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and the question of overseas service in Vietnam**

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Volunteers with a Legal Impediment: Australian National Service and the Question of Overseas Service in Vietnam

The late Jeffrey Grey, Australia's leading military historian, and Jeff Doyle suggested in 1992 that the history of Australia's Vietnam War 'has been as laden with myth as the more celebratory products of earlier, more successful wars.'¹ Nearly twenty years later, Grey argued in 2010 that it was still the case that: 'Australians do not understand why we became involved, have little accurate idea of what our soldiers did while they were there, and continue to subscribe to a variety of beliefs about the effects of service in that war, the latter assiduously stoked by groups with a vested interest in perpetuating such beliefs.'² Grey and other historians such as Chris Dixon, Robert Hall, Andrew Ross and Mark Dapin have debunked some of the more prominent myths of the Vietnam War: namely that Australia was only there to support the Americans; Australian soldiers regularly scored conclusive victories in battle; returning soldiers received no welcome home parades; the anti-war movement forced Australians to return late at night and in civilian clothes; and that anti-war protesters regularly spat on or physically and verbally harassed returning soldiers. Other myths, however, remain stubbornly in place.³

Australians' popular memories of the Vietnam War preserve dichotomous mythologies about national service. Among civilians, one myth is that national service meant automatically being sent to Vietnam, when in reality only 17,424 of the approximately

¹ Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle, 'Introduction', in *Vietnam: War, myth and memory: Comparative perspectives on Australia's war in Vietnam*, eds Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992), ix-x.

² Jeffrey Grey, 'In every war but one? Myth, history and Vietnam', in *Zombie Myths of Australian Military History*, ed. Craig Stockings (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), 191.

³ Grey, 'In every war but one?', 190-212; Bob Hall and Andrew Ross, "'Landmark" Battles and the Myths of Vietnam', in *Anzac's Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, ed. Craig Stockings (Sydney: NewSouth, 2012), 186-209; Mark Dapin, "'We Too Were Anzacs": Were Vietnam Veterans Ever Truly Excluded from the Anzac Tradition?', in *The Honest History Book*, eds David Stephens and Alison Broinowski (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2017), 77-91; Chris Dixon, 'Redeeming the Warrior: Myth-Making and Australia's Vietnam Veterans', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 2 (2014): 214-228.

63,000 men drafted for national service in the period 1965-72 were deployed.⁴ Yet there is an almost diametrically opposed myth that persists in veterans' circles: that all servicemen in Vietnam – both Army regulars and national servicemen – volunteered to deploy there. Historian Mark Dapin has even called this myth: 'The most provocative and divisive question about national service in Australia'.⁵ This article cuts across the civilian-military divide to bring clarity to this myth by showing that while one cannot say that all national servicemen freely volunteered to go to Vietnam, neither can one say that they were all compelled. Like most complex histories, there were multiple factors at play, and veterans' groups have dwelled on particular aspects of the volunteer myth to situate their own experiences within the Anzac legend.

The research for this project stems from Ben Morris's personal history, as well as research conducted in the decade prior to 2014. Morris was a platoon commander in Vietnam in 1967, and conducted thirty-eight oral history interviews with surviving members of his platoon and other soldiers who served in the Australian armed forces during that era. As a participant interviewer, Morris has always tried not to interrupt the flow of the narrators' testimony. Often, however, he was deeply puzzled by what they had to say. In some cases, as Alistair Thomson and other oral historians have written about extensively, veterans were composing their own memories to fit within dominant narratives of the war and the post-war treatment of veterans.⁶ One issue Morris deemed worthy of further investigation was veterans' frequent assertion that they served as volunteers in Vietnam. This was different to the attitude expressed by many national servicemen during the war, when they highlighted

⁴ Figures for the number of national servicemen in Vietnam conflict depending on the source. We have taken 17,424 from Grey, 'In every war but one?', 199. The figure of 63,000 total national servicemen comes from 'National Service, 1965-72 – Fact sheet 164', *National Archives of Australia*, available from <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs164.aspx>, accessed 11 April 2018.

⁵ Mark Dapin, *The Nashos' War: Australia's National Servicemen in Vietnam* (Melbourne: Viking, 2014), 391.

⁶ See Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History', *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (2015): 1-29; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* 2nd ed. (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

the differences between themselves and the regular soldiers. These contentions also conflict with the definition of a conscript and public perceptions of their service.

This article first examines how the Vietnam War historiography has propagated the myth of the volunteer national serviceman. Only Dapin has explicitly challenged this myth by focusing on two national servicemen as case studies.⁷ This article goes further, by turning directly to the primary sources in ways that the existing historiography has overlooked, as well as by situating the myth's meanings in relation to the Anzac legend. The article examines the legal background to the *Defence Act*, *National Service Act* and what parliamentarians had to say about conscripts deploying overseas. It then turns to the question of if and how soldiers could opt out of overseas deployment, revealing that there is no documentary basis to support these claims. The article then turns to veterans' memories of national servicemen supposedly volunteering (or not) to go to Vietnam. It shows how these incomplete memories have perpetuated the myth of the volunteer soldier, and reveals why veterans have clung so strongly to this myth. It suggests that the myth of the volunteer soldier is part of a wider process of positioning Vietnam War soldiers' and veterans' experiences with(in) Australia's Anzac legend. Doing so has rendered the notion of the voluntary soldier, like so many other Vietnam War and Australian military history myths, sacrosanct, so that only brave historians might dare to challenge it.

National Service mythologies and historiography

As Grey points out, one myth in Australia's popular memory is that Vietnam was Australia's first 'conscripts' war, where the majority of soldiers were unwilling draftees. The myth likely derives from the anti-war movement, which focused much of its protest around conscription. Moreover, the Australian Labor Party made national service/conscription and its relationship

⁷ Dapin, *The Nashos' War*, 391-403.

to Vietnam a centrepiece in three elections (1966, 1969 and 1972).⁸ Grey even argues that had conscripts not been sent to Vietnam, it is possible that the anti-war movement may not have expanded beyond its traditional, far left base.⁹ As such, it is not surprising that so many Australians believe that national servicemen were the principal soldiers in Vietnam, as well as the belief that being called up for national service automatically meant being sent to Vietnam. The myth of Vietnam as Australia's first conscripts' war is false for numerous reasons, the most basic of which is that in the Second World War the Citizens Military Forces (CMF) were deployed to Papua, New Guinea and other areas of the southwest Pacific. The other more obvious error is that the *National Service Act* 1964 predated Australia's major commitment to Vietnam (which began in 1965). National service was originally set up in anticipation of conflict with Indonesia. Finally, as Grey points out, only 17,424 of the approximately 60,000 Australians who served in Vietnam were national servicemen – less than one-third of the soldiers.¹⁰

