

After The War



Lance Corporal Kevin Sloan, returns home from South Vietnam in 1971 where he served with 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (7RAR). He hugs his sister Anne, 15 (left), and girlfriend Maryann Lee, 19, of Mount Isa, Qld. Waiting their turn to greet Kevin are Mary, 19, Brian, 16, and Mrs Sloan.

AWM PEA/71/0099/EC

I don't seem to have many friends since I came home.

If you weren't there then you can't understand.

A quotation on the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What has happened to Australian veterans since the war?
- What has been the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia?

Teaching Suggestions

1 Background information

Focus of the topic

This topic looks at two long-term effects of the Vietnam War on Australia — the impact on the veterans and the coming of Vietnamese refugee immigrants.

Escape

After the fall of Saigon in 1975 those who had supported and worked with the Australians and other allies in Vietnam were now in trouble. Many were sent to 're-education' camps and were discriminated against. Some were killed, others were exiled.

Many tried to escape by sea. They paid people, boarded boats with virtually no possessions and set to sea in unseaworthy craft. They were attacked by pirates — robbery, rape and murder were common.

Refugee camps

Refugees who did survive had to stay in primitive camps in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Indonesia.

The plight of the boat people now became an international humanitarian crisis. Several countries agreed to resettle as many as possible of the refugees, and agreed to quotas — the United States of America (823 000), Australia and Canada (137 000 each), France (96 000), and Germany and the United Kingdom (19 000 each).

The myth of 'boat people'

Some came directly to Australia by boat. We refer now to the 'boat people' refugees from Vietnam — in fact only a few boatloads arrived directly, most were selected from the refugee camps and flown to Australia. Before 1975 there were approximately 700 Vietnam-born people in Australia. Fifty-six boats from Vietnam containing a total of about 2100 people reached Australia directly, mostly at Darwin. The first arrived in April 1976 and the last in August 1981. Most of the Vietnamese refugee resettlement between 1975 and 1985 was by air from the refugee camps in Asia, and was then followed by family reunion.

By 1981, 43 400 Vietnamese had been resettled in Australia. By 1991 there were 124 800 Vietnam-born in Australia and in the 2001 census, 154 000 people declared themselves as Vietnam-born.

Vietnam veterans

What of the Vietnam veterans?

As with all wars, many, perhaps a majority of veterans, were able to settle back into civilian life.

However, some have suffered. A 2006 study of the mortality (death) and morbidity (illness) rates among veterans has shown that there are definite statistical connections between Vietnam service and increased health problems in veterans as a group.

PTSD

Many Vietnam veterans have suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) — and this has also involved hardship for their families.

Agent Orange

More controversially, many Vietnam veterans believed that they were suffering from illness caused by Agent Orange — a cocktail of dioxin-based chemicals that are known to cause some cancers, and suspected of causing more illnesses, including some possible genetic problems.

The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (VVAA) took up their cause and succeeded in having a Royal Commission investigate the claim. In 1984 the Royal Commission reported that there was no evidence to show that Vietnam veterans were suffering more illness and deformities caused by Agent Orange than anyone else in the community. There were terrible individual stories of harm and apparent genetic disorders passed on to children, but these were no more statistically common than among others. The VVAA did not accept this finding and still challenges it as biased and inaccurate.

Veterans now receive medical or other support from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) for PTSD, most cancers and other illnesses — whether they can be shown to be caused by Agent Orange or not.

Support from DVA and ex-service organisations

As with all wars, the nation provides support to veterans for their war-related problems through a government agency – the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Many veterans also get great support and comradeship from their own organisations, which include the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia and the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia, among others.

2 Key learning outcomes

By the end of this topic students will be better able to:

- Know about a range of health issues for Australian veterans of the Vietnam War
- Be aware of and empathise with the problems facing those veterans whose health has suffered as a result of the war
- Appreciate the nature of Vietnamese migration to Australia after the war

3 Suggested classroom approaches

ACTIVITY 1

This activity looks at a range of key statements about the current situation with the health and care of Australia's Vietnam War veterans. The aim is to provide a simple explanation of some key points so that students will be able to understand the occasional news item and controversy that are reported in the media.

