

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE PATRON TO THE 9 RAR ASSOCIATION FAMILY

I'm writing to tell you all something I am pretty sure you will already know by the time you get your newsletter. Brian Vickery, our greatly like and admired National President has been recognised by the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his services to the 9 RAR Association and to Surf Lifesaving.

Just about all of us have known Brian since 1969 when we served together on operations in South Vietnam. We knew him then as a very fine leader, courageous and most professional -- a junior officer whose men had vast affection for him. Since that time he continued to have a most meritorious army career until his retirement as a Lieutenant Colonel. Since Vietnam days he has been a pivotal, indeed crucial figure in the broader ex-services organisation, especially as president of the 9 RAR Association (NSW and then National). There was no greater demonstration of this than in 1987, when on October 17 that year a great national welcome home parade was held for Vietnam Veterans in Sydney and some other places. Many of you marched proudly with Brian on that day.

Then still in the Army Brian took it upon himself to ensure his mates of 9 RAR participated fully in the Vietnam Veteran's Welcome Home. He organised accommodation, transport, catering and participation in the March for a very large group, all of whom deeply appreciated the opportunity to congregate and receive this welcome public accolade. On the day over 400 of us gathered, many more than had previously indicated they would attend and somehow Brian was able to adjust his arrangements so that all felt welcome and that their needs were met. As a result of this we virtually "captured" Brian as permanent President of the Association for the many years thereafter. After his retirement while making a second civilian career, he has continued to be the most energetic and fatherly of figures within the Association. Very many of us, either emotionally troubled or simply down on our luck, owed our support and comfort to Brian and those many others he organised and enlisted to support his old comrades-in-arms. For the years of his Presidency of the 9 RAR Association (NSW Branch) (1987 to 1998) and National President (1992 until the present time) Brian has been indefatigable and inspirational. For every one of the traditional "gathering" days from ANZAC Day every year to those ad hoc reunions that take place from time to time around Australia, Brian has been the wellspring of those activities and tireless in his care and professionalism in supporting all of us veterans and our many family members who now are part of the larger Association family. As National President, Brian has presided over our National Reunions in Canberra in 1992, in Adelaide in 1997, Melbourne in 2002 and in Perth in 2006. He has been the driving force that has combined the efforts of the 9 RAR State Branches into a truly national organisation. In particular in 1992 as President of the NSW Branch of the 9RAR Association, Brian organised both 9RAR's participation in the Dedication of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and a 9RAR National Reunion to coincide with it. More than 500 of us and our spouses attended the weekend and as usual Brian organised the accommodation and the facilities and catering for the reunion Dinner.

In 2006 Brian played an inspirational role in the writing of the book "Proud to Serve", a history of 9 RAR after its time in South Vietnam. I think we all know within the Battalion Association that this project would not have succeeded so admirably without his great and cheerful drive and energy: he was the irresistible force to mobilise us to write and to contribute our memories and our photographs for this major memento of the Battalion's time after it's tour of duty on combat operations in South Vietnam. The book covered the history of 9RAR from its return from Vietnam in 1969 until its Colours were "laid up" and its name removed from the Order of Battle. Many of you may not appreciate he willingly accepted a significant financial risk in order to see "his" Battalion's history recorded.

In addition to this wonderful service to a particular group veterans, Brian has had a significant involvement with the RSL Sub Branch at Kingscliff in northern New South Wales, where he and his family live. Brian saw that the Kingscliff Sub Branch was in dire straits in 2005 and offered his services to arrest the downward slide and attract new members. He was elected to the position of Vice President in 2006. The President is a wonderful old veteran but of advanced years. Brian's single-handed efforts have effectively resurrected the Sub Branch. He has doubled membership of the Sub Branch and made it financial. ANZAC Day is once again a high point in the community. I observed first-hand on ANZAC Day in 2007 the affection, indeed the veneration in which he is held locally. The thousands of local residents who attended the commemorative services he organised were a revelation.

Brian has been a stalwart of the Surf lifesaving movement his entire life. When he moved to northern New South Wales he resumed his active interest in Surf lifesaving through the Cudgen Headland Surf lifesaving club where he is currently Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Licensed Club and Secretary of the Surf Club.

Brian Vickery OAM, we are very proud of you and Carol whose support for you and for the Association has been magnificent. We think the world of you. Well done mate.

Duty First

Peter Cosgrove Patron