There is another myth about national service, more common within veterans' circles, and which has received less historical attention. That is the myth that all who served in Vietnam, including national servicemen, volunteered to be deployed overseas. Indeed, Grey himself perpetuates this myth in his centenary history of the Australian Army, writing: 'national servicemen signed a declaration volunteering for overseas service; those who did not sign did not go'.¹¹ This notion of the national serviceman volunteering to go to Vietnam appears in many of the popular histories of Australia's Vietnam War, though notably it is

⁸ Ann Curthoys, 'The anti-war movements', in *Vietnam: War, myth and memory*, 81-107; Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72* (London: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1980), 51-67; Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett, *Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia* (South Yarra: Hyland House, 1991), 75-91; Carina Donaldson and Marilyn Lake, 'Whatever happened to the anti-war movement?' in Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), 88-91.

⁹ Jeffrey Grey, 'Protest and Dissent: Anti-Vietnam War Activism in Australia', in Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey and Peter Pierce, *Australia and the Vietnam War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 59-60.

¹⁰ Grey, 'In every war but one?' 197-9.

¹¹ Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence Volume 1: The Australian Army* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 218. Grey quotes David Horner and Jean Bou, *Duty First: A History of the Royal Australian Regiment* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 190.

absent in the most prominent scholarly histories.¹² In ‘Australian soldiers in Vietnam, Product and Performance’, for example, Jane Ross emphasises that there was never any shortage of soldiers wanting a posting to Vietnam. She argues that this made all who deployed to Vietnam volunteers.¹³

Several military officers have made similar claims. Lieutenant Colonel Jim Shelton, Commanding Officer of 3 RAR, claimed his battalion did not take any unwilling conscripts to war.¹⁴ In the 3 RAR Unit History, Michael English claims that both Army regulars and national servicemen signed volunteering forms during corps training. Jerry Taylor agrees with him in his history of 4 RAR in Vietnam.¹⁵ Paul Ham also stokes the all-volunteer myth in his bestselling book *Vietnam: The Australian War* by asserting that, ‘the great myth about conscription was that national servicemen were forced to serve in Vietnam. In fact, they were all given the chance not to go.’¹⁶ Ham quotes correspondence from Brigadier Colin Khan to David Horner, editor of *Duty First*, saying that conscripts had to volunteer to serve overseas.¹⁷

Tracing the source of the references to volunteering for Vietnam, it becomes apparent that all citations eventually link back to *Duty First*, a history of the Royal Australian Regiment. In his chapter, Colonel John Healy, a former Director of Infantry from 1978-81, makes the claim that national servicemen had ‘to specifically volunteer for overseas service by signing a declaration during corps training’.¹⁸ Neither Healy nor the other authors citing

¹² See John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia’s Vietnam War* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993); Peter Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014).

¹³ Jane Ross, ‘Australian soldiers in Vietnam Product and Performance’, in *Australia’s Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, ed. Peter King (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 78.

¹⁴ Ashley Ekins, with Ian McNeill, *Fighting to the Finish: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1968-1975*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2012), 65.

¹⁵ Michael English, *The Riflemen: The unit history of 3 RAR in Vietnam, 1971* (Loftus, NSW: Australian Military History Publications, 1999), 4; Jerry Taylor, *Last Out: 4 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion’s Second Tour in Vietnam* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin), 2001), 15.

¹⁶ Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War* (Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 170-171.

¹⁷ Letter from Colin Khan to David Horner, 26 October 1989, cited in Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, footnote 20 on p. 695.

¹⁸ Horner and Bou, *Duty First*, 159.

him produce verifiable evidence such as a signed document, military instruction or any other military documentation supporting this contention. Interestingly, Horner has stated in an email to Morris that he now doubts the veracity of this claim that all national servicemen who served in Vietnam volunteered to go.¹⁹ That one particular reference published in 1990 could lead to so many other claims attests to historian Craig Stockings' observation that 'the considerable – if slow-witted – inertia of such [Australian military history] myths seems to give them a life of their own'.²⁰

Mark Dapin's *The Nashos' War*, the most comprehensive history of Vietnam national servicemen to date, is the first text directly to challenge the idea of the volunteer national serviceman in his chapter 'The Myth of the Volunteers'. He provides two case studies where the Army sent reluctant national servicemen to Vietnam.²¹ Dapin also points out that in May 1966, 'the government explicitly and specifically banned the Army from asking national servicemen if they would serve overseas'.²² Nonetheless, the myth persists, with some Vietnam veterans claiming they had to sign a form agreeing to serve overseas, others saying they were asked on parade to volunteer for Vietnam, and some repeating hearsay about 'others' who were given the option to opt out of Vietnam. To debunk the volunteer myth, this article now aims to do what the previous studies of the Vietnam War and national service have not adequately done: search for any documentary evidence that soldiers, including national servicemen, volunteered to deploy to Vietnam.

The Law and Volunteering for Overseas Deployments

¹⁹ David Horner/Ben Morris, *Re: Declaration for Volunteers*, 19 December 2011.

²⁰ Craig Stockings, 'Introduction: Myths and Australian Military History', in *Anzac's Dirty Dozen*, 2-3. Stockings uses a similar phrase in 'Introduction: The Walking "Undead" and Australian Military History', in *Zombie Myths of Australian Military History*, 2.

²¹ Dapin, *The Nashos' War*, 391-403.

²² *Ibid*, 96. *CPD*, 1966, 1891.

The term ‘volunteer’ has been part of the Australian military lexicon since the British government decided to recruit local citizens to assist in the defence of the colonies during the Crimean War era. After Federation, the 1903 debate over the *Defence Act* was a conflict between some parliamentarians arguing that the British Empire was to be supported with troops in time of war, and those who believed that Australia’s defence forces were to defend only its territorial boundaries. There was an underlying belief in the parliamentary and public debate that if invasion occurred, Australians would volunteer to defend the new nation. After several parliamentary debates, it was agreed that volunteer forces could be raised and deployed overseas to assist the British Empire.²³

During the two world wars, volunteers enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). This is the foundation narrative of the ANZAC volunteer citizen soldier: the notion that as an all-volunteer army, the 1st AIF was a superior force because the men were all hard, willing fighters. Thomson’s oral histories with surviving First World War veterans found that they were proud that they belonged to an army that did not have conscription, and this was central to their identity as ANZACs.²⁴ Graham Seal posits the volunteer citizen soldier hypothesis: that First World War diggers’ status as volunteers was central to their identity and their supposed values of ‘anti-authoritarianism ... mateship; irreverence and larrikinism; swaggering arrogance; an aggressively nationalistic and, by later standards, blatantly racist stance; sardonic, even cynical humour; and a nonchalant attitude to death and injury’.²⁵ Of course, as John Connor has argued, Australia’s was not the only all-volunteer force, and armies with conscripts were just as effective as the Australians.²⁶ Even so, the volunteer status became a central pillar of the Anzac legend and set a bar against which future

²³ John Mordike, *An Army for A Nation: A history of Australian military development 1880-1916* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, in association with the Directorate of Army Studies, Canberra), 128.

