarterly Newsletter  
Patron: Col. Sandy MacGregor (Ret.)



ISSUE 1

MARCH 2006

Welcome to the *First Edition* of the *National Newsletter* of the MiVAC Trust.

**THE TRUST:**

Launched in Tasmania in March 2002, MiVAC is a non-profit, non-sectarian charity. The initiative of former soldiers who served in Vietnam and 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. Being a voluntary organisation, very little of the money raised needs to be spent on administration, salaries, etc.; so almost all of the funds raised are spent on the ground.

**TRUSTEES:**

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



Lara Giddings MHA (Minister for Economic Development) presenting a \$50,000 Cheque to MiVAC Trustee, Rob Woolley, for the rebuilding of the Batticaloa Orphanage, on behalf of the Tasmanian State Government.

**THANK YOU**

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS SUPPORTED OUR FUNDRAISING EFFORTS FOR THE REBUILDING OF THE BATTICALOA ORPHANAGE IN SRI LANKA.

DONATIONS HAVE NOW REACHED OVER \$70,000. WE NEED MORE FUNDS TO ENSURE THE BUILDING MEETS STRICT GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES INTRODUCED SINCE THE TSUNAMI.

\*SEE PAGE 8

All correspondence and donations to –  
The Secretary  
PO Box 967  
SANDY BAY. TAS. 7006  
[secretarymivactrust@mivactrust.org](mailto:secretarymivactrust@mivactrust.org)

For further information about MiVAC,  
Membership Forms, and details of our  
Projects – past and present – go to...

[www.mivactrust.org](http://www.mivactrust.org)

Each edition of the National Newsletter will feature an article from one of our members about their own experiences with the issue of landmines. Our first guest writer will be known to many of you as the lead singer of the band "Redgum". His name is John Schumann, and he wrote what was to become the Australian anthem of the post-Vietnam War era. His song gave many Vietnam Veterans a voice and dignity, and their families and friends an explanation of the changes that took place in their lives after their return from Vietnam. John shares with us the story of how he came to write "I Was Only 19".

**John writes –**

Over the years, many, many people have asked how I came to write "I Was Only 19". Typically, there is a long answer and a short answer. The short answer is that the song just came barrelling down my pen like it had already been written – and I was just the willing and slightly bemused – conduit.

I realised that I had something pretty special the first time Redgum played it live and when some of the people sitting down in the front rows cried. And I remember seeing them and thinking to myself, "Whoa! There's something special going on here."

I had friends who went to Vietnam. When they came back, they were fundamentally altered. There was no doubt that in the year they were away they'd grown up and moved away from me. They'd come back from the war with what we call the "thousand-yard stare". And I watched unemployment set in, I watched alcoholism set in, I watched health problems and I watch domestic problems settle into their lives.

I don't think I would have ever written "I Was Only 19" had I not met Denny, the woman I married. (She's the Denny in "Mum and Dad and Denny saw the Passing-Out Parade.....") Subsequently, I met Denny's brother, Mick Storen, my brother-in-law and good mate.

When I first met Mick I knew that he'd been to Vietnam but I was also aware that Vietnam veterans didn't really talk outside their own circle. Looking back, I think relating his Vietnam experiences to me was a pretty difficult thing for him as he had to confront a whole set of experiences that he'd probably bottled up for years. I taped our conversations.

For the next five or six months, travelling in planes and cars and whatever else, I listened to these tapes. In fact, I listened to them over and over again but I didn't know what I was going to do with them!

Then one morning, when I was living in Melbourne, I got out of bed and made myself a cup of coffee. To my shame I was smoking at the time, and I took a packet of cigarettes, the cup of coffee, a notepad and my guitar out into my tiny little Carlton backyard where ".... a stingy ray of sunlight struggled feebly down....".

In about half an hour I'd written "I Was Only 19". As agreed, I played it to Mick first. I remember him looking at me in a quizzical sort of way before saying, "I reckon you'd better go see Frankie."

I asked, "Does that mean you like this? It's OK?"

He responded, "Yeah, this is okay. You'd better go see Frankie."

"19" was the first Redgum song that got any airplay at all. In fact, we couldn't get our songs played on the air at the time because we were too feisty, too Australian, too nasal, too political and too prickly. Now, I note with some amusement, the success of bands like the Waifs and Missy Higgins whose successful Australian accents owe a lot to Redgum.

When I wrote "19" I had no idea the song would be so useful and so important over such a long period of time. For me, it was simply an attempt to tell Mick's story and, perhaps, let the "bloke next-door" in on what was happening to Australia's Vietnam veterans.

