



## **INQUIRY INTO RECOGNITION FOR MEMBERS AND FAMILIES OF MEMBERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE WHO ARE INJURED, WOUNDED, OR KILLED IN OR AS A RESULT OF SERVICE – AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION**

The Air Force Association welcomes the opportunity to provide input on the notion of recognising members and families of Australian Defence Force members who are injured, wounded or killed in or because of service.

The matter has unearthed a wide mix of opinions. Central to the concern of those who are not in favour of recognition is the risk of devaluing the Honours and Awards System with an award that recognises minor injuries leading to an abuse of the awards system. Others who have suffered severe physical and mental trauma during service favour some form of recognition.

Leading the argument, is whether injury or death on warlike operations is worthier of recognition than if it occurred on non-warlike operations or during day-to-day duties, including training. Day-to-day duties and training having no operational imperative. Injuries or worse on these activities could be considered workplace accidents. Serious as they may be, they are no different if they had occurred in the civilian workplace. Commanders and supervisors of these activities have a legal obligation to postpone or pause events if personnel are endangered.

Warlike operations bring extreme personal risk. There is an operational imperative with an expectation of casualties. Certain non-warlike operations have a high degree of risk. Casualties could occur but are not expected. In either situation, servicemen and women are exposed to a degree of danger above and beyond that of normal peacetime duty. The classification of operations as either warlike or non-warlike is made by the Minister for Defence. The commitment of our servicemen and women to these high-risk activities is acknowledged in the Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant. Accordingly, there seems a case for recognition of injury, disease or death that has occurred in the prosecution of these type of operations.

Crucial to any award is its criteria that can either value or devalue an award. Injuries incurred on warlike and non-warlike operations can be mild through to life changing and would need to involve more than minimum medical intervention to attract an award. Injuries could include physical wounds, mental health disorders and diseases but they would need to be documented and occur as a direct result of these operations. Perhaps, an injury or illness that requires medical evacuation might serve to gauge its severity.

Physical wounds are more easily assessed for severity. The formal diagnosis of PTSD in 1980 and subsequent treatments reveal the condition may last for years and have serious debilitating effects. In such cases, an award may be granted even after completing a tour of

duty provided formal diagnosis of the condition directly attributes the condition to operations. Moreover, some recent ADF operations have occurred where despite precautionary measures personnel have been exposed to serious diseases. The criteria for an award would need to be prescriptive to avoid abuse and ensure its support of the veteran and wider communities.

The Australian Honours and Awards System includes, among other awards, operational service medals, campaign medals, long service medals, commemorative medals and the Champion Shots Medal. Veterans in any campaign have varying experiences and exposure to danger. However, they are awarded the same campaign medal. Not all incur serious injury, death or disease which are significant additional personal sacrifices, many with serious lifelong wellbeing consequences. Therefore, it would seem appropriate for recognition of serious injury, death or disease incurred on warlike and non-warlike operations through medallic means under this system. Next of Kin of deceased members could be provided with a certificate expressing the gratitude of a grateful nation.

An award for injury, disease or death during military service is not a novel idea. France, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden and Croatia are among the countries that provide awards for wounds and death that have occurred during some form of service; usually, though not exclusively to military personnel during warlike operations. Some awards are in the form of commemorative emblems, eg United Kingdom's Elizabeth Cross, but most are medallic in nature.

Suggesting a starting point from when such an award should commence is problematic for fear those who suffered prior to the starting point may feel devalued. However, it seems reasonable there is merit to include the Vietnam War as a qualifying service given 521 died and over 3,000 received physical injuries. The full extent of the mental trauma from this conflict will probably never be accurately calculated noting that PTSD was not formally diagnosed until 1980 and not widely accepted as an illness until recent times. Many Vietnam veterans were among the first Australian's to experience long concentrations of exposure to combat. Returning Service personnel endured rejection from large sections of the Australian community for many decades. Their inclusion for consideration in such an award may further alleviate some ongoing suffering.

Australia formally withdrew from the Vietnam War in December 1972, and although the Australian Honours and Awards System was introduced on February 15th, 1975, Australian awards have been created prior to the System's establishment, eg Australian Active Service Medal 1945-1975. Also, the Australian Honours and Awards System has provided retrospective consideration for awards prior to its existence, eg LTCOL Harry Smith, SG, MC (ret'd) who was decorated for his leadership and command during the Battle of Long Tan.

It's conceivable that advice on death, injury or disease attributable to warlike and non-warlike operations may not be available on death or separation from service. Respective reconsideration should be available in such cases. Also, because it is likely some servicemen and women will feel aggrieved if they have had an application rejected for such award, an appeal process to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal should be in place.

Australian Defence personnel have been involved in a myriad of warlike and non-warlike operations following the Vietnam War. Limb loss and serious mental trauma are not

uncommon. An award that recognises mental injuries may also encourage affected veterans to seek help for their condition. Medallic recognition will not compensate the loss of life or injury but would likely provide emotional support for the injured veteran or a deceased veteran's family.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carl Schiller".

Group Captain Carl Schiller, OAM CSM (Retd)  
National President  
Air Force Association  
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