²⁴ Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, 43.

²⁵ Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press in association with the API Network and Curtin University of Technology, 2004), 3.

²⁶ John Connor, ‘The “superior”, all-volunteer AIF’, in *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen*, 35-50.

Australian armies have measured themselves.²⁷

From 1903 to 1964, pursuant to the *Defence Act*, the Australian permanent military forces could only serve within Australian territorial boundaries. Section 49 stated: ‘Members of the Defence Force who are members of the Military Forces shall not be required, unless they voluntarily agree to do so, to serve beyond the limits of the Commonwealth and those of any Territory under the authority of the Commonwealth.’²⁸ The 1st AIF, 2nd AIF and K-Force (Korean War) consisted of men who, through the very process of enlisting into these purpose-raised forces, signed attestation forms agreeing to be deployed overseas. With the exception of the CMF in the Pacific War (and even then, a controversial decision not taken lightly by Prime Minister John Curtin), under the law Australian men could not be conscripted to fight overseas.

On 27 September 1950, Prime Minister Robert Menzies foreshadowed a change to Section 49 of the *Defence Act* that would oblige all members of the military to be deployed overseas when necessary.²⁹ This change did not occur until the reintroduction of the *National Service Act* in 1964 and through corresponding amendments to the *Defence Act*. In 1963 and 1964, during discussions about the reintroduction of national service, the Minister for the Army, Jim Forbes, told Parliament that an all-volunteer force would be better than a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts.³⁰ In early November 1964, both the Army and the Department of Labour and National Service made representations about the need for a fully deployable defence force. They received support from the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (currently Returned and Services League: RSL), placing vocal pressure on the government to retain an all-volunteer force. The agitators did

²⁷ See James Brown, *Anzac's Long Shadow: The Cost of Our National Obsession* (Collingwood: Redback 4, 2014).

²⁸ Commonwealth of Australia (Cth of A), *Defence Act 1903*, section 49 (Canberra: Government Printer, 1903).

²⁹ Cth of A, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 27 September 1950, (Robert Menzies).

³⁰ ‘Opposition by Army Service call up if needed’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney), 27 October 1964, 1.

not foresee that the government would consider deploying conscripts overseas. The government ignored the all-volunteer force pleas. Cabinet instead decided on a compulsory overseas obligation for the Regular Army and national servicemen in line with what Menzies had foreshadowed in 1950.³¹

The 1964 amendments to the *Defence Act* replaced section 49. National servicemen were now also considered enlisted into the Regular Army Supplement, which was hitherto defined as part of the Australian Military Forces. Finally, a new section 50(C) explicitly stated: ‘Subject to this section, members of the Military Forces may be required to serve either within or beyond the service of territorial limits of Australia.’³² These amendments in 1964 thus changed Australia’s longstanding policy (albeit bent during the Second World War) regarding voluntary overseas service.³³ The 1964 amendments allowed the CMF to maintain their overseas volunteer option.³⁴ However, by 1965 the government decided that for the CMF to remain relevant to the nation’s defence, it had to be deployable overseas. Further amendments to the *Defence Act* removed the CMF exemption, and the CMF invited members who did not consent to overseas service to resign, thus removing the last legislated freedom of choice about overseas service.

Figure 1: Advice to members of the CMF of their extended obligations.

On 9 December 1965, Tom Uren, the member for Reid, who had volunteered for overseas service in the 2nd AIF, queried the changes to the legal aspects of the Australian

³¹ Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 23-6; Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 114-20; *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, National Service Bill 1964, Second Reading, 11 November 1964.

³² *Defence Act* 1964, section 50C (1).

³³ Glenn Withers, *Conscription Necessity and Justice* (Cremorne: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 16.

³⁴ *Defence Act*, amended 1964, Section 32(2).

Military Forces overseas deployments. He asked the Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, if all conscripts under the 1964 legislation were required to sign a document agreeing to serve in Vietnam. Furthermore, he inquired if conscripts who refused to sign this document were subjected to coercion to sign. On 22 March and 30 March 1966, he again asked this question. On 4 May 1966 he sent the Prime Minister a telegram. On 13 May 1966, Uren again raised the matter during an adjournment debate. At last Fraser gave a very clear answer:

There is no Government or Army Headquarters requirement for any national serviceman to sign any document saying that he is willing, or that he would like, to serve overseas. Honourable members should know that it is established quite clearly in legislation that has been passed by this House that national servicemen must be prepared to serve wherever the security of Australia demands and wherever the units to which they have been posted as individuals may be deployed in our own interests or to meet our own international obligations.

Fraser admitted that previously some national servicemen had been asked to sign documentation agreeing to go to Vietnam, but this was not done at the direction of the government or Army Headquarters. He stated that ‘some units had produced the forms on their own accord and this had now been stopped’ and these documents had no legal standing.³⁵ In the future, to prevent misunderstandings, commanders were not to ask questions relating to where soldiers may or may not wish to serve.

Fraser’s statement received dissemination in popular press including the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Canberra Times*.³⁶ It would have also filtered down to at least some of the commanding officers responsible for postings to Vietnam. Every Officers Mess in

³⁵ Cth of Australia, Parliamentary debates: House of Representatives: official Hansard, No. 19, 13 May 1966: 1891.

³⁶ ‘Query on foreign service deleted’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 May 1966): p. 7; ‘Reference to overseas service dropped’, *Canberra Times* (14 May 1966): p. 3.

Australia had a selection of newspapers which most officers read, especially the junior ones bucking for promotion. Senior officers in Canberra were carefully watching politicians, ensuring that if they came into contact with a parliamentarian, they would be aware of every syllable that they had uttered in Parliament. Their promotions depended on it. Alongside such informal channels, there would have also been some dissemination from Army Headquarters Canberra to the Commands.

