

# The Disciplined Forces: Veterans and the Victorian Police

GARY PARKER, NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS MUSEUM



The National Vietnam Veterans Museum (NVVM) at Phillip Island asserts that their Museum is not about war but is about the people that served during that war. From the background of the issues of the day i.e. conscription, to what the veterans wore, how they moved and the equipment that they used. Generally the presentation of these exhibits is relatively straight forward after making allowance for their preservation requirements.

With weaponry, the requirements are quite different. Clearly having these items getting into the wrong hands brings consequences well above the mere loss of a valuable item.

As you would hope, the Victorian Police Force maintains a very tight control over all small arms. The storage requirements for Museums must be the same or better than those required for the holder of a firearms collectors licence under Schedule 4, Item 1 of the Firearms Act 1996 or for a display permit.

The National Vietnam Veterans Museum houses displays of weaponry, aircraft, vehicles and equipment. The Museum's President, Gary Parker, explains how they have worked with Victoria Police to secure their displays and weapons in accordance with regulations.

All of the requirements for museums come under Schedule 1 of the Firearms Act 'Exempted Museums' and after the museum has been granted exemption, they are required to provide the following particulars regarding any firearms in their collections:

- Make
- Type
- Calibre action
- Serial number; and
- Magazine capacity.

The NVVM has the small arms—rifles, pistols, carbines, machine-guns – displayed in an armoury and there are stringent requirements that must be met for these too. The walls are steel lined, the doors are constructed and secured in a prescribed manner and the glass couldn't be dented with an axe!

The armoury is further secured by a separate off-premises security alarm and is covered by discrete recording cameras with monitors into the administration area.

Generally, any bolt or firing pin is secured separately from the weapon in a secure 'gun safe'. There are, however, some 'weapons' on display which are a component part of major equipment, i.e. the Centurion tank or in the Bell Cobra helicopter gunship.

In the case of the tank, each of the machine guns are 'rendered innocuous' which is the term for ensuring that they cannot be made to fire again. This generally means that barrels are welded closed and the firing mechanisms are also welded closed and weakened.

The pistols visible on the model driver and crew commander are plastic replicas

Below: a Bell Cobra helicopter gunship which shows the forward 20mm machine gun capable of over 600 rounds per minute. Photo courtesy of the Vietnam Veterans Museum.

solidly glued into place with stainless steel wire hidden but holding them in place. Any attempt to remove them would lead to the total destruction of those pistols, but this is preferable to having them fall into the hands of the wrong people.

For something like a gunship helicopter where the whole aircraft could be considered a weapon, the term 'rendered innocuous' still applies. Each machine-gun is 'doctored' and in addition, key components of the aircraft may be removed and the superstructure of the airframe is weakened at critical points. It is important for authenticity that it is done discreetly, but the aircraft could never be flown again.

Artillery pieces and mortars must also be made safe and the Defence Department has instructions on the action that must be taken. In most instances this requirement is completed while the weapons are under control of the Commonwealth and prior to their release.

There are some weapon models or replicas that are sold by the NVVM that are mounted onto backing boards that may be legally displayed without reservation. These are acrylic replicas where only a half of the rifle or pistol is displayed. They are magnificent full-size replicas and you have to look hard to see the shortcoming. Clearly, if pulled from the backing display board, the weapon could never be used in a hold-up.

The lesson regarding all displays of weaponry is that planning must start early to ensure that security standards are clearly understood and meet the requirements for permit approval. Early involvement with the Victorian Police Force is essential as they become a part of all administrative matters relating to the weapons: how and where they are moved, who has them, have they been correctly signed and receipted and have they in-turn, been stored securely?

All exempted museums must permit a member of the Victoria Police to inspect the storage and security arrangements at any reasonable time.

*Gary Parker is the President of the Vietnam Veterans Museum. The museum is open daily and located in Veterans Drive, Newhaven, Phillip Island.*

*For more about the Vietnam veterans Museum go to: [www.vietnamvetmuseum.org](http://www.vietnamvetmuseum.org)*