ACTIVITY 2

This provides a basic outline of some of the experiences faced by Vietnamese refugees coming to Australia and provides a way of exploring further their experiences since their arrival. It is suggested that teachers might invite Vietnamese people to talk to students in the classroom about their experiences, or that students might interview Vietnamese 'veterans', if that is appropriate. One activity could be for students to make their own small suitcase (like Cuc Lam's) and have to pack it for their refugee 'escape'.

4 Interactive CD-ROM and DVD resources



Interactives on the *Australia and the Vietnam War* CD-ROM that are appropriate learning tasks for this unit are:

- *Curate an Exhibition* of the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia. (Secondary)

What is the state of the health of Australia's Vietnam War veterans?

This topic is different to all the others in this resource.

It does not ask you to use evidence to develop your own answers to certain questions. Instead, it seeks to provide you with a way of understanding the current situation with the health of Vietnam veterans and to have a sufficient understanding to be able to follow items that appear in the news media.

A quotation on the wall of the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial in Canberra says:

If you weren't there then you can't understand.

That may be true. But there were many people who were there who can understand, who do understand and who are helping those who are suffering as a result of their service.

STATEMENT 1

Of the nearly 60 000 military personnel, men and women, who served in Vietnam 49 500 were alive at June 2005.

Many Vietnam veterans are living normal, healthy, productive lives, and being good family members and citizens.

Vietnam veterans overall have a 6% lower mortality [death] rate than the Australian male population.

About half of all Vietnam veterans are receiving some form of government medical or other support, and about half are totally independent of any form of government support.

Comments / Issues

1 The men selected for military service underwent many medical tests. They passed, however, many of their peers failed. Would you expect that this group should have lower mortality (death) and morbidity (illness) rates than their non-military peers? Discuss this idea.

The following statements and the comments about the issues associated with some of those comments will help you to know what is happening to Vietnam veterans in your community. The statements will also help you to be better informed when you speak to or interview Vietnam veterans.

The statistics that follow about veterans' health and mortality rates are taken from the *Australian Vietnam Veterans Mortality and Cancer Incidence Studies*, Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006.

(http://www.dva.gov.au/media/publicat/2006/vietnam_health_studies/Vietnam_Health_%20Study-Executive_Summary.pdf)

STATEMENT 2

Some veterans were physically injured at the time. They may have been permanent, or temporary but causing problems again now.

These men and women are given all necessary medical and hospital care through the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Comments / Issues

2 Many veterans speak highly of the quality of the medical and hospital care that they receive from the nation through the medical and health benefits system administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Why do you think the nation accepts a special obligation of care for its war veterans?

STATEMENT 3

Some veterans were psychologically damaged by the war. This damage may not have shown itself immediately, indeed it may not have appeared for many years; but it is real, and it is related to the person's war experience. This is often called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Government accepts responsibility for the care and treatment of all veterans suffering PTSD.

Comments / Issues

The Department of Veterans' Affairs defines military conflict trauma in this way:

For military personnel a trauma may relate directly to combat or peacekeeping duties or being in a war or peacekeeping zone. Even though military people are trained for the intensity of these duties, the training may not prepare people for the emotional impact of events.

Traumatic events may overwhelm a person immediately. In some cases, however, a person may handle the situation at the time, but feelings about the event can hit months or years later. Sometimes, these feelings occur again and again over time.

They do not always affect everyone in the same way. An event which traumatises one person, can be less significant for another and have no long term effects. Individual personalities and the circumstances surrounding the event affect response. The meaning of these experiences can be different for each individual. A person's other life experiences can contribute to how people handle traumatic events.

Traumatic reactions to combat have been documented since the ancient Greeks. During World War I they were called 'shell shock'. In World War II some common terms included 'combat neurosis' or 'combat fatigue'.

DVA Fact Sheet: PTSD General Information

- 3** Look back at the evidence in Topic 3 of the resource and discuss any evidence you find there of traumatic events that might have led to PTSD in some veterans in later life.

