Sunshine Coast Ex-Service and Serving Women's Association Inc.

Joining Forces



March 2025—June 2025 21st Edition

> Inc Assn IA 59129 ABN 15 390 668 848

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Editor's Note

This edition highlights the role of our Australian Army, RAAFNS, Red Cross & Civilian Nurses in Vietnam. Little of their role was known by the general public nor their significant contribution during this time. This article is not only informative but very thought provoking. I trust you enjoy this article.

Cheers

Larraine

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the 21st edition of Joining Forces.

A number of important preparations are in the mix for our members' enjoyment this year.

Firstly, we have our Annual General Meeting on 3rd April 2025. Notices of this were sent out 13th January 2025. I would encourage members to consider being a part of this team. Lots of differing roles make up the Management Team.

Secondly, Deirdre Elliott and her Events Team are working hard on preparing for the Annual Luncheon to be held on 5th June at the Maroochy RSL Events Centre. This years event and theme promises to be lots of fun and very entertaining. The Flyer is on page 8.

Thirdly, our Events Team have arranged for our Coffee and Chat on 3rd July to take the form of a Bus trip. First stop is at Kenilworth where we have a tour of the Cheese Factory and a wander around the lovely small town, then back on the bus and head to the Kandanga Hotel for a Christmas in July luncheon. The Flyer is on page 9.

I trust you enjoy this edition of *Joining Forces*.

With respect.

Larraine Houlihan

Australian Nurses During the Vietnam War

Information was obtained from articles by Dr Catie Gilchrist, Australian War Memorial files and Author Annabell Brayley, "Our *Vietnam Nurses*"

All of the information contained in this article is provided in good faith and any inconsistencies, differing memories or counter opinions are those of the original authors and not those of this Editor.

Australia sent over 50,000 defence personnel to serve in South Vietnam and its surrounding waters between 1962 and 1973. It was a controversial politico-military commitment which led to 519 Australian deaths and over 3,000 men were evacuated home with wounds, injuries or illnesses.

A largely forgotten part of those personnel were the female nurses who served during the conflict; some went overseas to treat casualties on the frontline, whilst many dealt with the wounded who were later sent back home. The first group of Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC) nursing sisters deployed to Vietnam in May 1967 were led by Captain Amy Pittendreigh. In total forty-three women volunteered to serve their country as army nursing sisters between May 1967 and November 1971. Before leaving, the nurses did not receive any specific training or practical information to prepare them for their daunting task; to perform nursing duties in a primitive, tropical war zone that until then had been carried out by male Army medical assistants and orderlies. And despite the Vietnam War being the first major 'televised war', in later oral histories, the women all agreed that they had had no deep understanding about why the war they were sent to, was in fact being waged. All however were dedicated and devoted and served with great courage, resilience and resourcefulness. They were also crucial, in maintaining the wounded soldiers' morale.

Undertaking a tour of twelve months, the first four nurses (playfully dubbed the 'fab four') served with the 8th Australian Field Ambulance then stationed at the Australian Logistic Support Group compound at Vung Tau, a coastal resort 60 miles south-east of Saigon. Shortly after they arrived, a New Zealand army nurse, Margaret Torrey joined them. In April the following year, the 8th Australian Field Ambulance transitioned into the 1st Australian Field Hospital which remained operational until late in 1971. The hospital specialised in fast treatment for Australian casualties and was connected to the Nui Dat task force by US ambulance helicopters.

Countless lives were saved in Vietnam by the ability to evacuate casualties from forward areas quickly, often within an hour of men being wounded or injured. The nursing work was very demanding however and the hours long; on a routine week the nurses worked twelve-hour shifts, six days a week, earning two-thirds of what a male officer of similar rank earned. '...mines were the curse of Australia's last years in Vietnam. The wounds horrified the medical teams; M16 jumping jacks — most of them lifted from the Australian minefield — caused more than 50 per cent of Australian casualties between September 1968 and May 1970, the height of the mine war... Mines were invisible, hidden, loathsome killers; they disabled, disembowelled and emasculated...'