Another and perhaps less noted fact is that "19" helped bring the issue of the use of landmines into Australia's lounge rooms in a way that helped us all understand the impact of these things – in a very real, immediate and human way.

For a songwriter to have written something that has become such a part of Australia's cultural fabric and that has been of such assistance to veterans and their families is a gift beyond measure. If I go to my grave only ever having done that, that'll be enough.

John Schumann.

\*As one of the many fans who rolled up to the City Hall in the early '80's when Redgum played "I Was Only 19" for the first time in Hobart, I can testify to the huge wave of emotion that swept through the crowd when the song ended. It wasn't only a few in the front row who cried either. M.W.

*John Schumann's latest album "LAWSON" is sure to appeal to all Henry Lawson diehards. His earlier recording "Portrait" features the song "I Was Only19"*

**LAWSON**  
*Henry's poems reborn as songs*  
**JOHN SCHUMANN**  
**& THE VAGABOND CREW**  
available from all leading music stores  
[www.henrylawson.com.au](http://www.henrylawson.com.au)

## **STATE NEWS:**

### **QUEENSLAND**

Derek Smith is MiVAC's Representative in North Queensland and his last letter tells of a trip he made to Herberton (out of Atherton)....

"It was my pleasure to give a presentation to the Ravenshoe Masonic Lodge on Saturday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2006. The Grand Master of the Lodge, Henry Condon, kindly invited me to give the presentation. Some time ago I had given a similar presentation to a Townsville Lodge, on the Barrier Minefield. Since then I have become involved in MiVAC and the Barrier Minefield presentation was an excellent link into MiVAC.

There were about twenty or so people attending, including wives and other members of the public. Unfortunately, my show clashed with another public event, but Ravenshoe is a very small community anyway.

I was able to provide via Power Point a brief history of our involvement in Vietnam, how the Barrier Minefield evolved, was used to great advantage by the enemy, and then how the same Corps (RAE) were then required to clear it.

Those in attendance were able to see the effects of these sinister devices and then learn of the MiVAC objectives. At the end of the presentation, people were asked to make a donation to MiVAC. I have now been able to send off a cheque for \$133. It is a small start, but I am confident

that I will now be invited to give presentations to other community organisations in the Atherton region, including schools.”

## **VICTORIA**

**Max Goddard is MiVAC's Representative for the Victorian Chapter**

**Max writes,**

**Since commencing our work in Victoria last October we have been concentrating on creating an awareness of MiVAC with a view to increasing membership and to do this we have approached a number of service organisations in both Melbourne and Geelong.**

**Geoff Tobin who is a member of the Patriotic Funds Council has approached other members of the Council to enlist their help in passing on information about MiVAC to their own organisations, which includes the RSL, VVAA, Legacy etc.**

**The RAE Association newsletter was mailed out in late February and included a short article on the presentation we made to their Annual General Meeting as well as a copy of the MiVAC brochure.**

## **TASMANIA**

**MiVAC members have continued with their Schools Program and have spoken at several schools in Hobart and the Huon Valley during November and December 2005. Children from Sacred Heart School, Guilford Young College and Glen Huon Primary have had several fundraisers to assist with the Batticaloa Orphanage project.**

**Our Day of 1000 BBQ's was great fun and Trustee, Eva Ruzicka gives this report - Brainchild of Rob Woolley, the inaugural Day of 1000 BBQs started well and ended up bringing out a very competitive streak in the aspiring Tongmasters. The day was chosen as part of Human Rights Week, as a means of publicising and fundraising for the Batticaloa Project, and publicising too, the impact of landmines.**



**Hobart City Council's Soudy Park provided an ideal setting. From fencing to secure the excellent banners, to a well set up BBQ area, lots of lovely shade for enjoying the bright sunny day in and plenty of space for children to enjoy. So good the venue, we're going back in 2006 and can only hope the weather repeats itself too.**





**Kevin (Pud) McDermott and Danny Sherrin our Sausage Sizzle Judges from the RAE Association with Rob Woolley and Sue Bastone**

Many family groups who had not intended to be part of the Day, but found themselves drawn in by the attractions of the puppet troupe "SMIFFS PUPPETS", the games and the toy stall, shared the venue.

Attendance was good, especially from aspiring and sitting state politicians, given the upcoming State Election. Early on they outnumbered other attendees and it was commented on how politically powerful MiVAC must be to get so many from across the board! Jokes aside (and MiVAC being a non-political organisation), it did provide an excellent opportunity to get the issues across party political lines for some consensus on what can be done.

