

NATIONAL SERVICEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The greatest fraud ever perpetrated by any Government upon a selected section of its people happened here in Australia between 1965 and 1972. The people affected were the 64,000 National Servicemen who served Australia in a time of need.

Successive governments have been guilty of negligence by omission in that they have failed to inform National Servicemen of their rights under the *Re-Establishment Act* and *Commonwealth Employees Compensation Act*.

The government willing ordered the records of National Servicemen to be destroyed leaving only the barest of information intact. This was commenced in late 1971 under the guise of the *Archives Act 1971* being only four years after the discharge of the first intake of National Servicemen. It is normal procedures to keep records such as these, which are legal documents, for seven years but this was not been so in the case of National Servicemen.

The National Servicemen's Association submits the following requests to the House of Representatives and the Senate:

1. That all National Servicemen who served from 1965 until 1972 be entitled to a Defence Service Home Loan of \$25 000 or be given a \$10 000 grant in lieu of interest to those who already own or are in the process of paying off a current housing loan for their family home.
2. That the ReEstablishment Scheme \$6,000 loan as stated in the *National Service Act* be reopened.
3. That an Australia Service Medal 1964-73 be awarded for all servicemen including National Servicemen called up between 1965 and 1972.

National Servicemen were conscripts not volunteers who had no voting power and no alternative but to do as the Government of the day demanded. National Servicemen have a legitimate claim to the above mentioned requests.

*Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best: his state
Is Kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.*

John Milton (1608-1674)

1. NATIONAL SERVICE INTRODUCED FOR ACTIVE SERVICE

Sir Robert Menzies (Prime Minister)

It seems clear, on our military advice and our own carefully formed judgement, that we cannot expect by voluntary means to achieve a build up in the Army's strength to the order we require and to the timing which is necessary. We are living in a period of unsurpassed prosperity and more than full employment; the attractions of civilian employment are very great indeed.

The Government has therefore decided that there is no alternative to the introduction of selective compulsory service. ...

It follows also that to enable the Regular Army to achieve the required degree of operational readiness effectiveness, national servicemen must serve in regular units on a full time basis. If the scheme is to be effective those called up must therefore be under an obligation to serve overseas as necessary and must be available to go with the regular unit which they are serving.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 10 Nov 1964, p.2717/8

E James Harrison (Blaxland - ALP)

During the Second World War which was total war, conscription was introduced only for a circumscribed area. But tonight we are dealing with a measure that enables the youth of this country to be conscripted for service anywhere in the world.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 20 May 1965, p.1781

Hon Arthur Calwell (Leader of the Opposition)

We are the only country in the world fighting on two fronts in South East Asia. America is committed to Vietnam. Britain is committed to Malaysia. Australia with its limited resources, with its meagre defences, has obligations in Vietnam, Malaya, Borneo and New Guinea. The commitments are apparently without end, in size and in number.

How long will it be before we are drawing on our conscript youth to service there growing and endless requirements?

Hansard, House of Representatives, 4 May 1965, p.1107

Pat Galvin (ALP - Kingston)

The National service Bill which is now before the House seeks to extend the scope of the National Service Act which was passed by this Parliament last November. The existing Act provides that a young man of 20 years of age may be called up for national service training and conscripted for service with Australian Regular Army forces not only in Australia but, as I said earlier, overseas if directed to do so. ...

The National service Bill which we are now discussing provides that in two circumstances national service trainees can be compelled to serve an additional three years with the Regular Army Supplement, but service restricted to a maximum period of 5 years in a time of defence emergency. However if a state of war existed the trainee would soldier on with the Regular Forces.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 24 May 1965, p.2048/49

Defence Act 1903-1965

50(c) Members of the Military Forces may be required to serve either within or beyond the territorial limits of Australia.

Act No.51 of 1965, assented 7 June 1965

Lance Barnard (Minister for Defence 1972-75)

National service was introduced for Vietnam on the basis that the conscript would be trained for a year and serve a year's combat duty in Vietnam.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 18 August 1971, p.238

Keith Johnson (Burke - ALP)

An undertaking had been given to foreign powers that Australia would provide a given number of worker's sons to fight. When young men thought about the futility of the situation and refused to volunteer, the men with bloodstained hands who called themselves the Government then decided to force men to go, and conscription for active service returned to Australia.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 28 Sep 1971, p.1567

2. MEDICAL ANOMALIES

Les Reynolds (Barton - ALP)

My question is directed to the Minister for the Army. How earnestly is the Australian Regular Army seeking recruits. How is it that a constituent of mine who applied to join the Regular Army was rejected on medical grounds, but within a week or two was ruled fit for national service.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 6 April 1971, p.145

Gordon Scholes (Speaker 1975-76)

The Government has said it cannot raise a volunteer Army. The Government has failed to enlist two-thirds of persons seeking to enlist in the Army. Many of those who have been rejected for service in the Regular Army have subsequently been accepted for national service. No genuine explanation has been given for its anomaly.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 28 Sep 1971, p.1556

Since a large percentage of conscripts would not have passed the medical requirements for the Regular Army, the National Servicemen's Association concludes that national servicemen were conscripted specifically for cannon fodder for Vietnam despite the fact that the medical requirements for national service were alleged to be the same as the requirements for the Australian Regular Army at the time. Claims for compensation are made very difficult in view of this situation.