Here is a table showing the symptoms and how these symptoms might appear in a veteran's life:

Recurring memories of the traumatic event which you can't seem to get out of your mind.	INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS
Recurring dreams of the trauma.	BAD DREAMS, NIGHTMARES
Feeling that the traumatic event was happening again (hallucinations, flashbacks).	RELIVING THE TRAUMA
Things or events act as triggers which remind you or resemble your traumatic event.	FLASHBACKS
These triggers or reminders make you feel nervous tense, generate panic attacks.	PANIC ATTACKS
Purposely avoiding thoughts, feelings or conversations about trauma.	WITHDRAWN
Deliberately avoiding activities, places and situations about the trauma.	PHOBIAS
When trying to recall the traumatic event you are unable to recall or remember certain things or important aspects that had happened.	MEMORY LOSS
Losing interest in people, things and activities (family, friends and hobbies) which were important to you prior to the traumatic event.	LACK OF MOTIVATION
Feeling more emotionally estranged, separated or feeling cut off from others.	ALIENATION
Feeling a markedly reduced ability to feel emotions, especially those associated with intimacy, tenderness and sexuality.	LACKING EMOTIONS
Difficulty falling or staying asleep.	POOR SLEEP
Experiencing irritability or outbursts of anger.	RAGE
Difficulty concentrating on tasks or completing tasks.	POOR CONCENTRATION
Feeling overtly alert or watchful when you don't need to be.	EVER WATCHFUL
Having strong startle reactions.	EDGY
Worrying about coping with everyday situations.	LACK OF CONFIDENCE
Difficulty keeping a regular job.	WORK DIFFICULTIES

Some veterans are critical of the process for being accepted by the Department of Veterans' Affairs as suffering PTSD.

Normie Rowe was a high-profile rock star when he was conscripted in 1968. He recently found himself suffering from PTSD. Look at this account given on ABC TV's *7.30 Report*:

Veteran friends grabbed me and said 'We know what's happening.' And they took me to my doctor and got a referral and put me into a psychiatric hospital, and it took me 15 weeks in that hospital to get a handle on what was going on in my head ... I have post traumatic stress disorder. It's going to be there for the rest of my life. The best I can hope for is some strategies to deal with it.

NORMIE ROWE

After his diagnosis of PTSD, Normie Rowe says the process of approving his claim for entitlements was dragged out for 18 months by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

LISA WHITEHEAD

My personal experience is that I was told, because I'm in the public eye, I can't possibly have post traumatic stress disorder. Well, that proved to me that this man who was — whose job it was to look after ... my case, didn't have any idea about what post traumatic stress disorder was. It's like their job is to actually put a wall up and say 'Look, whatever you say, it's a rort.'

NORMIE ROWE

In many cases, I have to really fight it all the way, and that means going through the appeal system, which is very stressful for veterans, and the tragic thing about the whole thing is that, in the end, the veterans usually win the argument.

TIM McCOMBE, PRESIDENT,
VIETNAM VETERANS FEDERATION



AMM EKT/69/0001/VN

7.30 Report, 5 September 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2006/s1733861.htm>

- 4** Do you think it reasonable for a government department to question veterans in order to establish some connection between their health and a war-related cause? Explain your views.

You can find more information about PTSD at:
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/ptsd.html>
http://www.healthminister.gov.au/topics/Post_Traumatic_Stress

STATEMENT 4

Vietnam veterans have a 15% higher overall cancer rate than the general Australian population. With some individual forms of cancer they have a greater rate, but with others they have a lower rate than the general population.

Comments / Issues

- 5** The veterans had higher standards of health when they were younger than the general population. Does this suggest that their Vietnam service must have contributed to the higher rate of some medical problems now? Can you think of any other reasons that might explain this result? (For example, from pre- or post-service activities?)

STATEMENT 5

The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia claims that many illnesses, including many of those described as PTSD, are in fact caused by toxic dioxins in chemicals sprayed to defoliate areas of Vietnam. A Royal Commission report in 1984 did not find a connection between Agent Orange and cancers. The Department of Veterans' Affairs now accepts that studies have established a connection with some cancers, but not all. However, they provide medical and hospital support for veterans with any cancers.

Comments / Issues

- 6** The issue of Agent Orange is a complex and controversial one.

