

## READER FEEDBACK

*"This book embodies not only our team-work, but our compassion and empathy as we dealt with the confronting human cost of war head on. " .... LTCOL Michael Naughton OBE (Rtd), Commanding Officer 1AFH 1969/70*

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*"The women and men who served there, who treated cared for, looked after all the wounded and sick are in my mind the true heroes of the Vietnam war. I will never forget the unknown nurse who spoke to me in a dark ward as I woke from surgery extremely distressed and vomiting " You're safe here Private Berry ". I thank them all daily" ..... Michael Berry (7RAR)*

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*"Well , I have just about finished reading all the print in the book, and that probably sounds a bit daft, but it is very easy to drift through it, doing mostly the great visuals, (and I've done plenty of drifting!), but the text is just wonderful ... and the research and work that has gone into it is extraordinary. There is just so much information about the many aspects of the Unit's operation that I was quite ignorant of, and I find it all quite riveting!*

*The style and brilliant presentation, with so much personal input, must surely make it unique in the genre..." ..... Ruth Devine (LT Ruth Page, RAANC, 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Field Hospital SVN 69/70)*

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*"Take a bow all involved. One of the most outstanding unit book on Vietnam units I have ever read. What a great publication and it is certainly a collectors must have." .... Graham Edwards AM (7RAR)*

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*"Who should read this book? Anyone who was a patient in either 2 Field Ambulance, 8 Field Ambulance, or 1 Australian Field Hospital. You will learn a lot about what was going on in the background during your stay as a patient in these establishments. I would add that anyone who is a relative or a friend of one of the patients should also read the book, it will help you understand what it was like to be there and give you a very good appreciation of the wonderful work that the medical staff did to keep our diggers alive and help them recover. And of course, anyone who worked in Vietnam as amember of the medical fraternity, whether a medic, a surgeon, a nurse, or a member of the Red Cross." ..... Karl Metcalf(7RAR)*

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*"Much has been written about Australia's role in the Vietnam War. There are many written histories by academics, journalists, historians, and first-hand accounts by veterans. All are valuable to our knowledge and understanding as a people and as a nation, but something was missing. Who cared for our sick and wounded? How was it done?*

*Call Sign VAMPIRE fills a long-held void. A space where the premier Australian medical unit of the age is showcased by its veterans. The 1st (Aust) Field Hospital Association is to be commended for publishing an outstanding record of the hospital's achievement, a story of and about its members, and their commitment to the survival and welfare of the Australian and New Zealand Digger, who admire them beyond words." ..... MAJ Geoff Jones Rtd (RAAMC)*

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*"Soldiers who found themselves as patients may well be amazed of the behind the scenes which occurred to restore them to good health or prepare them for evacuation home." .... Kathy Mortimer former FLTLT, RAAF*

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I received the book, thank you so much! Apart from the fact it is a beautiful book...I now have SUCH an amazing resource.

Sarah Fulford

BA

MPhilProject Co-ordinator Curtin School of Allied

HealthPRECRU Co-ordinator Curtin School of

Nursing

## REVIEW by MAJOR GENERAL John PEARN AO RFD MD

Life is enriched by the publication of heritage records of great events. For the many hundreds of men and women who served in 1 Australian Field Hospital during the Vietnam War, *“Call Sign Vampire”* is a record of one of the most significant events in their lives. For the thousands of wounded, injured and sick Australian servicemen, and others besides, recollections of their treatment as inpatients or outpatients in that unique Hospital remain as one of their defining experiences of the Vietnam War.

*Call Sign Vampire* is an elegant, case-bound volume which tells the narrative of this pivotal medical unit; and of its service to the more than 50,000 Australian servicemen who served in that War. It tells also of the role which this Hospital played in the clinical care of those who were treated by its skilled teams. This fine volume has the subtitle, “The Inside Story of an Australian Field Hospital during the Vietnam War”; and in this context, this book is about people – about people serving in diverse roles in order that their patients might receive best-practice care.

