

## VIETNAM MARCH

**SERGEANT Bert Kuijpers (Recruiting)** has not forgotten his return to Australia from Vietnam.

'I was in a group brought back in an aircraft that landed at night. The only people who met me were my family and that sort of treatment was very hard to accept at the time,' he said.

'People really didn't want to know me and I felt like an outcast.

'I couldn't talk to people about my experiences. Only the other troops who served there really understood.'

But he said the Vietnam veterans' march in Sydney on October 2 had gone a long way towards healing old wounds.

About 50 AFP personnel took part in the march in their various units.

'It was a tremendous, indescribable feeling; the reception was just unbelievable,' he said.

Sergeant Kuijpers was in the regular army before going to Vietnam, where he served as a medic in the 8th Field Ambulance.

A lot of old mates had not made the parade.

'I regularly hear of suicides, alcoholism and disease — particularly cancer — among veterans. A good friend of mine died of cancer only five weeks before the march.'

He said the strong roll-up from his old unit was typical of the enthusiasm of the veterans.

'About 60 of my old comrades turned up. The 8th Field Ambulance was about 150 strong when it went to Vietnam.'

'After the march the veterans celebrated in the traditional military way. There were certainly a few sore heads on the Sunday,' he said.

Several senior AFP personnel also served in Vietnam, including the Commissioner, Major-General Grey, and the Director of Recruiting, Brigadier Colin Kahn.

Chief Inspector Colin Rowley (Officer-in-Charge International Branch) won the Military Medal for his service in Vietnam.

The military careers of all three men were linked. Chief Inspector Rowley had served in the Commissioner's battalion which had taken over from Brigadier Kahn's battalion after its tour of duty.

Brigadier Kahn led his old unit at the Sydney march and was the guest speaker at the Cenotaph. He also led a parade of Vietnam veterans in Wollongong on the Monday of the long week-end where a new Vietnam memorial was dedicated by Major General 'Sandy' Pearson who had led the march in Sydney.

'It was a reunion for the nation,' Brigadier Kahn told *'Platypus'*. 'The nation was at one, which in some people's eyes was what was needed.'



*Brigadier Kahn*

'Those of us who brought battalions home had wonderful welcomes and exciting parades but thousands who came home in smaller groups didn't.'

He said the Sydney march had extended that welcome to all the people who had fought.

'It was a reunion; there was happiness and we, the veterans, were as one with the crowd which was as it should have been.'

Brigadier Kahn said he believed many of the health problems attributed to the Vietnam War could be put in down to the fact that people had been made more aware by media 'hype'.

'No soldier can say any war is worse than any other,' he added.



*Sergeant Bert Kuipers (centre) in action at Nui Dat with an 8th Field Ambulance forward aid post. (Picture courtesy of John Fairfax and Sons Ltd.)*

**T**HIS is the text of Brigadier Kahn's speech at the Dawn Service at the Cenotaph:

One day last week, I wanted to think about our near 500 dead and the so many others seriously wounded, so I went, at this same time of day, to the cliffs at North Head.

While there, three incidents occurred which vividly brought back to me images representative of what these men did in earning their so very rightful place in our Nation's memory alongside that of their grandfathers in World War I and fathers in World War II. For a moment, share these images with me.

A submarine sailed through the Heads but what I saw was HMAS Hobart with the US 7th Fleet providing gunfire support to Australian and South Vietnamese troops in the South and US Marines near Quangtri. I saw our Navy clearance diving teams, and Navy helicopters operating so far away from the sea at Black Horse, involved in heavy ground combat operations.

Then, in the sky I heard the unmistakable thud, thud, thud that had become, indelibly, our sound as a helicopter flew over. And I saw 9 Squadron RAAF coming out of a dawn sky to pick up an infantry battalion waiting on the strip at Nui Dat. I saw those same helicopters smashing their way through jungle canopies or landing in minefields to evacuate hundreds of our wounded diggers, back to the unequalled care of our doctors and nurses at the Australian Field Hospital.

And I saw lumbering Caribous of 35 Squadron flying through enemy fire into isolated outposts such as Duc Co to re-supply Vietnamese and US advisers. And the Canberra Bombers of 2 Squadron were taking off from Phan Rang on yet another mission in the Delta.

Then, with the sound a bugle from the Artillery Barracks, I was overwhelmed with images of the Army.

I saw our gunners in 100 different fire support bases, stripped to the waist pouring tens of thousands of shells in support of the infantry and armour and I saw our armour, — those incredible tanks and personnel carriers operating in places few of us thought possible — and there were the engineers, clearing enemy tunnels and minefields and helping to rebuild a shattered South Vietnam countryside. There too were the countless logistics and support units tirelessly performing their critically important and frequently dangerous tasks.

But then I saw 'the man who walked out front' — the infantryman — so many of whom are the men we honour today. I saw a rain and sweat-drenched man in green, laden like a pack mule, age 21



*The AFP's Director of Medical Services, Dr Dwyer (far right) in the Sydney march to welcome the veterans.*

going on 50, cutting his way through jungle by day to find and attack the enemy, then lying all night in paddy fields or on trails in ambush.

I saw him as the Special Air Service soldier deep in the enemy territory; I saw him in 1965 in War Zone D, and at Long Tan repelling a day-long massive attack. I saw him standing so justifiably tall after battles such as Balmoral, Coral, Binb Ba, Baria and the continuous patrol battle of mine infested Phouc Tuy.

Finally, I saw an image which I believe epitomises what this ceremony is about and perhaps above all what Vietnam meant to we veterans. I saw the Tra Bong Valley in 1965 and two isolated Australian infantry warrant officers from our famous Training Team. They are under attack — one is dying from his wounds but the other will not leave his mate to the enemy. They are later found dead together.

**I conclude with the thought, that services at this place, at this time of the day, are synonymous with an event which forged Australia's nationhood more than 72 years ago, at Gallipoli. There are a number of similarities worth remembering between that eight month campaign and our ten years war in Vietnam.**

**• Both were fought by men, supported by women, who were the cream of the Nation.**

**• Both groups were volunteers.**

**• Both were fought in a foreign land that few had ever heard of or cared about, in wars that many said were not ours and in which we should have no part.**

**• Both times we fought alongside many foreign allied armies; at Gallipoli the British, NZ, Gurkas, Palestinians, French and Algerians. In Vietnam we were with the South Vietnamese, US, NZ, South Koreans, Thailand and Philipines.**

**• And at Gallipoli, in 1915 some 60,000 Australians were sent to carry out the directions of an elected Australian Government. In the 1960's, 50,000 other Australians did the same.**

While there is no comparison in the numbers killed, on this, the dawning of a great day of *reunion*, we pay homage to our particular 500 colleagues who will not be marching with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, while there may have been a lack of complete support for the war, we assure the loved ones of our dead and wounded that there is no lack of appreciation and gratitude for the sacrifice of these men. They know it abounds in the hearts of we their colleagues. I believe today, those relatives will see and hear the same expression of appreciation from the people in Sydney, for a job that was not just well done but superbly done.