This immovable stance by Fraser received affirmation during an Army inquiry into the 6 June 1970 death of Private Stanley Gordon Larsson. Larsson's family had requested that he be transferred to an Australian based unit because he had poor eyesight. The new Minister for the Army, Andrew Peacock, rejected the parents' application to have him withdrawn from active service, in line with Fraser's May 1966 statement.³⁷ This suggests that a hard-line attitude towards the overseas obligation was in operation for at least four years. As a result of ministerial representations after Larsson's death, an investigation was conducted into the Army's actions deploying Larsson to the war zone.³⁸ The investigation likely had an effect, as by September 1971 Peacock had changed his tune and announced in a television interview that 'It would be less than sensible to send someone to Vietnam who doesn't want to go...I have directed that only national-service personnel who wish to go are sent to Vietnam *from now on*.'³⁹ Importantly, Peacock's statement was at a time when Australian troops' staged withdrawal was almost complete, and by then amendments to the *National Service Act* had reduced the obligation from two years to eighteen months. His statement was likely a reaction to the anti-war movement and the McMahon Government's desire to neutralise the Vietnam War and conscription as political issues. Regardless, for the

³⁷ Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, 534.

³⁸ Michael O'Brien, *Conscripts and Regulars with the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 192-3.

³⁹ 'Servicemen can "avoid Vietnam"', *The Canberra Times* (27 September 1971): 3. Emphasis added. See also 'Conscripts can refuse Vietnam', *The Australian* (27 September 1971): 1.

purposes of this article, the key part of Peacock's statement is the implication that, until September 1971, national servicemen could be sent to Vietnam involuntarily.

Veterans' Contested Memories of Volunteering

While legally there was no obligation to make national servicemen volunteer for overseas service, as the aforementioned historiography and Fraser's 1966 statement show, there were cases when particular units or commanders were calling for people to volunteer for Vietnam in any case. Sue Langford states correctly that 'Officially, national servicemen could not be posted according to their wishes and therefore could not choose whether or not they served in Vietnam'.⁴⁰ The fact that Langford uses the word 'officially' suggests that she was aware of unofficial solutions. Langford notes that senior military officers asserted that all troops deployed to Vietnam were volunteers because more national servicemen wished to serve in that theatre of war than there were vacancies. Essentially, Langford argues that because of the supposed oversupply of volunteers, those national servicemen who did not wish to be deployed in Vietnam were transferred to Australian based units.

Assessing what is myth and what is history becomes complicated, because the supposed calls for volunteers operated at the unit level. As such, oral histories are the main source for assessing just how overseas service came about. There are conflicting oral testimonies, several of which are examples of hearsay, and the reliability of memory and challenge of composure make these accounts problematic as reliable sources. For instance, one interview participant from Morris's research, Ross Horne, states that the popular opinion that national servicemen were sent to Vietnam against their will was a load of rubbish.⁴¹

Horne trained at 3 Training Battalion Singleton, and numerous men who trained at that unit

⁴⁰ Sue Langford, 'Appendix: The national service scheme, 1964-72', in Peter Edwards, *A nation at war: Australian politics, society and diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1997), 363.

⁴¹ Ross Horne, 'A National Servicemen's View 1966/68', in Bill Parry, *Just A Nasho* (Mango Hill, QLD: Mr W.O. Parry, 2011), 38. See also Ross James Horne, interview by Ben Morris, Lugarno, 25 September 2004.

have made similar assertions that all national servicemen had to volunteer to go to Vietnam.⁴² A letter in the NSW RSL magazine *Reveille* supports Horne, suggesting that it was a popular myth that the government made conscripts go to war.⁴³ Yet, none of these narrators provide evidence or even anecdotal examples to support their claims that national servicemen had to volunteer to go to Vietnam.

Gary McKay acknowledges that some national servicemen may have gone to Vietnam against their wishes when he observes that many of them were not aware that they supposedly could have avoided going. He writes about the effect of peer pressure on trainees, and how this resulted in reluctant soldiers being deployed because they were unaware of avenues to avoid Vietnam. He does not, however, explain how a conscript could have avoided deploying if ordered to do so.⁴⁴ Ham, who similarly espouses the volunteer myth, does acknowledge ways that commanders could compel soldiers to 'volunteer'. He cites company sergeant majors shouting 'Any little cunt who doesn't want to go to Vietnam, step forward now!' Ham writes that those few men who were brave enough to step forward may be 'paraded in disgrace, then bundled out of the barracks like rubbish bins, their self-esteem in shreds, according to several accounts.'⁴⁵ A member of 7 RAR interviewed by Morris remembers a company parade where commanders presented the option of avoiding Vietnam.⁴⁶ This 7 RAR informant agreed with other narrators that such parades did occur prior to departure for Vietnam (7 RAR deployed in April 1967 and again in February 1970).⁴⁷ With so many soldiers claiming this to be fact, it would appear that this type of parade did occur in the Second, Fifth and Seventh Battalions. Everyone who mentioned these parades,

⁴² John Polkinghorne, interview by Ben Morris, Darwin, 15 June 2010; Brian Donald Gordon, interview by Ben Morris, Minden, 18 April 2007; John Hindmarsh, interview by Ben Morris, Runaway Bay, 7 December 2008; Norm Newell, interview by Ben Morris, Buderim, 19 April 2007.

⁴³ Helen Nolan, 'Letters to the Editor', *Reveille* 81, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 5.

⁴⁴ Gary McKay, *Going Back: Australian veterans return to Viet Nam* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2007), 144.

⁴⁵ Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, 171.

⁴⁶ Email, Tony Blake/Ben Morris, *Re: Fwd: Theory & Policy References. ADA*, 10 Dec 2007

⁴⁷ Colonel David Wilkins confirmed this claim in a series of emails and phone calls with Ben Morris on 11 January 2012, 17 January 2012, and 29 January 2012.

though, did not know the unit to which non-volunteers were being sent, nor did they come into contact with these men at a later date.