Working near a war zone was a far cry from the sanitised civilian wards and well-equipped military hospitals the women were familiar with at home. Clean water was scarce, power outages were common and facilities for medical incineration almost non-existent; amputated limbs and human waste were often and distressingly carried off by native dogs.

Caring for horrifically injured soldiers straight from the frontline, understaffed, and with only very basic resources, the conditions were like nothing they had ever experienced before. As a nurse later recalled, 'You didn't look after malaria or bomb injuries or people with shrapnel wounds back in the wards at home.'

However, the returning servicemen and women faced a cool or even openly hostile reception from the public. "Some were told once you got back into Australia ... not to wear your uniform outside the barrack area," she says. "People had no idea what it was like, so you didn't speak about it too much." Such was the culture of silence surrounding the Vietnam War that many nurse's journalist Annabelle Brayley interviewed didn't tell anyone about their service — not even their families. She says army nurses have always been recognised for their Vietnam service. But other nurses had to wait much longer.

Royal Australian Air Force Nurses (RAAFNS)

Between 1965 and 1972, an additional 106 nursing officers from the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) were deployed to the No. 4 Hospital at Butterworth Air Force Base in Malaysia to care for the military personnel based there. They also flew medevacs into Saigon, Bien Hoa and Vung Tau, transporting wounded Australian and New Zealand soldiers back to Butterworth, stabilised and then on to Sydney, via Darwin. Another route was to Sydney via Pearce, WA.

These evacuations played a crucial role in increasing battlefield casualty survival. Indeed, the Vietnam War, with its dust offs and rapid helicopter evacuations marked the medical treatment of casualties as uniquely distinct from previous wars; during the Second World War for example, 8.5 per cent of casualties died after reaching hospital yet in Vietnam, by contrast, the figure was less than 3 per cent. Sadly, on occasion however, the flag draped coffins of fallen Australians were also transported home with the injured men.

Thirty-two RAAF nurses also completed 60-day secondments with the US air force. Based in Manila, the nurses formed part of the four daily 'milk runs' — medevac missions to pick up wounded American and Korean soldiers in South Vietnam. A huge Hercules aircraft could fit 60 casualties — 40 stretchers stacked four high and 20 walking wounded — who were triaged and managed by the flight nurse as they flew back to base, often under enemy fire.

For the rest of the conflict, this continued depending on hostile actions. Accompanied by nursing sisters and medical orderlies, the aeromedical evacuated casualties were off-loaded at Richmond RAAF Base in NSW via Butterworth, Malaysia. From here, they were transferred by ambulance to the care of Army medical authorities, notably to the Repatriation General Hospital at Concord and to the Army base hospital at Ingleburn in NSW.

The Department of Defence refused to acknowledge the service of RAAF nurses during the Vietnam War until 1994 on the grounds they were based in Malaysia, not Vietnam. It's a decision Brayley says was unfair.

"The nurses were on the ground ... every time they got out of a plane to load wounded to take them back to Butterworth [Air Force Base]," she says. "[And] every time they were on the ground — and particularly the 32 who flew for USAF ... picking up and transporting patients — they were in danger."



The first group of Australian Army nurses of 8th Field Ambulance to arrive in Vietnam in May 1967. From left to right; Lieutenant Colleen Mealy, Lieutenant Margaret Ahern, Captain Amy Pittendreigh, Lieutenant Terrie Roche. "Know as the Fab Four"



Lieutenant Colleen Mealy tends to a patient at the 8th Australian Field Ambulance in South Vietnam in 1967



RAAF Nursing Squadron Officer Harriett Hardy Fenwick adjusts the litter strap of an Australian Army casualty being flown to Australia from Vietnam



South Vietnam, November 1968. A nursing sister attends to a soldier outside

CIVILIAN AND VOLUNTEER NURSES

As well as the deployment of RAANC nursing sisters, more than 200 civilian nurses from around Australia were members of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) surgical medical team that operated in Vietnam between 1964 and 1972. They worked in provincial hospitals supporting and assisting local hospital staff and they deployed for three to twelve months; some of them went more than once.

Twenty-two Australian Red Cross volunteers also worked with the medical staff in Australian and American hospitals in Vietnam; nineteen of them were women.

The civilian nurses had to wait until 2020, when Josh Frydenberg and Darren Chester (then treasurer and minister of veteran affairs, respectively) passed legislation entitling them to Vietnam service medals and the essential Gold Cards, which provide them with access to healthcare and support services.

"Few of them have returned without any impact from the time they spent in Vietnam," she said.



Australian civilian nurse, Maureen Spicer, at work at Bien Hoa Provincial Hospital north-east of Saigon in 1966.

Hospitals at Home - Ingleburn Army Camp

During the Vietnam War, the 1st Field Hospital was deployed overseas to Vung Tau whilst the 2nd Military Hospital (known as '2 Mil Hospital') received casualties of wounded soldiers who had been evacuated from Vietnam. Many of them arrived home with wounds packed and dressed in the theatres of the 1st Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau; upon arrival they would have the next stage of their surgery in the 2 Mil theatres to complete those preliminary treatments. Others required ongoing surgery to further repairs and/or reconstructions already begun. Patients at Ingleburn remained there until they were well enough to return to their home state, at which time the army organised commercial flights home for them accompanied by a Nursing Corps officer.

Many Army nurses at home were kept equally busy by Australia's involvement in Vietnam. By 1 January 1966, some 112 casualties, both sick and wounded had been flown out of Vietnam by the RAAF and brought home on C-130 Hercules transport couriers.

Australia's first Vietnam Nurses Memorial

In Australia, no single memorial to these brave Vietnam War nurses existed — until now. Eight years after the publication of her book, Annabell Brayley lead a new project honouring nurses who served in Vietnam. The Vietnam Nurses Memorial is a photographic exhibition at the Morven Historical Museum in central Queensland which was opened on April 24, 2024. "It will be a permanent display that includes civilian, RAAF and army nurses, and ... there'll be a very loose chronological story of their service in Vietnam that will reflect a story of the Vietnam War itself," Brayley says.

Six nurses travelled to Morven, a tiny town 650 kilometres west of Brisbane, to attend the exhibition opening. And this year a number of nursing veterans will march with local school children in the Anzac Day parade.

The permanent photographic exposition is the first Memorial in Australia dedicated solely to the 353 Australian women who nursed in Vietnam between 1964-1972. The sixteen compelling images share stories of RAAF, Army and Civilian Surgical Team nurses, at work during the war. Some of the images in the were sourced from the Australian War Memorial, some from nurses and some were generously donated by the family of renowned War Photographer, the late Denis Stanley Gibbons.

These photographs capture glimpses of the Australian nurses' experience in Vietnam, and ensure their stories have a permanent home in Australian history.

Editors Note:

For further information there are a number of books and personal articles written about this era which records the outstanding service these nurses contributed during the Vietnam War. These are but a few worth reading.

Our Vietnam Nurses by Annabell Brayley Vietnam Nurse, Mending and Remembering by Lou Eisendrandt The Women by Kristin Hannah



The Helicopter landing area known as Vampire at the 1st Australian Field Hospital, Vung Tau



No 4.RAAF Hospital Butterworth

In December 2024 Life Membership Awards were granted to Janice Thorne, Margaret Humby, Patricia Campbell, Bett Upson and Joyce Colclough. All have played a vital role in making our Association what it is today. We sincerely congratulate and thank them.



Margaret Humby and Janice Thorne with their Life Membership certificates and badge. Well deserved.



Bribie Island Ex-Service Women's Monthly Luncheon

The Luncheon for the Bribie Island Ex-Service Women is held on the 4th Monday of the month at the Bribie Island RSL, 99 Toorbul Street, Bribie Island. Contact Anita Cooper on 0402 246 408 for any further info. All welcome.



Glasshouse Country Women United by Defence - Monthly luncheon

Usually held on the 2nd Wednesday each month at 11.00am. Contact Fran Sinclair on 0416 013 987 for further info. All welcome.



SUNSHINE COAST EX-SERVICE AND SERVING WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC

Dress of the day: cruising attire

Prepare for the Luncheon Cruise of a lifetime



No passports, visas or vaccinations required

Guaranteed NO Sea sickness

The Captain and crew of the cruise ship SS SUNNY COAST invites you to join us at our Annual Luncheon. The ship will be docked at:

The Maroochy RSL Events Centre, Memorial Ave, Maroochydore.

Boarding Date: Thursday 5 June 2025

Time: 11.30 for 12 Midday

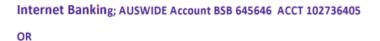
Passage must be booked and paid for by 25 May 2025

No monies will be accepted on the day of boarding.

Cost: \$40.00 SCESWA Financial Association Member. \$45.00 for Non Members.

A complimentary drink will be provided with each passage booked

Tea and coffee will be available for early arrivals at the Port.



Alternatively: Cash to the Treasurer prior to the RSVP Date.

Please advise if there are any special dietary requirements



Reply to:
The Events Co-Ordinator
Deirdre Elliott
Email: Deirdre_Colin@bigpond.com
Mob: 0408222592











SUNSHINE COAST EX-SERVICE AND SERVING WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC

Come and join us on

A GRAND C and C BUS TRIP

FOR A CHRISTMAS IN JULY LUNCHEON

THURSDAY 3 JULY 2025

that will be to

KENILWORTH—a visit to the Cheese Factory and a wander around this quaint town. Then at 12 noon prompt, to KANDANGA HOTEL for a Christmas in July luncheon

details of meal to be advised.

Pick up TIMINGS:

Caloundra RSL 8.15am

Maroochydore RSL 9.00am

COST: SCESWA Financial Association Members \$15.00 Non Members \$30.00

RSVP 24 June 2025

Methd of payment. Internet Banking Auswide Account.... BSB 645646 Acct No 102736405.

Cash to the Treasurer prior to the RSVP

Forward Reply to: The Events Co-Ordinator **Deirdre Elliott** Email: Deirdre_Colin@bigpond.com Mob: 0408222592

PLEASE ADVISE IF THERE ARE ANY SPECIAL DIETARY / ALLERGY REQUIREMENTS



Carers are welcome







WRANS





WRAAF & RAAFNS





WRAAC & RAANC





Meeting & Coffee and Chat Dates





6 March 2025—Coffee and Chat—Mini Golf, Maroochy River Golf Course 9.30am sharp



3 April 2025—OGM and AGM Kawana Waters Surf Club 10.00am for 10.30am start



1 May 2025—Coffee and Chat— Kawana Surf Club 10.00am



5 June 2025—SCESWA Annual Luncheon—Maroochy RSL Events Centre 11.00am for 11.30am start



3 July 2025—Christmas in July Bus Trip—Kenilworth and Kandanga. Flyer page 9



7 August 2025—OGM Kawana Waters Surf Club 10.00am for 10.30am start



4 September 2025—Coffee and Chat—Lunch at Cooroy RSL 11.00am for 11.30am



2 Oct 2025—OGM Maroochydore RSL Sub Branch HUB 10.00am for 10.30am



6 Nov 2025—Coffee and Chat—Wreath Laying with Picnic in the Park—Cotton Tree 10.00am



4 Dec 2025—OGM and Christmas Lunch Kawana Waters Surf Club 10.00am for 10.30am



SCESWA Management Committee Meeting Dates



20 March 2025



17 April 2025



15 May 2025



19 June 2025



17 July 2025



21 August 2025



18 September 2025



16 October 2025



20 Nov 2025



happy biRthday

BIRTHDAYS

March—Trudie Avery, Trish Campbell, Chris Clancy, Raylene Dries, Ingrid Hausman, Sandy Hoffschild, Lorelle Horan, Larraine Houlihan, Barbara Jeffreys, Judy Prewett, Elaine Retallick,

Melissa Roberts & Val Smith

April—Toni Lown, Jan Thorne & Bett Upson

May—Cindie Manzie, Dianne Pearce & Rhondda Poor



INTRODUCING NEW MEMBERS

Mary Jane Haynes



POPPY SERVICE

Remember to notify your local RSL Sub Branch if you would like to have a Poppy Service or alternatively ensure you advise your family of your wishes.



