

The Vietnam War was a savage encounter with the USA losing more than 300,000 men. It was fought in an attempt to prevent communism getting a foothold in this Asian area. It failed of course. If the French had allowed free elections to take place. Vietnam would not have divided into North and South in conflict with each other and, a National Government could have been elected.

Forty years have passed since the Battle of Long Tan in the Vietnamese War and in Australia, memories of that battle, are strong and with 18 men dieing in, August 1966, why wouldn't they be.

Physical injuries are many in wartime; but the mind is a scarred memory: veterans live with these haunting memories.

In Australia, many families had problems with the unpopular ballet of young men into the forces. Many burnt their cards publicly and went underground. The pain to these families was intense and in some cases dividing parents forever. Who can ever forget the sight of thousands of people marching in the streets of Melbourne voicing objections to that unpopular war?

War memories are never pleasant and it is not merely the destruction of lives and the mutilation of bodies. But the catastrophic destruction of the environment by Agent Orange: the deliberate destruction of trees and foliage by the use of napalm bombs.

The use of Agent Orange caused ill health amongst the troops and no wonder! The reports from returned men of the use of water trucks supplying men with water and then carrying Agent Orange in the same truck. First, carrying Agent Orange for destructive purposes and then after a mere wash of the truck by a sprinkle of water and then reverting to carting of water for drinking purposes.

Although the authorities deny the ill effects of Agent Orange, the facts are that children born to returned men are born mutilated. Therefore, the wounds of mutilation pass on to innocent victims, in the next generation certainly, something to reflect on! It is with shame and wonder I think of this recollection. Shame that it should ever have happened and wonder at the forgiveness of people: both Australian and Vietnamese. And more than that, they come to live in our midst. It is good that this happens but it will be generations before there is eradication of these events.

In total, the USA suffered 300,000 deaths with many wounded.

The battle of Long Tan served its purpose in that the enemy lost that battle, but unfortunately, the victory did not alter the course of the war. The Battle at Long Tan was won but the war was lost.

Our memories recall the protest marches. The vilification of the young men who protested their calling up. If only our reflections on the Viet war could influence potential wars of the future. And we could resort to diplomatic battles for the betterment of society. A more active United Nations supported by all nations.