

The new official history of the Agent Orange controversy to be released during 2019

DOCTOR Peter Yule began writing the new volume of the Official History of the Vietnam War three years ago.

He will finish it this year (2019).

The new history will be titled something like Health and Medical Legacies of the Vietnam War and as well as a rewriting of the Agent Orange controversy, will look into the vast problem of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other psychological fall-out from war trauma.

We campaigned for a new official history volume to be commissioned because we believed the original account of the Agent Orange controversy in Volume 3 of the Official History to be a shocker. It was both inaccurate and insulting.

It was written by FB Smith and focused on the Agent Orange Royal Commission, falsely claiming that the campaigning veterans were motivated by greed and that they had no valid case to present..

Both claims were ridiculous.

As for the claim the campaigning veterans were greedy, FB Smith ignored the fact that the veterans' submission to the Royal Commission plainly stated that no extra compensation was sought. The veterans simply believed that DVA, in denying any link between exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam and certain cancers, was breaking existing Repatriation law. This was because, whilst there was good scientific evidence for and against the link, Repatriation law demanded war veterans be given the 'benefit-of-the-doubt'.

So it was not greed that motivated Phil Thompson and the other campaigning veterans, just a need to for veterans to be treated fairly inside the existing system.

FB Smith's claim that the veterans had no case to present avoided the fact that the Royal Commission found that under Repatriation law, soft tissue sarcoma (with its very many varieties) and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma could be linked to exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. And that was after the law was changed during the Royal Commission to make the link harder to establish.

Whether FB Smith's viscous attack on the campaigning veterans and his incorrect claim that the veterans had no case were due to incompetence or something else is not known.

The VVFA campaign was eventually (after some 20 years) successful.

In 2013, the new Director of the War Memorial, Dr Brendan Nelson, responded to a document we sent him, and invited us to a meeting. In 2014 the Australian War Memorial Council ordered a scoping study. The scoping study criticised FB Smith's account and recommended a new history be written. This was followed by the War Memorial Council commissioning a new history from Melbourne historian, Dr Peter Yule.

Now, three years into the project, Dr Yule and his team have turned into the straight.

They have interviewed well over 100 randomly selected veterans as well as surveying a mountain of information, including listening to our case. Dr Yule has even been to Vietnam to increase his understanding.

We are grateful to the War Memorial Council and to Dr Brendan Nelson for this opportunity to correct this long-standing blight on the reputation of Phil Thompson and his team of campaigning Vietnam veterans and to correct the long-standing mis-information on the veterans' case before the Agent Orange Royal Commission.