



**WRITE WAY**

**Archives Research Service**

*Specialising in research of Defence war records*

John Tilbrook, CSM, RFD  
Commissioner for Disclosure  
PO Box 100  
TIROSS HEAD  
NSW 2537

Ph (02) 4473 9390  
Fax (02) 4473 9552  
Mobile 017 925 458

## FACSIMILE

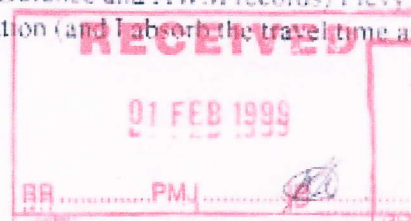
Classification	IN-CONFIDENCE	Message Reference Number	HIN1 98-138-1
Precedence	Routine	File Number	
<b>TO:</b> Facsimile Address	<b>Bob Richards,</b> Advocacy for Veterans'	<b>FROM:</b> Facsimile Originator	<b>John Tilbrook</b>
Facsimile Number	07 3372 9930	Facsimile Number	02 4473 9552
Telephone Number	0412 747 529	Telephone Number	02 4473 9390
<b>Subject Title</b> <b>ADVICE ON RESEARCH SERVICES FOR DVA CASES</b>			
File Reference		Date of Transmission	27 Jan 99
Total Pages (including FAX cover sheet)	8 Pages	Printed Name	Signature
		<b>JOHN TILBROOK</b>	

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for you Fax dated today. My work load is such I am a month or two behind Report wise as I currently have some 40 or so DVA requests from all state offices that I would normally have put your query aside until I found time. However, given the tremendous job you fellows do I thought I had better deal with your query promptly.

Yes, I am available to undertake research assignments. I used to do this as a member of the Army History Unit, but resource constraints has forced DVA and others to engage research consultants such as myself and COL David Chinn at the AWM (Ph: 02 6243 4359). I have a strong military history background, but in particular I have been closely associated with Vietnam records for some 10 years (see enclosed Profile), but that said I also deal with WW2, Korea, Malaya, Malaysia, Borneo, Cambodia, Somalia (across all services).

I am available to conduct research on behalf of any person or organisation, and in respect of Veterans' service I have acted on behalf of DVA (principally), individual war widows, Barristers, insurance companies and individual veterans. Although I am situated some 2 1/2 hours drive from Canberra (and Defence and AWM records) I levy a rate of \$30 per hour for research and report preparation (and I absorb the travel time and travel costs).



-2-

I do have a strong affinity with the ex service community, and often (given circumstances) I have conducted research and produced reports for a successful outcome for Veterans and war widows at no cost after they had been 'stone walled' by the system.

Please do not be offended by my explanation of my services as a Researcher as none is intended. My role as a Researcher (such as COL David Chinn etc) is to take a question or Contention and investigate an incident against official Operational records or unit war diaries etc. **In the event that there is no mention of an incident, then an informed comment is made as to the 'probability' of a particular claim.** I am able to do this from a variety of authoritative sources, through consultation with unit OCs, Pl Comds etc, official histories, unit war diaries, HQ 1 ATF OP LOG Sheets and general unit files (all held in the AWM Archives). The bottom line is that all findings made have to be objective, yes or no, and if 'possible', then informed opinion on 'probability' must be addressed. My experience is that DVA (all state offices) are more than happy to make a determination in favour of the Veteran if it can be reasonably substantiated. DVA is happy to accept my verified Reports whether or not I am acting for DVA or on behalf of the Veteran or War Widow etc. They just need the 'balanced' argument upon the table which permits the Delegate to make a determination (and move onto the next case).

I have been apprised of some difficulties between DVA case officers and a Veteran, and as with all facets of life, interpersonal difficulties can arise whereby blame can be apportioned to both 'camps'. In such circumstances an independent historical report by a military Researcher can break the nexus in providing objective findings (which are subject to appeal by either party).

My observation has been that DVA is extremely fair where claims from combatants are reasonable. The difficulties for the DVA case officer and the delegate increases (in substantiating Veterans' claims for PTSD etc) the further the Veteran is removed from the 'forward pit'. Riflemen, Splinter Team members, APC crews, Arty FO's and SIG Artys etc are much easier to rule upon than say, Cooks, clerks, drivers, stewards, workshop personnel etc. The biggest difficulty arises from the Veterans' themselves with their outlandish claims for 'Stressors' which are completely unfounded. I have 'hundreds' of stories in my files which would cast a shadow over any 'Boys Own Annual' story (and these all seem to originate from non-combatant's which can not be substantiated from official records, let alone plausible anecdotal stories). By way of example only I have attached a claim I have just received which, if believed by the DVA claims assessor, makes it hellish difficult for an infanteer to gain recognition for real combat-related 'Stressor' condition if he tells DVA the much 'duller' unvarnished truth, even though his story is true, and he was witness to death and wounding of enemy and fellow comrades in a personal life threatening situation. It is the increasing number of 'unsubstantiated' Contentions (such as the enclosed sample) that has forced DVA to examine some claims a little harder for all of the obvious reasons (probity of the system being the main concern).

It would certainly help both parties (ie. the Veteran and DVA) if the Veteran describes his Contentions accurately (without the embellishments of time). The outcome in respect of recognition of 'Stressors' will be the same, ie. he was involved on Contacts etc, there were KIA and WIA etc). The Advocacy for Veterans should encourage (if they do not already) to provide more precise information when submitting their individual claims for assessment and acceptance. To this end I have enclosed a suggested proforma which when completed by the Veteran would lead to more focussed research and much speedier finalisation of their claims. A separate proforma should be used for each Contention.

In summing up, I am happy to represent any party in researching and placing on the table the 'facts or probabilities' of a Veteran's service for whatever reason. My condition is that I tackle each case in chronological sequence of receipt of the request, unless there are very special circumstances (eg. such as in a recent DVA Brisbane case whereby the Veteran had developed severe alcoholic induced dementia and was placed in an institution whereby DVA did everything in it's power to urgently resolve the case in favour of his dependents)

In closing I would like to make the point that I am more than sympathetic to the plight of all Veterans, and like DVA, wherever possible - the benefit of doubt must go the way of the serviceman. In particular we should NOT lose sight of the predicament of the National servicemen during the Vietnam War, and this should be seized upon by Advocates as preparing their particular case as I really feel it should carry some weight in respect of any psychological problems they may be experiencing

- a. They were recruited against their WILL, and they generally did NOT volunteer
  - b. They were FORCED to join an big authoritarian organisation that they did not want to join
  - c. Soldiers were generally allocated to a Corps, unit or employment that they would NOT have chosen
  - d. They were SENT to Vietnam, following their indoctrinated sense of DUTY. They were not really volunteers (and not conscientious objectors), they just did as they were TOLD
  - e. They were MADE to serve in a Country (Vietnam) and in a climate that they did not want to be in
  - f. They were MADE to do things that they did not want to do.
-

-4-

- g. They were MADE to fight someone against whom they had no personal or political quarrel
- h. They were NOT given any form of 'Post Traumatic Stress' counselling on their return to Australia (and certainly not after major Contacts where death and injury in circumstances of personal peril were involved, and having held their mates in their arms when they died awaiting a 'DUSTOFF', and in many instances were flown home and discharged from the Army within days of fighting in the field in Vietnam.
- i. They were POORLY treated by previous friends, work mates, the general public, their family (and in some instances the RSL, who did not recognise (at the time) Vietnam as a war worthy of RSL membership). *By way of example: LT Colleen Thurgar, a theatre sister with 8 F D AMBI in 1966-67, and a Vietnam veteran in her own right who had assisted in operating on a myriad of gruesome battle casualties and 'saved' the lives of many soldiers, who, when she was RTA, and was posted to Singleton Army Hospital, she was steadfastly REFUSED entry to the Scene RSL (in NSW) on ANZAC Day, "as the Club was for Returned ServiceMEN only". Colleen Thurgar, AM was the driving force behind the magnificent Vietnam Memorial in Canberra, and until recently was the President of the Canberra Branch of the RSL.*
- j. NO acknowledgment when they returned home as being men who had served their country valiantly, often at great personal risk in order to preserve (as was preached to the soldiers) the continuing 'democracy and sovereignty' of Australia.
- k. They were NOT treated by DVA in the same manner as the Veterans' of the previous wars, probably because of the general ignorance existing at that time regarding the extent of their service (and still remaining today as many younger DVA staff members lack the in depth knowledge of the Vietnam conflict)

I have other business interests that keep me tied up until 2 PM each day, and I will be away in Melbourne for most of next week (for AAT appearances)

Against the above background I trust that I have presented myself in a 'neutral' light!

Yours  
 Steve DTL/brock  
 ...