

## **Fact Sheet 10: The Memorandum of Understanding and Tribute08**

In 2005 the government established a group to examine the concerns of Vietnam veterans. This group consulted veterans and their families and made recommendations to the government about what action should be taken to address any problems identified. The major outcome from this group's investigations was an agreement known as the [Memorandum of Understanding](#).

This agreement was signed by the government, the Ex-Vietnam Services Association (EVSA) and the Royal Returned and Services Association (RNZRSA) in December 2006.

Prime Minister Helen Clark acknowledged that it had fallen to her government 'to deal with the longer term consequences of New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s'. The government promised to make a formal public apology to Vietnam veterans and their families. The government also agreed to address ongoing health problems associated with exposure to defoliants. It was also agreed that there would be an official welcome home ceremony.

In 2007 the government provided a \$250,000 payment for a trust to support children of Vietnam veterans and launched *Tribute 08*.

[Tribute08](#) was held in Wellington on Queen's Birthday Weekend 2008. It paid tribute to New Zealand's Vietnam War veterans and their families. Some people might ask why after nearly 40 years such an event was seen as necessary. In simple terms it is because returning New Zealand service personnel were not given any official welcome home at the time (see Fact Sheet 8 Protest and the Vietnam War). Many Vietnam veterans felt shunned and hurt by what they saw as a lack of recognition for their service. One New Zealand Vietnam War veteran, David Grant, described it as 'galling' to come home under cover of darkness without a uniform so as not to attract 'rude remarks'. 'The bad thing about it was the soldiers were blamed for the unpopularity [of the war]. We were sent by the government'.

Some Vietnam veterans also found that their local RSA would not let them join because it did not recognise their war service. When it came to important moments of public commemoration such as Anzac Day many of these veterans did not march because of this sense of rejection. Attitudes have changed in recent years. David Grant has been attending dawn services since the 1980s and as the Second World War generation grows smaller, Vietnam War veterans have become the most visible group of New Zealand veterans to have seen active service.

At *Tribute08* a whakanoa ceremony to honour those killed in action and those veterans who have died since returning home was held. A Memorial Service and rededication of the Vietnam Honour in the National War Memorial was also held.

In announcing *Tribute08*, Helen Clark stated that whatever people's views on the Vietnam War, those who served, 'like other New Zealand soldiers before and after them, undertook their duties bravely, loyally, and professionally.' Phil Goff, the Minister of Defence, acknowledged *Tribute08* as offering a public commemoration that recognised the service of the veterans and the sacrifices of their families. Despite the passage of time it would allow a healing process to occur and help bring closure to Vietnam veterans and their families.

*Tribute08* comes 10 years after veterans organised their first ever national reunion and parade – 'Parade '98 – Vietnam Remembered'. For the first time since returning from Vietnam, veterans and their families publicly acknowledged their problems. *Tribute08* is different in that it will be the first occasion in which veterans will receive official recognition of their service.

The Memorandum of Understanding also included provision to extend the eligibility for military personnel who served in the Vietnam War to be awarded medals in recognition of their service. The first 26 recipients of the New Zealand General Service Medal 1992 (Warlike) with Vietnam clasp were presented with their medals in Wellington in May 2008. The Defence Force announced that more than 3000 New Zealand Vietnam veterans were eligible for this medal. The medal and clasp was also available to the surviving spouse or family of Vietnam veterans who had died. The award of these medals represented a significant moment for recipients who felt that at long last their service was being recognised by the country they served.

- See also: [Prime Minister Helen Clark's apology to Vietnam Veterans](#) (Beehive website, 28 May 2008)