Ham acknowledges that there was a pragmatic element to calling forth those who did not want to go to Vietnam: it would remove men whom commanders would not want in a battle zone.⁴⁸ Forty years after the war, at the 2002 Chief of Army History Conference, Colonel Noel Charlesworth, Commanding Officer Second Battalion in 1967-68, claimed that, as a commanding officer of 2 RAR, he gave his soldiers an opportunity to volunteer to serve in Vietnam.⁴⁹ Even such determinations could be short-lived. Mike Towers recalled a parade during corps training in which volunteers for Vietnam were segregated from non-volunteers. All present were told that the non-volunteers would be posted to units in Australia. Towers was marched off the parade to an Australian unit which was the Reinforcement Unit Ingleburn - the group which supplied reinforcements for units in Vietnam when a soldier in the war zone needed to be replaced. Both the chaplain and officer commanding the unit advised Towers that he would not be posted to Vietnam while his wife was pregnant. However, these compassionate grounds were not applied to him, and he was posted to Vietnam.⁵⁰

In *Ashes of Vietnam*, Stuart Rintoul's interviewees indicate that there was confusion about volunteering. Seven of Rintoul's narrators talk about volunteering.⁵¹ Yet, Rintoul includes counter-narratives such as Don Duffus, who claimed that they served in Vietnam against their wishes.⁵² Similarly, soldiers' confusion about their volunteer status comes out in *Combat Battalion*, where Robert Hall writes that he interviewed some soldiers who claimed

⁴⁸ Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, 171.

⁴⁹ Noel Russell Charlesworth, 'Training for Service in South Vietnam 1966-1967 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment', in *The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1962-1972: The 2002 Chief of Army's Military History Conference*, eds Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra: Department of Defence, Army History Unit, 2002), 72.

⁵⁰ Mike Towers, *A Jungle Circus: Memories of Vietnam* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999).

⁵¹ Stuart Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam*, (Richmond: William Heinemann, 1988); for volunteers see pp. 12, 20, 31, 56, 67, 123, 211; for non-volunteers see pp. 11, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

volunteer status and others who said they were forced to deploy to the war zone.⁵³ What these many oral and written recollections demonstrate is that there was a level of inconsistency in how commanding officers decided who was sent to Vietnam. This inconsistency has fuelled disagreements over whether national servicemen were volunteers, with every example hardening opinions among veterans.

Another contested memory among Vietnam veterans is the claim that all soldiers who served in Vietnam signed a form volunteering for overseas deployment. Soldiers who had enlisted during the First and Second World Wars, Korea and pre-November 1964 did indeed sign a volunteering form in accordance with the *Defence Act* section 49. It seems that signing forms multiple times was common practice, and validates Menzies' 1950 claims that an Army force could not be deployed with the United Nations until the volunteering forms had been completed.⁵⁴ This zeal about observing the black letter law of the *Defence Act* during the Second World War and the Korean conflict may be a reason why soldiers of the pre-national service era and the first intake remember a volunteer form.

Figure 2: Undertaking to Serve Beyond The Limits of The Commonwealth If And When Required 3487 Lt John Arnold Warr (later CO 5 RAR First Tour Vietnam)

Figure 3: A Statutory Declaration to Serve within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth of Australia in the Australian Regular Army

⁵³ Robert A. Hall, *Combat Battalion, The Eighth Battalion in Vietnam*, (St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 2000), 12.

⁵⁴ Hansard (Menzies), 27 September 1950.

After the 1964 amendments to the *Defence Act*, the acknowledgement in figure 3 was removed from the standard Attestation Form. The volunteering form that some officers have mentioned has not been found in the service records of any servicemen who enlisted after these 1964 amendments. Some soldiers who had enlisted prior to the 1964 amendments had volunteered for overseas service, but when their terms of engagement expired and they re-engaged for a further term, the volunteering section had been removed from their new attestation forms. Army personnel records reflect the government's intention that national servicemen were not to be given a documentary option to opt out of Vietnam. Morris not only searched the records of the thirty-eight soldiers whom he interviewed, but examined over 100 veterans' personnel files trying to detect any statutory declarations; he found none. A former member of 5 RAR called up in the first national service intake indicated to Morris that he had completed a questionnaire asking about overseas service.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this claim, rigorous research has failed to locate any form showing that soldiers volunteered for Vietnam.

In a video titled *Ten Foot Tall & Bullet Proof*, Corporal Jens Schroeder of B Company, 2 RAR, shares his moment of realisation when, after accessing his personnel file in 2010 through a freedom of information request, he became aware that he did, according to the custodians of the Army records, volunteer to serve in Vietnam. This document is reproduced in figure 4. It is the Army's reply to his request for the statutory declaration that he had signed to volunteer to deploy to Vietnam. The Army sent him an instructor's report stating that Schroeder was happy with his posting to a Vietnam-bound unit. The actual document sent by the Army does not have the soldier's signature, nor a wording stating that he wished to deploy to Vietnam. Schroeder makes the comment that he did not realise that he

⁵⁵ *Conversation*, 2781441 Brian Frank Budden/Ben Morris, (Sutherland), 8 August 2017.

had volunteered for Vietnam until 2010.⁵⁶ This form is in many national servicemen's personnel files, but it was an allocation to battalion form. This pro forma document was *not* a statutory declaration affirming that the veteran wished to deploy to Vietnam. It was an administrative form to allow the Army staff conducting corps training to place the infantry corps trainees in a battalion quickly and efficiently. Essentially, it was asking the soldier if he wanted to join the next battalion to go to Vietnam, the following battalion or the reinforcement unit at Ingleburn; it was not asking whether or not he wanted to go to Vietnam.

Figure 4: A Form forwarded by Department of Defence to a national serviceman who had claimed under Freedom of Information the right to view his statutory declaration for deployment to Vietnam.

Some men did volunteer for national service itself, as noted by Dapin and illustrated by one of Morris' nine national servicemen interviewees.⁵⁷ This was always a possibility. Peter Edwards points out that over the period 1970-71 alone, nearly 500 men volunteered for national service despite being granted deferments, while another 255 volunteered at age 18 and 9 months under provisions of the *National Service Act*.⁵⁸ Moreover, several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who were exempt under the *National Service Act* voluntarily signed up for national service.⁵⁹ This act of volunteering for national service was required at registration stage, not during training. At the conclusion of the war, *The Sun Herald* stated

⁵⁶ *Ten Foot Tall & Bullet Proof*, created by Jens Schroeder, uploaded to Vimeo on 24 April 2016, <https://vimeo.com/163979892>, accessed 10 April 2018.

⁵⁷ Dapin, *The Nashos' War*, 46.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, 237.