Wikipedia describes Agent Orange in this way:

Agent Orange was the nickname given to a powerful herbicide and defoliant used by the US military in its Herbicidal Warfare program during the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was used from 1961 to 1971, and was by far the most used of the so-called "rainbow herbicides" used during the program. Agent Orange (as well as Agents Purple, Pink, Blue, White, and Green) contained dioxins which are known to have caused harm to the health of those exposed during the Vietnam War. Studies of populations highly exposed to dioxin indicate increased risk of various types of cancer and genetic mistakes; the effect of long term low level exposure has not been established. Since the 1980s, several lawsuits have been filed against the companies who produced Agent Orange, among them being Dow Chemical and Monsanto. US veterans obtained \$180 million in compensation in 1984, while Australian, Canadian and New Zealand veterans also obtained compensation in an out-of-court settlement the same year.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agent_Orange

The areas where Australians served were undoubtedly sprayed with Agent Orange.

Vietnam. 1968. In-flight view of a spray boom and twin M60 general purpose machine gun (GPMG) mount fitted to a UH-1B helicopter of No 9 Squadron RAAF. In about August 1968 and January 1969, Captain John Cecil Rhodes, 1st Field Hygiene Company, Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC), conducted crop destruction and defoliation operations on the Nui Dat perimeter and in the Thua Tic area, where a mixture of Agent Orange, Agent Blue and water were sprayed over corn and maize crops. The missions were carried out with RAAF helicopters with four-man crews.



AAMC P01733.006

- 7** Cancers may take years to develop. Scientific studies are being carried out all the time and new connections are being made between dioxins and health problems. There is no doubt that most Australians in Vietnam would have had contact with Agent Orange. Do you think that the policy of the Department of Veterans' Affairs to accept all cancer claims, but not necessarily to agree that they are caused by Agent Orange, is a fair and appropriate one? Explain your views.

More information about these and other issues and support services for Vietnam veterans and their families is available at:

Department of Veterans' Affairs
<http://www.dva.gov.au>

Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia
<http://www.vvaa.org.au>

STATEMENT 6

National servicemen who served in Vietnam have a 19% lower death rate than the general community.

However, they have a 23% higher death rate than their national serviceman peers who did not go to Vietnam.

The main causes of death that have caused this higher death rate among one group of national servicemen over the other are alcoholic liver disease, lung and pancreatic cancer, motor vehicle crashes and suicide.

Comments / Issues

- 8** A major cause of some of the diseases above are alcohol and tobacco. Why might alcohol and tobacco have been a large part of many soldiers' lives in Vietnam?
- 9** The issues above have all been about the veterans. Who else would have been greatly affected by these situations?

What has been the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia?

Imagine that a terrible disaster has struck your area – it may be war, flood, drought, fire, or some other catastrophe.

You have to leave your home. There is just no choice.

You can only carry five things with you. You cannot rely on anyone else because you are aware that you may be separated from your family – perhaps for a long time, perhaps even forever!

I Look at this list of 21 possible items to take. You can choose no more than five. Make your choice and explain why you chose those five and why you did not choose the remaining 16. Make your choices now and tick those you choose. Good luck!

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> Carving knife |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket | <input type="checkbox"/> Your birth and school certificates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Favourite toy | <input type="checkbox"/> Your favourite leather jacket |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pet dog | <input type="checkbox"/> Letters from your dead brother |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Passport | <input type="checkbox"/> Credit card |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra food | <input type="checkbox"/> Title deed to a house that you own |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cash | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera and film |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photograph album | <input type="checkbox"/> Your grandfather's watch, handed down as an heirloom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Favourite CD | <input type="checkbox"/> The expensive book you borrowed from a friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> iPod | <input type="checkbox"/> The nearly finished novel you have been writing for the last 10 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer | |



In 1975, when the North Vietnamese Army took Saigon and won the war, many Vietnamese had to become refugees. Many fled straight away; others had to wait many years before they could escape.

Of course, they did not have many of the objects above to choose from; but the principle was the

same: when you can only take the objects that you can carry, what do you choose? And then how do you create a new life in another country?

The following information will help you think about how these issues affected Vietnamese who came to Australia.