3. DEMOBILISATION

There was no proper demobilisation procedure for National Servicemen and therefore there was no way that the great majority of National Servicemen could know of their entitlements to:

(i) *Re-Establishment Act 1965*

(ii) *Defence Service Act*

(iii) *Compensation (Commonwealth Government Employees Act) 1971*

(iv) *National Service Act 1965*

4. AUSTRALIA SERVICE MEDAL 1964-73

National Servicemen were conscripts who serve as directed and where directed, in a time of a defence emergency from 1965 to 1972. National Service was introduced to provide men for Active Service. It was only right and proper that all National Servicemen, regardless of where they served, should be awarded a service medal, as was the case of our World War II counterparts who served between 1939 and 1945. Many of these soldiers never left Australia but still received two medals, the Australia Service Medal 1939-45 for eighteen months full time service and the War Medal 1939-1945 for 28 days full time service.

5. GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES

Gordon Scholes (Speaker 1975-76)

It does not matter to the Government that conscription destroys a young man's future; it does not matter that quite often it deprives a young man of early family life with his wife and children and it does not matter that it can destroy the opportunities of a man for the rest of his life.

Hansard, House of Representatives, 29 Sep 1971, p.1672

Ben Chifley, (Prime Minister 1945-49):

The careers of hundreds of thousands of young men have been interrupted and, in some instances, partially ruined. It is perfectly true that experience is gained but that is not material to an ordinary civilian vocation. On this Parliament rests the responsibility of seeing that THE RIGHT THING IS DONE.

6. SUMMARY

The decision to commit National Servicemen to active service was made in May 1965 well before the first intake on 30 June 1965. National Servicemen were conscripted for the purpose of active service. Of the 64 000 men called up between 1965 and 1972 at least 36% saw active service. A number paid the supreme sacrifice. Other National Servicemen were engaged in training men for active duty, some for the transport of dead and wounded when they arrived back in Australia and others who were involved in seeing men off in aircraft bound for South Vietnam. These are just some of the duties performed which would not normally be associated with peace time services. All the time they were awaiting their own turn to go over to South Vietnam. This was a very nerve racking

The restoration management committee list is like a *Who's Who* of Adelaide, including such institutions as the State Government, Santos Ltd, the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group, the National Australia Bank, the Commonwealth Bank, the Co-operative Building Society and many eminent persons who are contributing on a tax deductible basis donations ranging from \$10,000 to \$250,000. Also many ordinary people of Adelaide, myself included, are contributing what they can when they attend.

Two million dollars, however, is a lot of money and in early December Tony Summers is going to be meeting with the Minister for the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories (Mrs Kelly) to discuss the possibility of Federal Government assistance for this very worthy project, to restore and maintain one of the great buildings of the country and possibly the most eminent building in my seat. The residents of Adelaide are already digging deep for this worthy purpose and I hope the Government will find itself able to contribute some money of its own, with I hope the bipartisan support of this House. I do commend the honourable member for Sturt (Mr Wilson) for joining this appeal.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Dubois)—Order! It being 1.45 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106 as amended for this session, the debate is interrupted. I put the question: That grievances be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Anstralla Service Medal

Mr TAYLOR (Groom) (1.45)—Until their homecoming parade three years ago our Vietnam veterans were the lepers of our returned service community. Thankfully, that injustice has been redressed and those veterans now march proudly in their Anzac Day and other commemoration contingents. However, one element of those veterans, and I speak of the national servicemen, continues to receive less than satisfactory recognition.

Recently I was made aware of a written approach by the President of the National Servicemen's Association in Toowoomba, Mr Barry Vicary, to the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel (Mr Bilney) regarding the award of an Australia Service Medal not only to national servicemen but to all in the Vietnam conflict along similar lines to those applying for the Australia Service Medal of 1939 to 1945. I have sighted the Minister's reply of 6 November and find it totally unsatisfactory. I agree with the basic thrust of Mr Vicary's supplementary submission, which states in part that such a medal is "based on solid precedent and overcomes the injustice of non-recognition not only of the soldiers in Australian history who were conscripted for overseas service, but who never received a medal".

I hope that the Minister will reconsider this worthy cause and Mr Vicary's letter in the very near future.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation Children's Programs

Mr LANGMORE (Fraser)—After 60 years the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has ceased broadcasting children's radio, and ABC school television programs have been severely cut back too. Only a few remain and even their future is uncertain. The programs have been stopped as a result of the ubiquitous budgetary cuts in public expenditure. ABC management apparently considers children's programs expendable. Unfortunately, these days financial considerations often override educational and cultural goals. The ABC programs have a well deserved reputation of providing splendid entertainment and effective presentation of information ideas and entertainment. Characters in many of the ABC television programs have provided excellent role models for children in an advertising free environment. Many people will suffer from the ending of the programs. Teachers have relied on them, and parents at home with children, traditionally women, have used the programs to entertain and inform not only their children but also themselves. Country people for whom the programs have helped compensate for a lack of re-