⁵⁹ See Noah Riseman, 'The Vietnam War', in *Serving Our Country: Indigenous Australians, War, Defence and Citizenship*, eds Joan Beaumont and Allison Cadzow (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018), 219-220; Noah Riseman, *In Defence of Country: Life Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Servicemen and Women* (Canberra: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2016), 93-94; Noah Riseman and Richard Trembath, *Defending Country: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Military Service since 1945* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2016), 65.

that nine per cent of all national servicemen were volunteers.⁶⁰ Even so, a search of the files of veterans who volunteered for national service fails to disclose any reference to volunteering for Vietnam. Many national servicemen, of course, *did* wish to serve in Vietnam and would have regarded themselves as volunteers for that service. But this act of volunteering for national service was not a process for volunteering for overseas service. Conscripts of this mindset would support the ethos that servicemen in Vietnam were a volunteer force.

Morris' research also exposed the fact that a number of young men had voluntarily enlisted into the Regular Army under a false promise that they would be given trade training. Some of these men definitely did not want to deploy, but were shanghaied into serving in Vietnam before any such training. The resolution of these cases varied, ranging from suicide to ministerial intervention. One soldier, Lloyd James Michael Beck, whose enlistment papers were clearly marked for enlistment in the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME), was never posted to a RAEME unit or training facility. Below is Beck's Attestation form, with the annotation 'For Service in RAEME', who had volunteered to serve beyond the limits of Australia in the Australian Regular Army. His personnel file shows no RAEME training; however he did serve overseas in Borneo and Vietnam before discharge.⁶¹ The questionable status of volunteerism under false promises is a matter that the Australian Defence Force continues to grapple with, as over 200 sailors lodged a class action suit in 2016 against the Royal Australian Navy for not fulfilling its promises to provide apprenticeship training leading to particular certificate qualifications.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ian Fichett, '51,000 have done NS 9% were volunteers', *Sun Herald*, 12 Sep 1971, 47.

⁶¹ Lloyd James Michael Beck, service number 1200197, personnel file.

⁶² Ursula Malone, 'Sailors sue Navy saying they were "tricked" into joining with promises of trades', *ABC News*, 16 February 2016, available from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-15/hundreds-sailors-sue-navy-alleged-false-promises-trade/7170086>, accessed 10 April 2018; Barbara Miller, 'Over 200 sailors begin suing Commonwealth over shoddy contracts', *PM*, ABC Radio, 19 February 2018, available from <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/over-200-sailors-being-suing-commonwealth-over-shoddy-contracts/9462552>, accessed 10 April 2018.

Figure 5: Attestation form indicating Lloyd James Michael Beck enlisted for service in RAEME.

Volunteers, Vietnam and the Anzac Mythology

In September 2010 at the Mildura RSL, in front of a group of veterans, a former soldier from 7 RAR claimed it was a myth that soldiers serving in Vietnam were volunteers. This veteran claimed he was forced to go to Vietnam, but when Morris offered him a chance to record his story on tape, the veteran declined. It is common among veterans whose memories vary from the dominant narrative not to want to disagree publicly with the mythology. They fear the backlash, just as historians who have dared to challenge the Anzac mythology have received vitriolic responses from conservative media commentators and online trolls.⁶³ Yet, the question still remains as to why so many Vietnam veterans are so defensive about the proposition that they were all volunteers. This myth, like so many other myths of Australian military history, stems from Australia's Anzac legend. As historian Craig Stockings summarises: 'The Anzac legend, in its need to link the idea of "national character" to past military exploits sometimes requires interpretations of events that diverge from what might be called objective or detached historical inquiry.'⁶⁴

Historians such as Carolyn Holbrook, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds point out that the Anzac legend has always been contested and (re)shaped over the century since the First World War.⁶⁵ Even so, there have been consistent stereotypes of the iconic First World War ANZACs which have persisted. Graham Seal effectively summarises the digger

⁶³ See Martin Crotty and Craig Stockings, 'The Minefield of Australian Military History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 4 (2014): 580-91; Lake and Reynolds, *What's Wrong with Anzac?*, 1-4.

⁶⁴ Craig Stockings, 'Introduction: The Walking "Undead" and Australian Military History', 8.

⁶⁵ Carolyn Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014); Lake and Reynolds, *What's wrong with Anzac?*

mythology as ‘the stereotypical representation of the ideal Australian as a tall, tough, laconic, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, hard-gambling, independent, resourceful, anti-authoritarian, manual labouring, itinerant, white male’.⁶⁶ As Stephen Garton argues, this Anzac iconography has consistently been the representation of hegemonic masculinity in Australia, consistently defined (problematically) through war.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising that as early as 1964 the government was portraying national servicemen as the heirs of Anzac. The Minister for Territories, Charles Barnes, stated in Parliament: ‘I am certain of one thing: The majority of the young men of Australia will be in favour of this scheme because they still possess the spirit of the men who fought in the two world wars.’⁶⁸ Dapin too provides numerous examples of politicians applying the Anzac epithet to servicemen in Vietnam, including Prime Minister Harold Holt saying to soldiers in Bien Hoa on Anzac Day 1966: ‘You may have written another chapter in the history of Anzac’, and Treasurer William McMahon calling the men of 5 RAR about to deploy ‘the new Anzacs’.⁶⁹ Dapin also gives examples of press reports on Anzac Days which talked about the returned Vietnam soldiers participating in the marches as the newest caretakers of the legend.

Two aspects of Australia’s Vietnam War mythology have shaped a dominant narrative that Vietnam veterans were actually denied admission to the Anzac legend. The first was the anti-war movement and the mythologies attached to how activists supposedly (mis)treated Vietnam veterans. The dominant narrative, (re)told in numerous Vietnam veterans’ accounts, suggests that they were forced to return at night, told to wear civilian clothes so that protesters would not recognise them, and were either spat on or had paint or any number of items thrown at them. Some of this narrative, particularly the spitting, derive from popular

⁶⁶ Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 10.

⁶⁷ Stephen Garton, ‘War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 22, no. 56 (1998): 86.

⁶⁸ Cth of A, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 27 November 1964, 2936.

⁶⁹ Mark Dapin, “‘We too were Anzacs’: Were Vietnam veterans ever truly excluded from the Anzac tradition?”, in *The Honest History Book*, eds David Stephens and Alison Broinowski (Sydney: NewSouth, 2017), 80.