Who came to Australia?

SOURCE I An overview

Before 1975 there were about 1000 Vietnamese in Australia.

The first group arrived in 1975–1976 — 539 people, mainly elite Vietnamese: doctors, lawyers, academics and diplomats, as well as some ethnic Chinese businessmen.

Some refugees were taken from various refugee camps between 1976 and 1978.

Between 1978 and 1980 more Vietnamese arrived, mostly ethnic Chinese, after the closure of private businesses in Vietnam in 1978 and the outbreak of conflict between Vietnam and China in 1979.

A final group, in 1989–1991, were economic refugees — mainly small traders, rural and urban workers and some unemployed.

Most were brought to Australia from refugee camps. A few made it here directly by boat.

Since the mid-1990s Vietnamese migration has mostly been for the reunion of families.

By 1981, 43 400 Vietnamese had been resettled in Australia. By 1991 there were 124 800 Vietnam-born in Australia and in the 2001 census, 154 000 people declared themselves as Vietnam-born.

Look at the following sources and answer the questions associated with each.

SOURCE 2 Coming to Australia

I came from a middle class Catholic family in Vietnam. My parents were former officers of the South Vietnamese army and my father was active in the anti-communist movement. My parents were made refugees twice: the first time fleeing from North Vietnam to South Vietnam when communists took government in 1954; the second was when we left Vietnam bound for Australia following the fall of South Vietnam to the Viet Cong. While many people probably benefited from the new regime, my parents were not one of them. They witnessed the arbitrary arrests, torture, executions and persecution for certain classes of people considered bourgeoisie or traitors by the communists. They witnessed the devastation of terrorism and civil war.

To flee one's country is not an easy choice to make. You're leaving behind your homes, your relatives and friends, your culture, your possessions, your memories, your childhood. Fleeing a country on

a boat is also a dangerous affair. People speak of the savagery of being looted, raped and killed by pirates at sea. People talk about the unspeakable horrors of resorting to cannibalism of the dead to regain enough strength to fix the boat's engine. Many of us had knowledge of this so why did we take the risk?

We seek freedom because the government we were escaping did not respect our freedom. You will find this is a common story among refugees.

We were the relatively lucky boatpeople who did not encounter pirates, whose boat was not blown off course by storms, and who were rescued just in time. However, the journey was no less perilous. One infant, who would be my age today, died during the journey. On the third day our water supply was contaminated. We were all thirsty and frightened to the point where we could have given up all together. But we took the gamble because we believed the risk at sea was still better than staying in communist Vietnam.

Minh Nguyen, Extract from a talk given to high school students at St Scholastica College, Glebe, Sydney, 8 March 2004, http://www.acmica.org/pub_nguyen-refugees.html

- 1 How typical or untypical of Vietnamese refugees to Australia was Minh Nguyen?
- 2 Why did her family risk everything to escape?

How is the post-war Vietnamese migration represented in Australia today?

Here are two museum displays of this aspect of modern Australian history. Look at them and answer the questions that follow.

SOURCE 3 Representation of Vietnamese migration in Australian museums

A suitcase, the only luggage brought by refugee Cuc Lam to Australia from a refugee camp in Malaysia. Immigration Museum, Melbourne



- 3 How typical or untypical was their refugee journey?
- 4 Why do you think Australia took such refugees?

Display about the refugee boat Hong Hai National Museum of Australia, Canberra





Northern Territory Museum, Darwin

- 5 What does each display show?
- 6 What aspects of the story of Vietnamese migration to Australia after the Vietnam War are being stressed through these displays?
- 7 Why are the elements on display seen as significant symbols of the story?
- 8 Do you think these displays are representing the story effectively? Explain your reasons.
- 9 Imagine that you have been asked to add another object to a museum display to tell a missing part of the story. What would you choose, and why?

You should try to have some Vietnamese people speak to your class about their refugee experience. Or you may know some people whom you could interview.



A suitcase, the only luggage brought by refugee Cuc Lam to Australia from a refugee camp in Malaysia. Immigration Museum, Melbourne



 You can explore this more if you *Curate an Exhibition* of the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia.