JOHN HAINES

J.R In the brief time available to us, could you just tell me what the Association's role is at the moment?

J.H Ah, the association's role, well we've got a number of aims and objectives, but most, but the, the objectives we've set ourself revolve around welfare, for Vietnam veterans. We're, irrespective of what people say we're not political, although we have been known to use politicians of all parties, to gain better understanding of Vietnam veterans or the problems associated with service in Vietnam. So we're nonpolitical. We see our role in the broad terms as improving the conditions or the rehabilitation of Vietnam veterans, whether that's through repatriation, or through extra training, or through the counseling service. In short term we do visits to hospitals, jails, I've got two that I'm going to see on Friday. We visit them at home, the guys that can't get out, they're bedridden or those type of things. We have meetings with members in the country, we try and get away to our sub—branches or to groups that are meeting in, some of the areas we don't have sub branches, so we can explain to the Vietnam veterans what they can expect and what is expected of them. And you'll see with all those things that they're all centred around as I say welfare, whether it be helping some veteran in jail to receive some compensation for some disability that he had overseas or helping him in some cases to adjust to jail life, because with a lot of the prisoners we have for instance, they are in jail, we believe because of some of the problems that pertain to their service in Vietnam. In the hospitals, well we're not into the medical side of it, we're there mainly to sit and have a talk to them, understand their problems if they've got to put a report in or a submission or if they're making an application for a disability pension, we like to help them there. We go down and see them, particularly the guys from the country who have no visitors, or it's hard for visitors to get down, we go down and see them and take anything down they require, writing paper, pencil you know toothpaste and things like that. It probably sounds pretty minor to some people but we got to remember a lot of these guys, most of the guys that go in there, go in all of a sudden, it's not a matter of picking up a bag that's been packed for say 6 weeks knowing they're going to have say a nervous breakdown, so they end up in there with just a pair of repat pyjamas which are pretty cold in the winter and you know, we go down and see them and sit and talk to them and give them reading material or whatever they require.

But mainly that's it. The other one of course that my attention's drawn to is the fact that I'm trying to at present improve the participation by Vietnam veterans in other areas that have been lost to us in the past. We were instrumental in

the Anzac Day 1987, involvement by Vietnam veterans being such a huge success. We're the major group, or spokesgroup, for Vietnam veterans or we like to believe we are, the R.S.L probably say they are, but we have more Vietnam veterans in our association who don't belong to the R.S.L. than veterans in the association who do belong, so you may find that a lot of our veterans in our association don't belong to R.S.L.s, but their veterans belong to both groups. And we usually see that as being a problem for us because we can't compete with the big clubs, they go there at the clubs for the social part of it.

J.R And the pokies.

J.H And the pokies, yeah those things and the beer and the other sports activities, but to our association they look towards us because we're more into the welfare repatriation, social welfare that type of thing.

So we've been trying to encourage a greater understanding between the R.S.L. and the Vietnam Veterans Association. Now in that of course we don't, the problems between the two associations usually boil from the hierarchy, and I'm probably just as much to blame as anyone else, but the actual members of the association and the R.S.L. sub branch members, they're on a pretty even plane. I mean the problems they had in the main when they first came home were the same problems we're having. Although they're the same problems in some areas they're different. So we, I've been trying to get that on board. The other thing of course is that we were instrumental in pushing the claims of Vietnam veterans in the class action in the U.S. We have in actual fact two delegates from our association on the Board of Management, or Trust, that they have set up in Sydney to distribute the funds that we gained from the U.S. courts. And there are two members from our association, two from the R.S.L, one from Repat and one from ? The Chair person is an independent Justice, or Minister of the sorry, Judge of the Court. And we like to believe that the members that we have are looked upon as being the main contributors of the, how can you say, of the requests or the problems, the assessment of the problems that Vietnam veterans have.

J.R At what stage is that at? That Trust fund, and the distribution of funds?

J.H Early in April [1988] they had a seminar in Sydney to *discuss* a distribution plan that is being put forward or been accepted by the Judge, the U.S Judge. And of course the problems with that, the problems with the Trust is that there were many many appeals went into the U.S. Court of Appeal, and that court has now dismissed the appeals, and the Judge is looking at our distribution plan. And one of the main criterias that he said is that the distribution plan must be administered by as many Vietnam veterans as possible, it's Vietnam veterans for Vietnam veterans, so we don't have a lot of other people

who don't know the problems that veterans were going through, and then having to decide on, you know whether they receive funding or expenses or repayment of expenses or treatment. And I mean that's the policy we set too, so we're happy with that because it's in keeping with what we required in the first instance.

J.R One other thing I'm interested in is, have you noticed any change in the sort of attitude of veterans and particularly since the Welcome Home March, do you think that has had a sort of long-lasting impact... I mean it was very successful wasn't it [Yeah] I think considered by people as very successful.

J.H Successful in some ways, it's like, I think it's like treatment, medical treatment. You, what you may give one person may not necessarily be the right medicine to give another person. We co—operated with the Welcome Home Parade, in actual fact the first meeting, inaugural meeting was held in our hall out the back. And we were one of the first groups that submitted delegates to that and of course then it grew from there. So the mere fact that it grew from say 8 or 9 people to I think it was 28 or 32 people on the committee at one stage of Vietnam veterans, it did something for Vietnam veterans, it made a lot of them get off their bum and come out and do something. And of course then we went onto the participation by Vietnam veterans in the march, which, to a lot of veterans that was great.

But of course I personally object to some of the comments that were made by some people who would have thought that, the comments made by some people who said that there were no problems now with Vietnam veterans because of the march. And I mean that's utterly ridiculous, anyone that would suggest, as I said in our magazine, a stroll down George Street is going to cure some of the medical problems or psychiatric problems our veterans have got, I just couldn't believe anyone could make that statement. Now it's been acknowledged that the counseling service of course received a number of new clients, and the return of some old clients since the march, but I'm led to believe now that it's plateaued off or leveled off again. So whilst it was good for some veterans, and their families, it hasn't been good for others, whilst we've still got guys who have problems, we've still got guys who are still in hospital. We are still insisting that Ward 34 for instance be opened up, or reopened up, at Concord Repat, now..

J.R What is Ward 34?

J.H Ward 34 was a psychiatric ward.

J.R Was it specifically for Vietnam people?

J.H .... No, no for anyone. And of course when that first closed down which was closed down I think the Monday after Anzac Day

'87, we were the first ones to jump to the, to the defence of the nursing staff in particular because they're all qualified people in that area, and who understand the problems associated with being a Vietnam veteran. Now that's only us, I'm sure other people did the same thing. But we were very quick to shoot off 'a. letter and we were told that of course when the appropriate nursing staff came back on line that they would reopen Ward 34 which they haven't done at present.

J.R So where are the psychiatric patients?

J.H Ward 24. But of course the change theme„ *is* they haven't, they're under a different schedule. To go to ward 24 you're in with other patients, and you're not deemed to be as bad a case as if you were to go to 34, the next stage from 34 is to go to Rozelle in one of the, box down there. Now there's a big gap between someone who would go, see under the old schedule, the old scaling, to ward 34 as what they would to one of the Rozelle wards. And where are those guys going if they're, they were supposed to go to 34 and they go to 24, they shouldn't be there, because they're too severe a case. But if they're to ward, if they're going to the Rozelle wards, they shouldn't be there because they're not bad enough to go there. So we believe that ward 34 should be opened. Now we were one of the first ones that insisted on that reopening, I might add whereas other people jumped around and said well, you know it's been a great success let's have the Welcome Home Parade, we still haven't had the opening of ward 34. I would personally see that as a, a more major concern than having the march, but then I might be in the minority, people might turn around and say, no it's better to have a march with 20,000 than look after the ... say 6...

J.R Better to have both.

J.H Well I suppose so, yeah.

J.R Do you have a view overall of how Vietnam veterans cope, if somebody said to you, "how do Vietnam veterans cope with being veterans?"

J.H (Pause) An overall view. Mmmm. I think it's pretty hard because we still have veterans, Vietnam veterans who will not acknowledge openly that they're Vietnam veterans. So we're losing that, we're losing that battle because the longer it goes, the less chance that they're going to be susceptible to treatment or they're going to be helped with treatment.

J.R Why do you think they are like that, do you think a lot of people have suffered sort of accusations and ill treatment?

J.H Oh there's no doubt, no doubt. I, just seeing some of the people that come through and I'm not, I'm not... personally...my view, it's what people tell me when they come through the door. And I probably see more Vietnam veterans. Well I'll give you an instance, the seminars that they hold through the D.V.A.

I've had a talk to some of the people who come down for those,, and some of the information they give them is fantastic, other it's just old hat, you wouldn't worry about it, Now you get some guy that comes from an R.S.L up in the country, he would deal with a cancer case, say once a year, 6 months, now we've got 7 cancer cases on line that are going to appeal, members of our association that are going to appeal. I couldn't tell you how many guys we've got suffering from cancer that belong to our association. I couldn't tell you how many have got psychiatric problems. Now I don't mean someone that's raving mad, I mean guys that are having problems, and if it happens to be a psychological problem that caused his marital, or marriage to break down, I would see that as being a psychiatric problem, not a marriage break down, right? [Right] So, I talk only from the people that come through here. Now it would appear that we have three phases, one the build up to go over to Vietnam. And I might add when I went away personally, up to the day I left, no one was telling me that I was going to Vietnam, it was an Asian country. I mean I don't know whether that was to put the fear of Christ into us or whether to, because they thought we were thick and we shouldn't know. Then of course you've got your period of time that you served overseas and to, it depends on what you did, some guys went through a horrific time with a lot of the things that happened, others didn't. Others probably suffer some problems by the fact that they were doing a job that they felt was not up to what other people expected of them to do over there.

J.R The sort of pogos who...

J.H Well they call them pogos, I hate that word, I mean the word they used to use when I went there on my first tour was a "swinger and a clanger", if you'd served 6 months and you got 2 medals you were a clanger, if you'd served there one you got a swinger. Now I thought that was terrible. It degraded people who did a job that other people would not have been, their job, they would not have been able to do, if it wasn't for all of us there as a team. And I point that out, in actual fact, on our membership application we do not ask for the ranks of any serviceman that served overseas and we don't ask for any decorations, we don't care what they did or what they got, the fact is that they served in-country and whether they served there for one day or one year, they could still suffer from problems.

J.R Is there any sort of feeling amongst members though that, say, the riflemen are a bit more, got a bit more status sort of than the...

J.H Grunts always think they are better than anyone else, but no, no, I don't think so. I, I take, at our committee meetings here I take the mickey out of myself by the mere fact that I was a military policeman, and I mean we all know that they, everybody loves military policemen, but I might add that one other committee member is a military policeman, but no I don't

think so, I think that, I think probably when they get to a smoko or a reunion or they're having a bit of a talk amongst their mates, things may be said, but in the main, they all agree that no matter what job you did, everyone else depended on you. I mean there's no, there was no line to say that's where the good guys are, the bad guys are, you could be up in Nui Dat and some guy could get hurt down in Vung Tau, it's happened on occasions. You can be doing the run from Vung Tau Nui Dat to Saigon twenty times, and then one time a bridge go, or whatever. You could be helping in some school area away from operations and still be hurt. So I don't think, no I don't think that comes into it in the main.

J.R The sort of stress levels to you don't seem to be related specifically to combat...

J.H The job they did...

J.R ..the amount of combat or..

J.H Well I'd say, I'd say there'd be a different type of stress situation, I mean to be trained to do something and then go away and not be able to perform your job, or be called upon to perform the job that you were going to do to the best of your ability must be a strain. If of course you, the veteran runs a, he could run into trouble because if he goes over there and, if he said he performed the job that he was trained to do and that is search out the enemy and destroy the enemy, he runs the risk of being called a killer or a murderer when he comes home, have you got any blood on your hands? If he didn't do the job properly, why should we send him over, I mean, my personal view is we did the job properly, the people were the ones who couldn't stand the war any more, they're the ones that brought us home, not because, we didn't lose the war, they decided it was time, that they'd seen enough and we should come home. And it was a darn good army that went away, the guys that went away had a lot of service, a lot of time up, you know? And, down to the national serviceman, that may have been called up and be asked to go away 6 months after getting into the army, he performed really well, better than most other nationalities could do, much better, so I don't think, there's always the joke between the grunt and the others, there's always the joke between nasho and reg. You'll always have those things, and to be honest with you in a lot of cases it was really good, it was a bit of fun. I find it pretty amusing on occasions when I was told that the only reason I was in the army was because I was too dumb to get another job. I mean I didn't see the nasty in that, I saw, I saw it as being some of the banter that goes on between soldiers. And the Australian serviceman is renowned for having a really strange sense of humour, I mean to get into some of the situations that they get into and then laugh about it, you'd have to think that there was something wrong with them.

But of course after their service overseas they then came home and, to a lot of veterans I would have thought, I would think

from what they tell me that was the most tragic because they ...

J.R And is that in your mind what is responsible for them having problems now, not so much the actual time in the army but the readjustment or the lack of readjustment....

J.H (talking together) ... time when they came home. Yeah, I think that's got a lot to do with it in a lot of ways. It might have been the attitude of their family and friends, it might have been the way that they were scurried home, and dismissed. It might have been the, I mean when we first came home and the army had the majority of veterans in their ranks, would not be as harsh as what it did when it got further down the line and the veterans started leaving) and more guys come in and they were in the minority. So much so now that you've got units that do not have Vietnam veterans, yet you have members in the army who have long service records. So you've got some guy who's been in the army 15 years but didn't go to Vietnam. Yet you've got other guys who've only served in the army 2 years, but went to Vietnam for a year. So I could see a lot of problems now they're so serving members. I could see a lot of problems with people adjusting to civilian life when they got out of the army because of the, well I suppose the adjustment is to adjust to civilian life once again, adjust to the comments made by people, which were pretty nasty at times, I mean...

J.R Yes, I'm sort of curious about that because my memory of the time was that, although there was an anti war movement, that most people, I mean the government got back in again during the course of the Vietnam war [Yeah] I mean it wasn't that unpopular [No] with the sort of broad population.

J.H See in 1966, 67% of the people agreed to our participation in Vietnam. Now we then, everybody blames Tet, they said that Tet the attack in Tet, what they call the Tet offensive, brought to the attention of the various governments, the inability of the army in the main to hold the V.C, and that's wrong. In certain areas the V.0 or the North Vietnamese held areas for 2 or 3 days, for instance in Baria which was the provincial capital of Phuoc Tuy province, it was held for 24 hours and Australian troops cleared it. The Australian troops, it didn't worry them that they, I mean they were doing exactly what we would have liked (phone rings - Jane says something) From when we came home? [Yes] Alright, well, a number of incidences right, we had one veteran, I'll give you sort of case histories. [O.K] One veteran, he, got on a, we used to come home on the, what do you call it, Thursday it used to leave I can't think what they called it, something flight, and I remember in Saigon as a Military Policeman I served in Saigon, I used to have to go down and guard the Qantas plane when it came in and make sure no bad guys got on and put bombs on there. So this flight used to leave there Thursday and it would probably arrive here early, depend on where it was landing, early Friday morning, it depends on where it stayed, when I

came home we actually overnight stayed at Darwin, but some of them flew straight through it they could make it, the bigger 747s or 707s. So this guy got off, he was in Vietnam on Thursday, he got on the plane, he arrived in Sydney Friday morning, he was transported by bus to Holsworthy, he was discharged, then, and because he lived in the country he was transported by bus back again, picked up a bus or car or whatever it was, picked up a commercial flight, flew home to Parkes, and at _ o'clock that night was tilling the soil of his father's property. Now that's a pretty fair, fair upheaval isn't it [Yes, yes] you know when you come to think of it.

I, my second tour I left by...

J.R And can I just ask did he seem to have, did he say that that caused a problem at the time or was it something later.

J.H No, didn't cause a problem at the time because he was probably bloody glad to get out of the army. But many many, it took him many many years to identify himself as a Vietnam veteran, so much so that he contacted, and I haven't got his name, but he contacted me about 6 days before Anzac Day 1987 and asked how could he get his medals. Now his medals obviously had never caught up with him, they would have gone to a Q store somewhere. He wasn't in the army, they'd looked on their roll, he's not there okay, it either stays in the Q store or goes back to CARO where the medals are. The guy had never worried about them until his wife, he'd got married then and his wife had urged him to become a little bit more involved. He met a mate and decided he would go to Anzac Day 1987, he wanted his medals 6 days previous. Now there was many many thousands of guys didn't pick their medals up, many many thousands, you know, we've been told something up to fifteen thousand Vietnam veterans which is almost, what's that one third. Over one third of the, sorry not quite one third of the Veterans who served in Vietnam. So they didn't go for that little bit of meal, but it would have been nice to have I suppose, to have some acknowledgement of what you did, if that's the acknowledgement that you did a good job, great that's what you've got. To a lot of others though they were just glad to get home and take the green off, you know and get going. But there would have been plenty of others, others that I know came home late at night, I actually came home late at night with my family waiting there. I walked out, they'd given me my leave pass, I got in the car, drove home just like I was coming home from Melbourne on the business flight.

The Royal Commission has already acknowledged that that's a problem, not only with Vietnam veterans, but any other veteran in any future conflict or war. There must be a settling down period. And that doesn't mean take him back to barracks, lock him up and don't give him any leave passes. The idea is to make him gradually aware that there's a bit of a change out here, you know. I mean the food, the conditions, the attitude more than anyone else. My first tour, my wife was staying with my mum and dad, and my whole family, and I sent some gear home and the postie was really interested, this box gear which means not the normal

postie, but some guy who's on contract, and he was really interested and they had a bit of a talk. And of course by the time I went away on my second tour, 71/72 he used to just come in and dump it on the verandah. He'd, it probably wasn't his fault but he'd been sort of worked up to such a pitch that he blamed me or my family or the fact that he had to deliver that parcel, he took out his spleen on that. Now it's a minor thing, it didn't worry me, he didn't break any whiskey or anything like that so it wasn't any great tragedy, but in the same token there was a dramatic change there from 1967 to 1971. Now I'm not the only one that felt that, many many other veterans felt that, we've had instances where they've been called murderers. I used to receive dirty mail, "killer", "murderer",..

J.R Did you? [yeah] what because people knew you, were you living in army ... housing or anything?

J.H No, (talking together) well I'm also, I know it's, since I got out of the services, I got out when I came home straight away, but I'm an Alderman on Parramatta Councils and obviously someone up there, there's some people up there that don't like me and I used to get funny phone calls and dirty mail. I suppose I'm a little bit more in the public eye, but at one stage I was Deputy Mayor, so my profile would be greater than most others. Some other people would be able to hide the fact they were Vietnam veteran, I knew I couldn't, so I identified myself probably more quickly than most others. For me to get up and say that I wasn't would be a lie, would be a tragedy to me anyway, because it never worried me, you know I was proud that I'd, probably not that I went away, but proud that whatever I did over there, it was as good as what I could do and what I was sent to do.

J.R Did you march in Anzac Day parades and things from the time you came back?

J.H I've only ever marched once, Anzac Day 87, that's only because our association was involved and I was asked to participate and use our banner. I didn't march on October the 3rd, and I didn't march this year.

J.R You're not a marcher obviously?

J.H No I'm not a marcher because I think that, I think we're all, just personally I think we've all, I think it's great for some people once again, I don't think it does me any, you know I don't come out on a high. But then I'm more involved in the association than most other people would be. But, no I believe that a lot of us, a lot of people have lost sight of the problems that are associated with service in Vietnam. And, they're probably hiding those, they're hiding behind the march, or a function or whatever. I don't care what it was, meeting the Queen would be the same, shaking her hand won't solve the problems that we've got, and we've still got problems or else we wouldn't have the counseling service, we wouldn't have a repatriation department, we wouldn't have an office.

J.R Do you think they are the same sort of problems? You said earlier, you know veterans from other wars had the same worries do you think they are the same or..?

J.H Well probably in the main they are, but there were not too many other veterans that came home were abused [No] for going away and serving their country. I mean World War 1 never happen... in actual fact it was the opposite, if you didn't go you received a white feather I think if I remember rightly. That's tragic in itself, isn't it, but that did happen. It's tragic that a minority or people that were prepared to do what they thought was right and what they thought, and what they were ordered to do, should be the butt of the abuse by people who should have known better. And I don't care whether they were people for or against the war, if in fact they were for the war, they were reluctant to come out and say that when we came home, pretty decent of them to send us away, but when it, we call it that silent majority I suppose, because it was at that time, 67% in 196... '67. In 1971, '70/'71 it got down to about 27%, but the government still got in. In actual fact...

J.R Yes, yes, it wasn't a very, terribly important feeling?

J.H Well it was No. 9 or 10 on the 1st of their priorities when they were doing their electioneering. So we were fairly well forgotten weren't we, you know 'cause, yeah, give them enough food and give them enough ammo to make sure they don't get into trouble and then, and that's supposed to be it. So you can't blame the people in one sense, but you can in another that they weren't strong enough to get up and say, well okay, geez, we owe them a debt. We sent them over there, okay let's look after them when they come back, and they didn't do that, and we don't expect hand outs, it's the last thing any of us expect. We do expect a proper understanding of some of the problems that the guys have got, you know. But, and, well other, as I say other conflicts, other wars they probably went through a different type of war, a different type of operation area that we went through. You know the insurgent type operations that we went through, you were never ever safe irrespective of where you were. The mere fact that you trained to do something and could go out and do that job for two weeks and not even make contact with the army, in some cases *is* worse than making contact because you get some relief from making the contact, you feel a little bit alive [sort of release the tension] You think thank God for that... Yeah, but if you patrol around for weeks and weeks and weeks and only see signs and make no contact, it'd nearly drive you crazy. I know it used to upset a lot of veterans you know right. We're getting closer.. okay, I'd better cut it off...

[J.H had to leave for an appointment]

END OF TAPE 1