American mythologies of the anti-war movement. Other examples have derived from the true story of protester Nadine Jensen, who interrupted 1 RAR's welcome home parade in 1966 by smearing red paint on the lead marchers. This one incident has become the basis for numerous veterans' memories of their returns, even though there is no evidence to support it ever being more than an isolated example (albeit a very public one). Indeed, as Dapin points out, many Vietnam veterans are quick to remember the 'one' protester who (allegedly) attacked them, but seem to forget the hundreds of thousands of people who cheered them at welcome home parades or Anzac Day marches.⁷⁰

Yet, the truth is not so much that Vietnam veterans were denied admission to Anzac, so much as many Australians of the Vietnam era, especially young people, came to reject Anzac itself. Between the introduction of national service in 1964 and the end of Australia's Vietnam War in 1972, much had changed in Australian society, including the Anzac legend itself coming under considerable criticism. This was partly because of the anti-war movement, but it also came from generational change, with many young people seeing Anzac as clinging to a British, imperial, white, masculinist past.⁷¹ Vietnam veterans were thus returning to a vastly different Australia, where being seen as heirs of Anzac was not necessarily to be crowned in glory, but rather equated with outdated, militaristic ideas. It is in this atmosphere that the many myths about the anti-war movement and Vietnam veterans' homecomings have constructed dominant narratives about veterans being rejected by the Australian public at large.

The second major myth of Vietnam veterans' return is that they were not only rebuffed by the Australian public, but also by the RSL – the self-appointed guardians of the Anzac legend. This is a more complicated myth because while the RSL is often perceived as

⁷⁰ Dapin, "We too were Anzacs", 79-83; Dixon, 'Redeeming the Warrior', 214-228.

⁷¹ Carolyn Holbrook, 'Adaptable Anzac: Past, present and future', in *The Honest History Book*, 54; Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography*, 91-124; Donaldson and Lake, 'Whatever Happened to the Anti-War Movement?', 71-93.

a monolithic organisation, in reality it is a highly devolved association where local branches have significant autonomy. As such, some RSL branches very much did scorn returning Vietnam veterans with the adage that it was not a real war, making those veterans feel dejected. There is no way of knowing how widespread this practice really was, but what is clear is that it became a dominant trope and, in line with Thomson's points about how veterans compose their memories, the story of being rejected by the RSL permeates many veterans' narratives. Yet, the mythbuster Dapin went back to the records of the state and national RSLs, including browsing their publications such as *Reveille* in NSW. Dapin found ample references of support for servicemen in Vietnam among the national and state leadership, including a January 1972 letter from Frank Buxton in *Reveille* that read: 'The young veteran [sic] of Vietnam, now ex-servicemen, must be convinced by all means possible to join the League. They must be made aware that the League's future is theirs and that they now have obligations to care for the heritage handed down by past generations of ex-servicemen.'⁷² It is not the aim of this article to analyse the relationship between the RSL and Vietnam veterans, but rather to contextualise its significance: the supposed rejection that Vietnam veterans experienced at the hands of both the Australian public and the RSL left them feeling excluded from their rightful position within the Anzac legend.⁷³

The 1980s represented a confluence of changes that effectively (re)asserted Vietnam veterans' rightful place in a revived Anzac legend. First, through the publication of popular First World War histories by people such as Patsy Adam-Smith and Bill Gammage in the late 1970s, the Anzac mythology recast the diggers not as warmongers, but rather as the victims

⁷² Dapin, "We too were Anzacs", 83-91.

⁷³ Michael O'Brien notes that many national servicemen were discharged on the second anniversary of their engagement and wound up returning from Vietnam before the rest of their battalions. O'Brien claims that Army members sometimes did not invite, and would not permit, those national servicemen to march with their units when they returned to Australia. There is not enough evidence available to confirm or deny this assertion, but we note it here as another feature of some national servicemen's memories of return. See O'Brien, *Conscripts and Regulars with the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam*, 260. Some of Morris' oral history narrators also allude to not being able to march when the battalions returned: John Hindmarsh, interview by Ben Morris, Runaway Bay, 7 December 2008; Colin James McKendry, 1732102, interview by Ben Morris, Rockhampton, 1 December 2009; Victor Cecil Jenkin, 1732047, interview by Ben Morris, Charters Towers, 4 December 2008.

of warmongering politicians. New pop culture depictions of war, such as Peter Weir's 1981 film *Gallipoli*, began a long trend of cultural productions glorifying the Anzac mythology in film, literature and art.⁷⁴ Second, in the 1980s, as Christina Twomey argues, the Anzac legend also shifted to incorporate 'trauma' as a significant marker of the digger experience.⁷⁵ Third, the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (VVAA), founded in 1979, effectively framed Vietnam veterans as being neglected by the Commonwealth Government, particularly in relation to access to repatriation benefits and adequate health care. Finally, though not to the same extent as the First World War, since the 1980s there was also a steady rise in nonfiction, fiction and other cultural productions about Australia's Vietnam War, much of it written by veterans. Indeed, one indicative example of how these veterans positioned themselves is veteran Lex McAuley's 1986 book *The Battle of Long Tan*, subtitled *The Legend of Anzac Upheld*.⁷⁶ These changing dynamics of the veterans' community and of the Anzac mythology opened a space for Vietnam veterans to take their place within the reinvigorated legend. As Garton summarises, 'It is only since the 1980s, with Welcome Home marches and Vietnam Memorials, that a process of reintegrating Vietnam veterans into a larger Anzac story of mateship, sacrifice and noble manly endeavour has begun.'⁷⁷ The process of aligning Vietnam veterans within the Anzac myth was therefore intricately tied to the resurrection of the Anzac mythology in the 1980s. It also coincided with Vietnam veterans' desire to be more enthusiastically welcomed into the RSL.

Essentially, Vietnam veterans fought long and hard to be recognised as part of Australia's Anzac legend, and it is for this reason that they cling to aspects of their own

⁷⁴ Donaldson and Lake, 'Whatever Happened to the Anti-War Movement?', 90-91; Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography*, 124-42.

⁷⁵ Christina Twomey, 'Trauma and the Reinvigoration Anzac: An Argument', *History Australia* 10, no. 3 (2013): 85-108.

⁷⁶ Peter Pierce, 'Australian and American Literature of the Vietnam War', in Doyle, Grey and Pierce, *Australia's Vietnam War*, 111-12. See also Donna Coates, 'Coming Home: The Return of the (Australian Vietnam War) Soldier', *Southerly* 65, no. 2 (2005): 105-17.