This book tells of the teamwork and essential coordinated service of nurses, medics, administrators and clerks, caterers, field hygienists, quartermasters, pharmacists, chaplains, doctors, radiographers and skilled scientists. It tells of the dedicated service of hundreds of nurses and medics; and of the 141 doctors, the majority of whom came from the ranks of the Citizen Military Forces to bring their specialist skills as part of the Forward Surgical Teams which saved the lives and limbs of so many. It tells of the outreach programs of those, based in the Hospital, who worked in the Vietnamese civilian community that life might be healthier, safer and enriched.

In this book, one reads and sees the photographs of the arrival of surviving casualties at the Vampire Pad, and the quiet horror of witnessing a stretchered soldier, a mine victim, into the resuscitation bay. It tells of the teamwork needed to care for patients, and of Medevac Day – “A day not to be missed... Everyone turned out... And we had such joy in waiving those boys off and wishing them well for the next part of the journey home”. In these pages, there is a record of the drama, pathos, and of the compassion and counselling which is part of the life of a military hospital on hot operational service. 1 Australian Field Hospital was raised on 1 April 1968 and in its more than three years of service, its teams developed skills which became the foundation of much doctrine in the Australian Defence Force since that time. The survival rate of soldiers arriving at the Hospital alive was 99 percent – an audit of unprecedented success in Australian military history.

The Hospital closed on 25 November 1971. This fine book is its enduring memorial.

Major General John Pearn AO RFD MD

Surgeon General

Rtd Australian Defence

Force

October 2021.

## **Book Review – Call Sign Vampire by Karl Metcalf 7RAR**

posted to the 7RAR Facebook group 6 Jul 2021

This book is a history of 1 Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau, brought to life by the recollections of those who were there, told in their own words. You can feel the full range of their experiences: exhaustion from dealing with the never-ending Dustoff casualties; compassion for their patients; elation when a patient, thought to have no hope of survival, pulls through; sadness at the soldiers declared 'Dead on Arrival'; and even greater sadness when a very seriously ill patient dies under their care. That last event was fortunately very rare, with the hospital recording a phenomenal survival rate of 99%.

Coming through strongly in the book is the incredible stress that all members of the hospital experienced dealing with the very heavy workload and shocking injuries of their patients. The book pulls no punches, it tells it as it was, direct and to the point: gross trauma, resuscitation, severe pain, amputations, deaths, and disposing of body parts. These are but a few of the stressful episodes encountered by those who worked there. Added to by never knowing when the Dustoff siren would next blare its strident wailing across the hospital, calling all hands on deck, including those not on duty, to deal with the next lot of casualties.

The book is well set out and covers the medical evacuation chain from the medics in the field and the Dustoff helicopters through to triage, theatre, wards, and either recovery and return to unit or medical evacuation to Australia. Every department of the hospital has been described in its own chapter.

The book has many great photographs. Perhaps the most interesting are those showing the medical staff at work: Dustoffs picking up patients in the field, arriving at the Vampire helipad, bringing them into triage, resuscitation (where necessary) and preparation in triage, surgery in the operating theatre, and medevac to Australia. And it has photos and recollections of some of the patients, including a very moving section covering 7 RAR's Graham Edwards, AM.

Who should read this book? Anyone who was a patient in either 2 Field Ambulance, 8 Field Ambulance, or 1 Australian Field Hospital. You will learn a lot about what was going on in the background during your stay as a patient in these establishments. I would add that anyone who is a relative or a friend of one of the patients should also read the book, it will help you understand what it was like to be there and give you a very good appreciation of the wonderful work that the medical staff did to keep our diggers alive and help them recover. And of course, anyone who worked in Vietnam as a member of the medical fraternity, whether a medic, a surgeon, a nurse, or a member of the Red Cross.

Having written the above I must now admit that I am biased. I was a patient in 8 Field Ambulance at Nui Dat (RPG shrapnel right buttock – I naively asked the doctor if he could simply pluck it out with a pair of tweezers - I knew nothing about the process of debridement but was soon to find out). And a patient in 1 Australian Field Hospital (bullet through sole of the left foot – I was so delighted to be alive in triage that the nurse politely but firmly told me to keep quiet – they were treating a very seriously wounded soldier nearby). I am very grateful to the medical staff for my treatment.

I congratulate the team that put Call Sign Vampire together. They have done a great job.