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# United Service

*Informing the defence and security debate since 1947*

## **'Next generation' veterans should rally around the old flagpoles ... and then repaint them!**

**Marcus Fielding<sup>2</sup>**

As we enter the period after a decade of near continuous operations in East Timor, the Solomon Islands and the Middle East, approximately 50,000 new veterans have joined the ever thinning ranks of World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans around Australia.

Unlike the veterans of those wars, however, these 'next generation' veterans are choosing not to establish new associations as their forefathers have done. There are a range of possible reasons for this, but it does represent a tremendous strategic opportunity for these next generation veterans to step forward and become more involved in two of Australia's most well established service organisations – the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL) and Legacy.

In the period following World War I, a number of veterans' support organisations were established, but by the late-1920s the RSL and Legacy had become the two mainstays.

The RSL's mission statement remains: "To ensure that programmes are in place for the well-being, care, compensation and commemoration of serving and ex-service Defence Force members and their dependants; and promote Government and community awareness of the need for a secure, stable and progressive Australia".

Legacy is dedicated to caring for the families of deceased and incapacitated veterans. Its support and services now extend to include the dependants of members of today's Australian Defence Force who lose their lives as a result of their military service.

Both the RSL and Legacy have well-practised organisational structures and procedures, manage extensive support programmes, have established facilities and can draw upon significant financial assets. Both organisations rely heavily on volunteers to keep things going, but as the Vietnam veteran generation ages it is up to next generation veterans to now take up the reins in these longstanding and respected institutions.

Some younger veterans may argue that the existing institutions do not cater for the needs of younger veterans, but the best way to evolve an organisation is from within. Contributing energy and leadership are the ways to encourage change.

The North Bondi RSL Sub-Branch is a good example. In recent years, next generation veterans have stuck their hands up for committee appointments and breathed new life into the Sub-Branch, while still retaining the support and services relating to welfare, pensions, advocacy and legal aid.

I encourage serving members to become more involved in the local branches of the RSL and/or Legacy; and then to continue to support both organisations as you hang up your ballistic vest and settle down in Civvy Street. Service in the military is a badge of honour that you will wear for the rest of your lives and the opportunity to stay connected and assist others who have also served is a hard earned privilege.

The RSL website is [www.rsl.org.au](http://www.rsl.org.au) and the Legacy website is [www.legacy.com.au](http://www.legacy.com.au).

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