

Vietnam vets march was head of its time

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THE late 1970s was a hard time to be a veteran of the Vietnam War, even five years after Australian forces had left South-East Asia.

The official welcome home parade was nearly a decade away when southern Gold Coast and Tweed Vietnam Veterans were photographed marching together at Coolangatta on Anzac Day, 1978.

The picture shown here was taken by photographer Ray Sharpe in Coolangatta's Griffith Street and features a group of local Diggers preparing to march.

The image is one of the few in the Gold Coast City Council's collection featuring Vietnam veterans and their families during the era.

The Local Studies Library has launched a public appeal to identify the Diggers featured.

A council spokeswoman said any information on this photo from the public was welcome.

The Vietnam conflict officially began in late 1955 following the withdrawal of French forces from the region after a century as the country's rulers.

The US first sent military advisers into the region in the early 1950s while providing arms to South Vietnam forces before eventually entering the conflict in the early 1960s.

By 1963 more than 16,000 US troops had entered Vietnam. Australia sent advisers there in August, 1962 and committed military forces in 1965.

Australia withdrew its troops in late 1972 and early 1973 following the election of the Whitlam Government.

The war ended on April 30, 1975 when Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) fell to North Vietnam forces.

Tweed Rivers Historical Society president Joan Smith said treatment of local Diggers was not as harsh as those in Sydney during the 1970s.

Australia officially recognised veterans of the Vietnam conflict with a welcome home parade in Sydney in October, 1987.

If you can help identify the pictured Diggers, call 5581 7217 or email lslibrary@goldcoast.qld.gov.au

-ANDREW POTTS



Vietnam Veterans at Coolangatta on Anzac Day, 1978.

Picture: Supplied by Gold Coast City Council Local Studies Library