

For our “galloping grocers”

By Katina Curtis

THIS Friday a group of Vietnam veterans will gather at the Australian War Memorial to see their particular service commemorated.

A plaque will be dedicated to the “galloping grocers”, the 3500 soldiers of the Royal Australian Army Service Corps.

Bruce Manning, the president of the Vietnam Supply Platoons Association, said his group started a push about three years ago to get the official plaque laid at the memorial.

This will recognise the work the RAASC did in Vietnam to organise and transport supplies of food, ammunition, mail and other necessities for the troops in the infantry, artillery, armour, engineers and signals sections.

VSPA vice-president Ray Brown described the role as being like part of a football club.

“The armed people are the players on the field and we were the coaches, the people making the guernseys and the drinks and so on,” he said.

Mr Manning said the idea for the plaque arose after a reunion of RAASC soldiers his group organised in 2006.

“One of the members of the platoon, he was almost in tears, saying, ‘I felt I didn’t do my job; I wasn’t in the infantry shooting,’” he said.

“He didn’t have a choice, that man, he got told to go in the Service Corps.”

Mr Manning said that feeling of regret was fairly common and the association wanted to do something to ameliorate it.

“We wanted a plaque that that man’s family now and in the future could visit, that they could touch the number of the sub unit he served in and that they could photograph and put in his family tree, thus continuously recognising his service,” he said.

“It’s basically to say the support soldiers did a job in Vietnam and we should be proud and the country should be proud.

“I think, not for me personally, but for a lot of the others it means coming to terms with Vietnam because it influenced a lot of their lives.”

The plaque dedication is the first part of a project that Mr Manning said would eventually lead to a history of the corps being published.

He expected there would be about 200 members of the various units in the RAASC attending the plaque dedication.



Former RAASC soldiers Russ Morison, Bruce Manning and Ray Brown will be dedicating a plaque at the War Memorial next Friday.

Picture: Elesia Lee