

# Vale Ben Morris

Janis Wilton

Ben Morris passed away on 14 July 2019. He was a thoughtful and committed oral historian who spent the last fifteen years recording fellow Vietnam veterans. His concern and enthusiasm were contagious, and he bravely spoke out at national and international conferences, in the media and through publications. His most recent publication is a joint article with Noah Riseman for *History Australia*.

His work is an embodiment of oral history's long held status as a means to challenge official histories and to give voice to those whose experiences have been left off the historical record. He tackled the complexities involved in insider interviews including the additional insights, the dangers of assuming a collective narrative, and the intricacies of a past hierarchy impacting on the structure and content of an interview. Ben also directly confronted the challenge of disagreeing with established official narratives about the Vietnam War, and questioned the ways in which published Vietnam War oral histories have not been sufficiently interrogated. He met with resistance and criticism alongside support and recognition.

Significantly, Ben came to oral history after a long career in the Australian Army. Retired as a totally and permanently incapacitated (TPI) ex-serviceperson, he sought to rewrite what he saw as incorrect accounts of events during the Vietnam War. He turned to oral history. He recognised the power of oral history, the skills involved, the methodological and conceptual issues that need to be addressed, and the challenges of presenting the results of his research in a variety of forums.

Ben will be missed in the oral history world and among his fellow veterans for his research, his bravery, his commitment to learning and sharing, and his generosity and compassion. He will also be missed, as Rosie Block and Sandra Blamey recall, for his great capacity for friendship and his willingness always to stop and have a chat. I will certainly miss my conversations with him, and our tracking of each other's work and lives.

The following provide a sample of Ben's research output and media appearances:

- with Noah Riseman, 'Volunteers with a legal impediment: Australian national service and the question of overseas service in Vietnam', *History Australia*, 16/2, 2019, pp. 266-286.
- 'Mental scars of Vietnam War healed through multicultural friendship between veteran and

restauranteur', ABC Illawarra, 25 April 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-25/multicultural-friendship-in-the-wake-of-the-vietnam-war/11037938>

- 'I was confronted with a scene that would haunt me forever', *Insight*, SBS, 16 February 2019, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/i-was-confronted-with-a-scene-that-will-haunt-me-forever>
- 'Bombshell claims army covered up truth about Aussie massacre at Nui Dat in Vietnam in 1967', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 2014, <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/bombshell-claims-army-covered-up-truth-about-aussie-massacre-at-nui-dat-in-vietnam-in-1967/news-story/3eacf164bb0fa42790fb66b138922834>
- 'The diggers wish: set the record straight', *OHAA Journal*, 36, 2014, pp. 72-85 [peer-reviewed].
- Australian War Memorial accepts Ben Morris's oral history interviews, University of Wollongong, 24 November 2014, <https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2014/masters-students-interview-tapes-accepted-into-national-collection.php>
- Remembering Vietnam: official history, soldiers' memories and the participant interviewer, Master of Arts thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry – Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, 2014, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/4348/>
- 'Permission to speak, sir – official history, whose reality?', *OHAA Journal*, 32, 2010, pp. 3-7.



Ben Morris. Image courtesy of Paul Jones, University of Wollongong