

Is the Australian Defence Force a Responsible Citizen? *By Damien Staveley*

Citizenship is defined as “the character of an individual viewed as a member of society; behaviour in terms of the duties, obligations, and functions of a citizen.”¹ When talking about the Australian Defence Force it’s the last three examples in that description of citizenship that are important; their duties, obligations, and function as a citizen. It’s these examples that also apply to the Australian public and Government, who like to think that they are upholding them by remembering, recognising and supporting our ADF veterans. There are many services, memorials and activities held each year, also, veterans receive medals and ceremonies to thank them for what they have done for their country. On top of this they also receive compensation for their services and many counselling services too. However, there are some who believe they do not receive enough recognition, support or compensation for what they have done. If this is true, does it constitute bad citizenship, and if so, to whom, the ADF, or the Australian Government and people?

Functions

The function of the Australian Defence Force is to follow orders from the government but also to advise and demand from the government. It could be said that this is why the government and the Australian public remembers ADF veterans in so many different ways. From 2006 to 2008 the government has spent more than 115 million dollars on services, memorials and activities². This money has been used to upgrade and maintain memorials, conduct services, open exhibitions and many more things. Australians also attend ceremonies each year on certain days, to honour the memory of those who have served. In total, there are 8 days dedicated to remembrance³. One of the major days of remembrance and honour is ANZAC Day. On this day tens of thousands of Australians attend dawn services and ANZAC ceremonies to mourn their losses and remember those who put their lives on the line for their country. Many people go to different ceremonies usually because of their location; thousands of Australians head over to arguably the most significant service of them all, at Gallipoli. Thousands also flock to national ceremonies that are held in places such as Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, as can be seen in Source 1, and others choose to go to smaller services in their own community. This would have to be the most common way that Australians choose to pay their respects, most likely because of their high significance. However ceremonies and services are not the only way we remember, there are also a number of smaller gestures that occur, such as the one minute silence followed by saying the Ode of Remembrance at the local RSL; a small but important part of communities. Medals are also given out to soldiers who have served exceptionally in combat, even if what they did occurred decades ago. For example three ADF veterans, pictured



Source 1: “In Brisbane, 15,000 people began jostling for positions in the city’s Anzac Square well before 4am.”
(The Age, 2008, online)

¹ Randomhouse, 2006, online

² Walker, 2007, online

³ DVA, 2008, online



Source 2: (L-R) Dave Sabben, Harry Smith and (far right) Geoff Kendall (Smith, K., 2008, online)

in Source 2, who served in Vietnam and fought in the Battle of Long Tan on August 18, 1966, were all given a Star of Gallantry in August 2008; 42 years after the actual battle took place⁴. All these different means of remembrance is the Australian people's and government's way of recognising ADF demands, by remembering ADF personnel; this function is one positive aspect of what they do for the Defence Force and their veterans.

Duties

Even with all of this remembrance, some believe that ADF veterans are not being supported enough by the government or some of the public, feeling as though their duty to Australia means nothing to them, and the ADF is only making progress very slowly. The main cause for concern is the amount of compensation they receive. Even though



Source 3: "You may think you found the right formula for dividing your pension income but there's a good chance you got it wrong." (Pape, G., 2008, online)

veterans do get a pension there are arguments about how much it should be because of the struggles faced by many families, as depicted in Source 3. Deciding this is a difficult job however, because of the different types of pensions available and the requirements needed to qualify for them there are a number of different factors to think of. Currently, there are eight pension types and nineteen allowance schemes available. At present, the Single Service Pension is \$546.80 per fortnight, only recently has this slightly increased; prior to 20th March 2008 the pension was \$9.10 less⁵. This is a welcome increase, and shows that the Defence Force is slowly getting results from the government, but it has taken so long in the process, it should have happened much sooner, especially considering Australian troops have been involved in the recent "War on Terror" conflict overseas since 2001, meaning that there are a vast number of newly injured,

mentally scarred and disabled Defence Force members that will be seeking help each year. There have also been many struggles in the past regarding compensation claims, usually about injury, sickness or death. This is quite saddening considering these men, who volunteered to risk their lives for the sake of their country, are now fighting for their own wellbeing. A recent case involves the veterans who were involved in secret nuclear testing in Maralinga, South Australia, fifty-two years ago, who are still fighting for recognition and compensation⁶. More evidence to show that veterans are being affected is the shocking statistics that as of 2006 there had been seventy-nine suicides by defence personnel in the past nine years⁷. This example tells us that our diggers aren't being supported sufficiently enough financially, but also



Source 4: A signpost marking where the nuclear tests in Maralinga were carried out and the effects that still remain. (BBC, 2001, online)

⁴ The Australian, 2008, online

⁵ DVA, 2008, online

⁶ Haxton, N. 2008, online

⁷ Nicholson, B., 2006, online

emotionally. Suicide has also sparked a number of compensation suits, with families blaming the ADF and therefore wanting to make them pay for the pain that they caused. This is not true however, with the Federal Government and independent bodies helping to try and solve the problem created by not the ADF, but by war. Some Australian war veterans are not being supported sufficiently enough by the government or by members of the public, which shows a very immoral sense of judgement and duty by these people.

