

## **Australian War Memorial. Dedication of Commemorative Plaque.**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008 an unveiling of a commemorative plaque was performed in the western courtyard of the Australian War Memorial.

The plaque was to recognize the service of the **Australian Civilian Surgical/Medical Teams** sent to S.Vietnam under the South East Asian Treaty (SEATO) scheme. Over three hundred people attended the ceremony.

Teams served from 1964 to 1972 in Long Xuyen, Bien Hoa, Vung Tau, and Ba Ria under arduous and hazardous conditions. Vietnamese hospitals were primitive, to say the least.

The Aims of the SEATO Surgical/Medical Teams were threefold:

- \* to provide a diplomatic gesture by providing a general Surgical/Medical service of quality to the RVN.
- \* to instruct Vietnamese medical and paramedical personnel and,
- \* to treat any person who presented at the hospital – to establish mutual goodwill “winning hearts and minds” programme.

This was sometimes done under life threatening situations. One such situation was the Tet offensive of 1968. In addition there were air incidents, risk from collateral damage and infectious diseases.

In Canberra it was a glorious spring day and the Band of the Royal Military College of Australia played along with the Rugby Choir

Prayers were by chaplain John Brownbill RFD

Commemorative Address was by -

Dr Bernie Dunn MBChB FFARACS

Unveiling of Commemorative Plaque by -

Mr John Scott MB BS FRCS FRACS -Bien Hoa 1967-68

Mrs Susan Sherron( nee Terry) BA MRCNA – Long Xuyen 1964

Mr Clive Bond DR DO DC –Long Xuyen 1967-68

Emeritus Professor Jennifer James AM - Vung Tau 1966-67

## **The History of the SEATO Civilian Surgical/Medical Teams-**

In the late 1950s, early 60s, Australian membership of the South East Asian Treaty Organization, brought with it the requirements to nominate forces to contribute to planned contingencies. These would be put into effect if the member nations or protocol states were threatened by subversion or aggression by a communist state.

The Australian Civilian Surgical/Medical Teams were to be part of these contingency plans for South Vietnam

Both the Civilian Surgical Teams and the Military Advisory Group were a part of the bipartisan SEATO contingency planning by the (then) Department of External Affairs and the Department of Defence.

Whilst administratively the Australian SEATO surgical teams came under the direction of the Department of External Affairs and the Australian Embassy in Saigon, they shared a common bond with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) operationally. For the SEATO Civilian Surgical Teams were also under the operational command of the Commander of the US Military Advisory Council Vietnam (COMUSMACV). For as in both World Wars, the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Conflict, and unlike the recent events in East Timor, official records show that the ADF was not fully independent whilst in Vietnam (McNeill 1991).

The hospitals where the civilian Teams worked were vetted as part of the US “many Flags programme”, and the teams were also responsive to USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) and the Province Chief for the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), who was usually a military commander.

Team members have been awarded the Australian Active Services Medal (AASM). They assisted the Australian Defence Force in wartime, they provided assistance to, and served with an allied country (the USA and the Republic of Vietnam) and they incurred danger from hostile enemy forces during hostilities.



The Plaque

Photos of "THE TEAM" then and now

THEN



The Long Xuyen Surgical Team of 1967-68 (Taken 1967 in Long Xuyen)

- Top left: Clive Bond, Dr Tom Calov, Dr Welby Skinner, Howard Menzies  
Dr Malcolm Goldsmith,
- Mid Left: Brenda Wilton, Kay Parnell, Dr Gordon Hudson, Dr Brian Kearney,  
Dr Ken Doust(Leader),
- Low Left: Janice Rayner, Beryl Nichols, Loraine Bignall, Janet Glasson,  
Angela Ross.

And Now



Photo taken 10th Oct 2008.

Left to Rt.= Brenda Wilton, Angela Ross, Dr Brian Kearney, Clive Bond, Dr Ken Doust, Dr Gordon Hudson, Kay Parnell.