Here's hoping that when the dust settles on the State Election, the work of MiVAC will remain in their memories and we can count on further support. We certainly hoped to give everyone a good time in attending, and judging from the feedback since then, everyone did.

The highlight feature of the day was the inaugural Tongmaster event. A hotly contested event, it included Nick McKim MHA of the Greens, Will Hodgman MHA from the Liberals and Terry Martin MLC from Labor. Terry has spent many a morning cooking sausages in his motel so he started very confidently in the cooking, browning and final presentation of his sausage. The expert judges were Kevin (Pud) McDermott and Danny Sherrin sourced from the RAE Association Tasmania. We were assured by Rob Woolley that these Engineers would be experts in their task of judging, and just watching them was a pleasure as they carefully appraised texture, crispness, colour, cutting, taste and mouth feel, all washed down between bites with a cleansing ale. The sausages were presented "blind" to the judges, with the names of the competitors on the underside of the plate. Judging was fair for all to see.

Much to the surprise of all, the winner was Nick McKim, who then generously undertook to have the inaugural inscribed tongs mounted and returned to MiVAC for the 2006 Day. Sadly a protest to the judges was lodged from Will Hodgman – he complained that a Green should not have been allowed to use a meat sausage! Judges disallowed the protest – their decision was final. Terry Martin was reportedly devastated, saying that after cooking over 40,000 sausages in his lifetime as a short order breakfast cook, he should have won!

Humble thanks from MiVAC goes to the marvellous volunteers and helpers who cooked the sausages and sorted out the other catering, assisted with the games, made the excellent banners, ran the Tongmaster event, organised the media and all the other bits in between. Thanks also to Hobart City Council for the venue and kind waiving of fees for the extra rubbish bins. Thanks especially to the Judges, without whom the tongmaster event could not have been run so impartially or with such good humour. Thanks to the television media for reporting it State wide.

So all in all, around \$600 was raised on the day towards the building of the Batticaloa orphanage, more people are now aware of the problems and issues of landmines, the Day of 1000 BBQ's is launched as an annual event in Human Rights Week, and best of all, Terry Martin has since pledged to return and challenge again for the Title of Tongmaster and retrieve the honour of the

ALP. Looks like the next Day will be one to anticipate! Thank you to EVERYONE who made it such a great day.



**Peg Putt MHA with Nick McKim MHA (Tongmaster of our Day of 1000 BBQs), Alderman Helen Burnett, Hobart City Council and Will Hodgman MHA, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party.**

## **NEW SOUTH WALES**

**John Pritchard and Kerry Phelan, (founding members of the NSW Chapter), have recently returned from Vietnam where they visited several of the sites they plan to include in their Vietnam Tour.**

**We would like to invite you to participate  
in our first of a series of major fund raising Tours.**

### **11 DAY TOUR TO VIETNAM.**

**With exclusive access to the  
Baria-Vung Tau Province  
to Showcase mine warfare.**

**Tours Departing: 21<sup>st</sup> July, 11th August 2006  
& September 2006.**

**Together with Village Travel St Ives (Travelscene American Express) and Adventure World, MiVAC and AVVRG (The Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group) have secured exclusive access to include the Baria orphanage, Nui Dat, (former Australian Military Base), The Long Tan Memorial Cross, The tunnels at Long Phouc, The Dat Do minefield area, The Minh Dam secret Zone in the Long Hai Mountain Range and the Vietnamese Soldiers retreat, The combination of these inclusions have previously not been available as a day tour package to the travelling Public.**

**These tours ex Sydney, cater for interests in the Vietnamese culture, heritage and areas of military significance. We travel to Hanoi, touring south through Hue & Hoi and then onto Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). You will then have the unique opportunity to travel to Vung Tau**

and participate in the MiVAC sponsored Minefield Day Tour. (Note, the 11th of August departure coincides with the 40th anniversary service at Long Tan).

The tours are fully escorted by a MIVAC representative and a Village Travel Escort to ensure all the organisational and comfort aspects of your tour are a success.

**PLEASE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT MIVAC.**

**Alex (Sandy) MacGregor MC ( Col Ret'd)  
National Patron MiVAC**

**John Pritchard (Lt Col Ret'd)  
NSW Representative MiVAC**

**For further details please contact Katie Ballard at:**

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## **WEST AUSTRALIA**

Arthur Ventham, MiVAC's Rep., in W.A. has advised us that he will soon be moving overseas to take up new employment and although he will still support MiVAC from afar he has resigned as the W.A.Rep.