Obligations

The Australian Defence Force tries hard to adequately help their personnel mentally and socially during their time in service and after they have served, fulfilling their obligation to



Source 5: The Stepping Out Program aims at transitioning people from military to civilian life. (DVA, 2008, online)

take care of Defence Force employees. One way the ADF helps their service men and women socially and psychologically after they have served is by the numerous counselling services available. One of the latest is the Stepping Out Program, which has completed a successful trial in Townsville and has been rolled out nationally, with the expansion to be complete by the end of 2008. The program, which was developed in consultation with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health is aimed at equipping ADF personnel with the skills needed for the transition into civilian life. The Stepping Out Program is available free to all ADF members in the process of leaving the military or

who have left within the last 12 months. This positive initiative is an important part to the social wellbeing of these people, without the program they may suffer from some very common disturbances, such as antisocialism. A way that Defence Force members are helped during service is by having counselling services available to them from DCO Defence Service Workers, where they are offered support and/or advice. These services are available to all ADF personnel and their families via the nearest DCO Office, which are located throughout Australia. The Director General of the Defence Community Organisation says the program is there for people to “help them cope with aspects of the Defence lifestyle which may be new or different to them”⁸. This program is beneficial to the psychological wellbeing of Australian Defence members and families. There are also many psychological benefits to come, which will provide much needed help to those severely in need, such as the people who are on the verge of committing

suicide. An independent study was launched by the Federal Government into the cause and extent of veteran suicide, with results due December 2008. These results will help to improve mental health care among ADF veterans so that they can overcome their issues and live a long, normal and healthy life. However not all help by the ADF is received well by the public. In 2007 it was discovered that the Navy was paying for women sailors to have breast enlargement surgery for cosmetic reasons only, the reason given by the Navy was that it was to address psychological issues⁹. This is not a sensible thing to do, and



Source 6: It was concluded by the Australian public that breast augmentation was not a suitable means of helping a psychological problem. (The Sunday Telegraph, 2007, online)

⁸ Callan, M., 2005, online

⁹ Markson, S., 2007, online

the practice was soon put to a stop in February 2008, when Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon ordered a full review into the exercise, saying “my instinct is to issue an immediate directive to put a stop to it¹⁰.” Even with a few setbacks in the name of support, the Australian Defence Force successfully and effectively implements its obligation supports their current and past personnel in many different social and psychological instances.

Responsible Citizenship?

Members of the Australian Defence Force need to be recognised and remembered for their services to Australia. They receive services and ceremonies dedicated to the remembrance of what they did, and also medals as a symbol of their achievement. There are also a vast number of smaller things Australians do to remember ADF veterans. Although there is some trepidation as to whether or not they are being treated to the fullest respect of which they deserve. There are ongoing compensation battles happening between the Government and the veterans, in which the Government spends more money in legal fees than they would if they just simply compensate sufficiently. Also there are issues of emotional support for suicide, because of the alarming figures, however the government has many programs available to help ADF members through this and the other effects service may be having on them. Even though the Australian Government and people do things to honour the memory of our Defence Force veterans, they don't remember and recognise them enough. The ADF should be more demanding of the government, asking for better support and less resistance to compensation from the government. However the relationship between the government and the Defence Force is a complicated and complex one, and is not like a normal working relationship between employer and employee. The chain of command dictates that the ADF is an employee of the government, so even if the ADF isn't asking enough of the government, in the end they shouldn't have to; the government should be enough of a responsible citizen and have initiative to do what is right. Citizenship requires upholding the behavioural code of fulfilling their duties, obligations and functions as citizens. The Australian Defence Force does this, the Australian government and people do not.

¹⁰ Fitzgibbon, J., 2008, online

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Figure 4: (2001) *Australia Confronts UK Over N-Tests*. [online] Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1326580.stm> [2008, October 24]

Figure 5: (2008) *Stepping Out Program*. [online] Available: http://www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs/group_programmes_doco/P01433.pdf [2008, October 30]

Figure 6: (2007) *Taxpayer Money Spent Funding Breast Enhancements*. [online] Available: <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,22424066-2,00.html> [2008, October 30]

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