<u>Facebook - Combined Ex Service and Serving Women Australia</u>

The Combined Ex-Service and Serving Women Australia is a very informative site on Facebook for ex-servicewomen and is independently administered by exservice women. Ex service women from all over Australia have registered and make frequent posts providing interesting information, military photos and fun ditties.

To join, simply answer two questions relating to your service, and once the Administrator approves your request you will have unlimited access to other Combined Ex-Service Women Australia's members posts, photos and importantly all events that are coming up for numerous Associations throughout Australia.

Whilst this Facebook site is **not part of our Association**, the committee ensures that all events relating to the SCESWA are recorded on this site.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR 2024-25

Executive

President: Larraine Houlihan, Phone: 0408 126 710, Email:

president.sceswa@gmail.com

Vice President: Deirdre Elliott, Phone: 0408 222 592, Email:

deirdre_colin@bigpond.com

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Asst Secretary: Chris Birch, Phone 0403 905 023, Email: christinebirch52@gmail.com

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Events Co-ordinator: Deirdre Elliott, Phone: 0408 222 592, Email:

deirdre_colin@bigpond.com

Membership Officer: Chris Birch, Phone 0403 905 023, Email:

christinebirch52@gmail.com

Grants & Merchandise: Fran Sinclair, Phone: 0416 013 987, Email: fran@kandfspace.com

General Committee Members

Maggie Winduss Dot Kunde

Newsletter

Editor: Larraine Houlihan, Phone: 0408 126 710, Email: I.houlihan1@bigpond.com

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654, BUDDINA, Q 4575

Email: thornejl@hotmail.com

Members: Please note the email address for our Association.





NAVY WOMEN (QLD) Calendar of Events 2025

Calendar of Events 2025 - subject to changes

Date	Event	Notes
27 Feb	Service @ Jack Southbank	Honouring HMAS Voyager (II) Lost Crew
9 Feb	Navy Women Qld AGM & OGM Geebung RSL	Geebung RSL - First meeting for 2025
Feb	NAA(Q) State Council meeting	Delegates attend
End Feb	Navy Week	HMAS Moreton
27 Feb	Service @ Jack Southbank	RAN Navy Week
		Hosted by HMAS Moreton:
9 Mar	Navy Women Qld OGM Geebung RSL	Tiosted by Third Horoton.
14-16 Mar	WRANS-RAN National Reunion - Tasmania	
Mar	NAA State Conference –	Delegates attend – everyone invited
27 Mar	Service @ Jack Southbank	Doiogate attend overjoin invited
12 Apr	CESWA Tri-Service Luncheon Geebung RSL	Singing Competition
13 Apr	Navy Women Qld OGM Geebung RSL	Easter Bonnet
18 Apr	Good Friday	Happy Easter
25 Apr	ANZAC Day	Formal Uniform
20 Apr	0600 Service at St John's Church Northgate	T GITTAL GITTAL
	Corvettes Assoc Service Newstead	Ship Inn after March
	0930 Parade in Brisbane City	
May	Victory in Europe Service 08May1945	South-Eastern District RSL New Farm
18 May	Navy Women Qld OGM	3rd Sunday due to Mother's Day date
29 May	Service @ Jack Southbank	
5 Jun	Sunshine Coast Ex-Service and Serving Women's	Civilian dress with name tags
	Assoc Inc Luncheon Maroochydore	orman aroso mar namo tago
8 Jun	Navy Women Qld OGM Geebung RSL	
26 Jun	Service @ Jack Southbank	
5-6 Jul	Reserve Forces Day Wondai	
13 Jul	Naw Women Qld OGM Geebung RSL	
24 Jul	Service @ Jack Southbank	
Jul	CESWA Annual Church Service	Formal Uniform
26 Jul	Korean Veterans Day	
10 Aug	Navy Women Qld GM Geebung RSL	
Aug	Victory in Pacific Day 15Aug1945	South-Eastern District RSL New Farm
18 Aug	Vietnam Veterans Day	
28 Aug	Service @ Jack Southbank	
3 Sep	Battle of Australia Commemoration	
10 Sep	CESWA Commemoration to Service Women of Aust	Women's Memorial Pine Rivers Kallangu
то оср	CECTIA COMMENCIALION IO CONTICO VIGINEM OF AGSE	Formal Uniform
14 Sep	Navy Women Qld OGM Geebung RSL	T Office Children
13 Sep	NAA Golden Rivet 2025	CSI Ipswich - Hosted by NAA State
25 Sep	Service @ Jack Southbank	COLIDORICI - HOSICO DE TENNOCACE
13 Oct	Navy Women Qld GM Geebung RSL	Breast Cancer Fundraising WEAR PINK
October	Hervey Bay Birthday weekend	D. Sact Control : Grandiding Frank Filth
31 Oct	Service @ Jack Southbank	HMAS Sydney II -
1 Nov	Navy Women Annual Reunion Luncheon	Geebung RSL Club
9 Nov	Navy Women Old OGM	Coopering NOE Order
11 Nov	Remembrance Day Service	
20 Nov	NAA(Q) State Council meeting	1
27 Nov	Service @ Jack Southbank	
7 Dec		Venes Dorte First Constant
/ Dec	Navy Women Qld GM Geebung RSL	Xmas Party First Sunday

