

Robert S Buick MM

Mountain Creek, Qld 4557

Email strait8@bigpond.com

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TO WHO THIS WILL CONCERN
Department Veterans' Affairs

QUESTIONING - Defence and veterans' affairs policies regard veteran suicide
PRESENTED BY Robert Stanley BUICK Army REGIMENTAL Number 55106
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Background

After over twenty years service with the Army – RAAF – Army, with operational service Malaysia 1961-3 (2RAR) and Vietnam 1966-7 (6RAR) and retiring in 1980 and Warrant Officer One Royal Australian Infantry, I believe I have the service and experience to make an assessment of and criticise the ADF and DVA policies regarding veteran suicide.

I was a member of the Australian Military Forces (AMF) when we signed on for a specific period to serve in the Army, Navy or Air Force and completed that time irrespective of injury unless administratively discharged. However, this changed with the Hawke Labor and the so-called modernising of the AMF and rebadging it the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) when enlisted was by contract for all and I understand there are clauses enforcing retirement/discharge if a member is deemed unfit or unable to carry out the duties required of his employment. This contractual arrangement is what I believe is the cause of depression and possible suicide of members.

I have made an inflammatory statement above, and I have done so purposely.

During my service, I know of many injured during training, others killed in action (KIA) and wounded in action (WIA). Some with loss of limbs could not continue serving in the Corps of their choice, but the AMF was obligated to retain these service personnel and offer to retrain them. Many of the WIA remained in service completing their enlistment engagement in another Corps while a large number continued to serve for decades and attained commissions.

I wish to discuss one of these members who lost a limb and remained in service retiring with the rank of Major. He was a Private soldier in 11 Platoon, Delta Company, Sixth Battalion Royal Australia Regiment during the units first deployment to Vietnam 1966. I was the Platoon Sergeant of the platoon and Long Tan on 18 August 1966, the platoon that suffered the highest numbers of casualties during a single year of deployment, fourteen killed and nineteen wounded, a total of a rifle platoon posted strength. My platoon radio operator was killed at Long Tan, and he became the radio operator and remained so until November 1966 when on Operation Ingham in the East of Phuoc Tuy province a command-detonated mine (IED) killed and wounded thirteen others, including my radio operator who lost his right foot. He returned to Australia, was retaining in another Corps, received a prosthetic foot and retired as a Major after over thirty years active and useful service in the AMF.

I challenge the ADF and DVA to name one similar experience with any ADF members who has served in a combat zone since Vietnam, I'll bet they cannot and will explain why.

I understand as part of the contractual agreement personnel make on serving in the ADF is that if they are unable to complete their duties, they will breach the employment contract and service terminated. Is this so?

I have explained the AMF system in regards to my signaller losing a limb in the Vietnam War and put this scenario to the ADF and DVA with a story I am familiar with involving an Afghanistan veteran.

Sgt A was serving in Infantry and deployed to Afghanistan, he has married two kids and in a married quarter. He returned from Afghanistan like me with PTSD, mine diagnosed in 1995, fifteen years after retirement; he was diagnosed about a year on returning to Australia.

Now in the AMF, I served on for a further fourteen years before retiring. Sgt A was discharged, few job prospects and no support. The ADF nullified his employment contract due to the war cause disability, and DVA awarded him the Special Rate Disability (Gold Card TPI). He immediately lost his job, discharged and unentitled to a married quarter went from the public-funded income to a massive loss of income, he was dumped because the ADF does not retain and retrain, I ask if commissioned officers diagnosed with PTSD are awarded the same procedures.

His marriage crumbled, he hit the grog and dabbled in drugs. His world destroyed because unlike me he was diagnosed PTSD although he could have served on in Infantry as I did with PTSD.

I have not heard of Sgt A for some years. He may have capped himself, who knows, who cares? I do because I believe that ADF/DVA system stinks, unlike the AMF that did support their personnel, the ADF discards it unwanted, alledged incapable members and says that DVA will care for them.

That is bullshit, and the politicians and department heads know it.

I have contacted the Minister for the ADF and DVA in the passed by email, no reply from the Minister for the ADF and a non-committal thank you from the Minister for DVA.

I am a lone voice that can shout and jump, but government ignore folk like myself, we are a pain in the arse.

Next year I will consider seeking media support because veteran suicide is increasing, reviews do nothing policies within must change DVA motto is meaning the ADF is dysfunctional on it cares for its personnel.

In closing, you will be surprised that not one member of D Company 6RAR directly involved in the Battle of Long Tan has suicide. I wonder why?

Bob Buick

If you served in the AMF and have Vietnam Service and agree with what I submit as being a cause to suicide, please make an effort to write to your local Federal MP and state Senators' and tell them.

I have written to media commentators like Jones, Hadley, Murray on Sky and many others and they have not acknowledged my letter.

I genuinely wonder if they do care or are they as shallow as the political classes.