We wish Arthur all the best and thank him for his efforts in the West.

Michael Ryan, well known to many MiVAC members as the President of the RAE Association W.A., has indicated that he would be pleased to continue promoting MiVAC (as he has done for several years) until a new Rep., is appointed.

## **MIVAC USA**

The Trustees are pleased to welcome Vietnam Veteran Frank Geary to the team as a MiVAC Representative in Massachusetts, USA. Frank brings a wealth of experience to MiVAC.

For many years he was President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Fitzgibbon/McMahon Chapter 837 and with others campaigned for the rights of disabled veterans. Frank has had a long association with MiVAC and we all look forward to working with him. A big G'day to other veterans from the USA who have joined as members. We are honoured to be associated with you,

## **INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES**

As well as taking on the task of being a MiVAC Trustee and National Secretary for MiVAC, Gill Paxton is also the Tasmanian Co-Coordinator for the ICBL. Gill explains some of the work the ICBL has been doing towards the Mine Ban Treaty.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was launched in 1992 and it brings together over 1300 organizations (human rights, peace, disability etc) in over 90 countries. The aim of the ICBL is to ban antipersonnel landmines and to decrease the suffering caused by them.

Australia has a group associated with the ICBL. Its official name is International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Australian Network Inc (ICBL-AN Inc.) The general usage name is Australian Network to Ban Landmines (ANBL) It has a website: <http://australia.icbl.org> and the phone number for the Tasmanian State Coordinator is (03) 62 278191. The ANBL holds monthly

Committee meetings by teleconference and an annual face-to-face National Committee Meeting with an AGM.

At this stage over 140 countries have signed up to the Mine Ban Treaty, but there are over 40 countries, which have not yet acceded to the Treaty, including the USA, China, Vietnam, India, Pakistan and Israel. The Treaty bans the use, production, procuring and stockpiling of antipersonnel mines. It calls for destruction of existing mine stockpiles, mine clearance, and victim assistance. MiVAC works closely with the ANBL and has similar aims, but it is a non-political organization and has, so far, focussed mainly on the area of survivor assistance.

A landmine costs only a few dollars to produce, but up to \$1000 to remove. Landmines indiscriminately kill and maim a great number of people and animals, and they last long after a conflict has ended. Apart from horrific injuries, this makes peace and survival in mine-affected areas extremely difficult.

So the Mine Ban Treaty is a great step in the direction of decreasing the suffering caused by this weapon, and the ICBL has played an enormous part in making it happen.

## **PROJECT NEWS**

Our fundraising efforts this year are directed towards an orphanage in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. After hearing of the devastation by the Tsunami to the communities in this war-affected area, our overseas advisor Mike Roberts, Rob Woolley and Brendan Boucher worked together to identify an area where MiVAC would be able to provide assistance.

Brendan had already worked on MiVAC projects in Cambodia, and he travelled to Sri Lanka with another MiVAC member, David Mariadason to visit the Batticaloa Province at Dutch Bar.

They learned that the orphanage had been completely destroyed by the Tsunami. Fortunately, most of the children were away for the Christmas holidays. However the manager of the orphanage and his wife were killed while pushing the few remaining children to safety in a large tree.

Once the Trustees had agreed to support Batticaloa Orphanage as MiVAC's next project the call for donations went far and wide.

The Tasmanian State Government has provided a \$50,000 grant, \$10,000 was received from a bequest in South Australia and we have also raised several thousand dollars from donations and fundraising events.

**\*Robert Rands, Trustee has provided an update on the Batticaloa Orphanage:**

**We are moving ahead with this project.**

**We have an initial plan for the orphanage, which we are refining, as new building regulations have come into place, to account for the possibility of another Tsunami.**

**Brendan Boucher, our Project Officer in Sri Lanka, is working with Father Joseph Mary and the nuns who are involved with the orphanage, Sister Stella and Sister Margaret Mary.**

**We are fortunate to have the voluntary services of a Tasmanian architect, Robert Vincent, who will work with the project group to assure the best possible design for the funds available.**

**The project group consists of Brendan, The Engineer, The Architect and myself. We should have a plan ready for the builders in two months. Building is expected to take about 9 months, due to the fierce competition in Sri Lanka for builders and materials**

**We are looking forward to the orphans being back together by this time next year. They are currently boarded out among the community.**

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter"*