First Saturday of each month

Western Suburb Lunch

Gold Coast Brunch

Third Tuesday of each month Fourth Monday of each month Last Thursday of each month

Bribie Island Lunch Jack Memorial

Bribie Island RSL Social Cafe Ship Inn, South Bank

GOLD COAST BRUNCH -

Jan - Cafe 360 - 360 Marine Parade, Labrador

Feb - The Willow Tree, Shop T12/37 Eggersdorf Rd, Ormeau - Omeau Village Shopping Centre

March - South Sharks, Corner Olsen and, Musgrave Ave, Southport

April - La Vintage Boutique, 1 Kurilpa St, Worongary May - Cafe 7, 42 The Esplanade, Paradise Point

If you wore a Navy Uniform, you are welcome at these events.

BANKING DETAILS:

Name of the Account:

Sunshine Coast Ex-Service and Serving Women's Association Inc.

Institution:

Auswide Bank

BSB: 645 646

Account Number: 102736405

Cheque made payable to:

Sunshine Coast Ex-Service and Serving

Women's Association Inc.

Forward to:

The Treasurer

PO Box 654, BUDDINA Q 4575

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBS: \$15.00 per year

Membership payments are Due 31 December each year

If you wish to pay by Internet Banking, Remember to include payee reference: Please quote your initial and Surname/Subs: e.g. JSmith/subs Payments will be accepted at the Meeting or Coffee n Catchup

CHANGE OF ADDRESS DETAILS

We are having a few Birthday cards and letters returned "NOT AT THIS ADDRESS". If you have moved address or changed your email or phone number, please notify our Membership Officer, Chris Birch on 0403 905 023. This will allow your Association to continue to provide you with updated information throughout the year.

SCESWA MEMORABILIA

SCESWA has three different types of Badges available to our members. We have Magnetic or Pin name badges. Please see Jan Thorne to arrange. Cost: Pin \$14.50, Magnetic \$16.00

Cloth badges are available from our Merchandise table. Cost is \$6.50

We also now have SCESWA Baseball Caps, \$22.00. Car Stickers, \$5.00. Note Books, Bags and Coffee Mugs

They may be purchased at all meetings and C n C and luncheon events. Fran will be happy to serve you.

New pieces of Merchandising to come.

DEADLINE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER

Deadline for the next newsletter is 10 July 2025

Every effort will be made to use all contributions, but it may not be in the next issue.

Please send all articles, clear photos and letters to the Editor at the association address or email Larraine at l.houlihan1@bigpond.com. We look forward to members' input.

Disclaimer: All contributions are welcome. All care will be taken with material but no responsibility is assumed or accepted by the publisher or the SCESWA Inc.