⁷⁷ Garton, 'War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia', 93.

mythology that fit the Anzac narrative – including the myth of volunteerism. Situating Vietnam veterans within the Anzac legend has the added dimension of differentiating themselves from the US forces in Vietnam, which included large numbers of conscripts who (so it was often claimed) fought poorly. Martin Crotty and Craig Stockings describe the archetypal ANZAC as:

physically imposing, mentally stoic, yet mercurial in spirit. He is rough around the edges but has an unflappable sense of fair play, natural justice, and deep democratic urges. He fights hard but plays by the rules. *He is distinct insofar as he is an eager volunteer with no desire to kill, but rather resigned to do his terrible duty by his nation and his mates. He is not a conscript, for compulsion is too close to reluctance.*⁷⁸

It is these final characteristics which underpin so many Vietnam veterans' determination to see themselves as volunteers, just like their predecessors in the First and Second World Wars. This has been quite a conscious project, as most of Morris' narrators attempted to position themselves within the Anzac legend. Some related their Vietnam experience to grandfathers', great uncles', fathers' and uncles' service in previous wars, while others made connections with the grand Anzac tradition of volunteering to serve their country in distant lands because of patriotic motivation.⁷⁹

The importance of the volunteer serviceman and woman still bears significant weight in the contemporary Australian Defence Force (ADF). Since the end of national service in 1972-73 and the return to an all-volunteer force, there has been a gradual shift in how the ADF has tried to portray an image of professionalisation. As Australia again went to unpopular wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the status of ADF members as

⁷⁸ Martin Crotty and Craig Stockings, 'The Minefield of Australian Military History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 4 (2014): 583. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Brian Donald Gordon, interviewed by Ben Morris, Minden, 18 April 2007; James Edward Langham, interviewed by Ben Morris, Condon, 28 July 2012; Michael Vincent Kinsella, interviewed by Ben Morris, Perth, 27 June 2012.

‘professionals’ who were doing their job held significant clout, even among anti-war protesters who were generally able to separate the politics from the personnel. Yet, as Afghanistan veteran James Brown has written, the Anzac mythology continues to weigh heavily on these men and women. James argues that current members of the ADF often measure themselves against the Anzac legend, and the digger mythology of the egalitarian, heroic larrikin undermines the importance of officers as commanders, detracting from the pursuit of a culture of excellence.⁸⁰ It seems that even as the ‘volunteer’ has morphed into the ‘professional’ soldier, still the Anzac mythology (mis)shapes civilian and military perceptions of service in the ADF.

Of course, to the lay outsider civilian, the fact that someone was a national service conscript had no bearing on their efforts in Vietnam, the traumas they faced on the battlefield, and the difficulties returning to Australia. As Stockings argues, debunking myths of Australian military history is in no way meant to take away from the valiant efforts and challenges faced by servicemen and women.⁸¹ Even so, ‘alternative facts’ risk definitively casting Vietnam veterans in an inaccurate light. For veterans caught in the Anzac circus (to borrow Carolyn Holbrook’s term),⁸² such aspects of their service can represent a central pillar of how they have composed their memories and their identities as Vietnam veterans. The challenge for the historians and veterans alike is to make sense of this myth and find ways to (re)think Vietnam veterans’ individual and collective place in Australian military history.

Conclusion

The 1964 amendments to the *Defence Act* which removed the volunteering section of the Attestation form changed a tradition that had been nurtured in two world wars, and which

⁸⁰ Brown, *Anzac’s Long Shadow*, 89-106.

⁸¹ Stockings, ‘Introduction: The Walking “Undead” and Australian Military History’, 8-9.

⁸² Carolyn Holbrook, ‘Anzac offers a new way to join Team Australia’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 April 2016, available from <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/anzac-season-turning-war-memory-into-a-nationalist-festival-is-wrong-20160418-go8uhe.html>, accessed 11 April 2018.

many men of the Australian Army held sacred. Fraser's statement of 13 May 1966 theoretically denied commanders' ability to exclude any soldiers who did not wish to deploy overseas. While the Army's officers and enlisted men observed the letter of the law by removing any documentation, oral histories suggest that some still attempted to preserve the tradition by asking men to declare orally or on parade that they were volunteers. These practices, dubious though they may have been, have fuelled a mythology that all servicemen in Vietnam were volunteers. The myth has endured because in many ways it makes sense: asking for volunteers represented a fair go for all members and reflected the need to ensure that the best team was deployed to the war. Seeing all servicemen in Vietnam as volunteers also nicely aligns Vietnam service with the Anzac legend. Yet, as this article has shown, the notion of the volunteer serviceman was, fundamentally, another myth of Australian military history.

Craig Stockings argues that Australia's military history myths 'appeal to instinct and sentiment more than reason', and that is certainly the case in relation to the idea of the volunteer national serviceman. Stockings further argues that such myths do have consequences:

The persistent misunderstanding and misrepresentation enshrined in the myths of Australian military history skewer proper understandings and interpretations of this nation's military heritage. They warp and twist our perceptions of war. They shape our picture of ourselves in obscuring and inaccurate ways. Moreover, they situate our attitudes to the past falsely, distort our reading of the present and our expectations for the future. They are monsters of the mind.⁸³

⁸³ Craig Stockings, 'Introduction: Myths and Australian Military History', 2-3.

To use oral historian Paul Thompson's words, military historians 'sit at the feet' of their interviewees and listen.⁸⁴ They must not be seduced by the legend, but critically assess the material and information they are given. Alistair Thomson argues that veterans often tell their stories to ease their conscience and fit the national legend. Thomson and Seal suggest that when the private and public myths are compared, they are in constant interchange, with unresolved issues appearing.⁸⁵ This is most certainly the case in the mythology of the volunteer soldier in Vietnam.

Both Thomson and Seal claim that the mythmakers of Anzac narrative have not been entirely innocent in their construction of the legend.⁸⁶ In this context, senior officers and warrant officers who profess the unwritten lore of the Army unconsciously carried the great volunteer tradition of AIF into the era of the Vietnam War. The Royal Australian Regiment elite held strong feelings about the status of the Second World War soldiers. These men were their heroes and they wished to follow in their footsteps. Senior officers, authors of military histories and unit histories, and veterans' oral testimonies reflect what oral history theory suggest will happen when collecting interviews and oral histories: narrators come to an interview with an agenda, and they compose their memories to fit that agenda and dominant narrative. It is just that the narrative that all Australian servicemen in Vietnam were volunteers is, fundamentally, a myth. While unwilling soldiers were not forcefully marched onto boats, ships and planes to be deployed to Vietnam, the full weight of the legislation and Army authority was brought to bear on recalcitrant soldiers. However, the underlying sentiment was that the regimental elite wanted only volunteers, and in many veterans' memory that is what they got.

⁸⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

⁸⁵ Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, 120-1; Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 4-7.

⁸⁶ Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, 45; Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 4-7.