

**AUSTRALIANS AT WAR**  
**VIETNAM VETERANS DAY / LONG TAN DAY 2018.**

**2018, 18<sup>th</sup> August.** is the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, Vietnam Veterans Day was originally called 'Long Tan Day' in dedication to those D Company 6RAR diggers who fought a pitched battle for over 4 hours in tropical downpour against an superior number of enemy. The name of this commemoration day was changed in 1987 by the then Prime Minister Bob Hawk after the welcome home parade in Sydney where 25,000 veterans marched. He announced that 'Long Tan Day would now be known as 'Vietnam Veterans Day'.

In 1969 on the third anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, a large cross was erected on the battle site by veterans of the battle to commemorate their fallen comrades. This commemoration day was picked up by other diggers and eventually became a nationally accepted commemoration day for Vietnam Veterans.

During our commitment between 1962 and 1975, almost 60,000 Australians served our nation in Vietnam, 521 lost their lives and over 3,000 were wounded. Of these 15,381 were National Servicemen of whom 200 were killed and 1,279 wounded.

Australia first committed troops to Vietnam in 1962, Australian and New Zealand military personnel had and were still gaining further experience as Jungle fighters in the Malayan Emergency and yet to happen Borneo Confrontation.

Australia's commitment to Vietnam began in July and August 1962 when 30 military advisors were sent as the 'Australian Army Training Team Vietnam' (AATTV) led by Colonel Ted Serong.

Australia's first battle casualty in Vietnam was WOII Kevin Conway on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1964 who died alongside Master Sergeant Gabriel Alamo of the US Special Forces during a sustained attack on the 'Nam Dong Special Forces Camp'.

The AATTV would see 4 of their number awarded the Victoria Cross. 1 posthumously. The AATV was also the most decorated unit in Australia's history.

From an Australian perspective the Battle of Long Tan on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> August 1966 is viewed as the most well-known battle, known to the wider community. On this occasion a heavily outnumbered 'D' Company under the command of Major Harry Smith, 6RAR fought a close quarter battle against a determined enemy, of D445 Regional Force Battalion and 275 Main Force Regiment. In that 108 Australian and New Zealand soldiers fought a ferocious battle against an estimated 2,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong enemy. Fighting for 4 to 5 hours in poor visibility due to tropical downpour and approaching night they were nearly overrun. The resupply of ammunition by helicopters of 9 Sqn RAAF, timely arrival of support by armoured personnel carriers of 1<sup>st</sup> APC Sqn carrying 'A' Company of 6RAR and accurate artillery fire called in by the New Zealand Forward Observer Artillery Party led by Captain Morrie Stanley. The Australian, New Zealand and US guns, fired over 3,000 rounds from their ANZAC 105mm and US 155mm Artillery Batteries, some rounds landing in extremely close proximity to D Company diggers achieving maximum enemy casualties.

From this battle 17 of our diggers were killed in action, 25 wounded, one died later from his wounds.

The enemy withdrew leaving behind 245 dead and carried away many of their dead and wounded.

The bravery of the soldiers in this action resulted in been awarded the US Presidential Unit Citation 'For Extraordinary Heroism' presented by US President Lyndon B Johnson on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1968. This was only the third time an Australian Army Unit had been so honoured.

**2018 is also the 50<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of another battle in Vietnam, the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral and Fire Support Base Balmoral. This collective action was the largest Unit-Level Battle involving Australians during the Vietnam War.

The Coral-Balmoral Battle was a series of ongoing actions against the enemy for 26 days running from midnight 12 May 1968 to 5/6 June 1968 when withdrawal from FSB Coral and Balmoral occurred.

The action involved Infantry / Mortars, Artillery, Armoured Personnel Carriers, Centurion Tanks, Air Support and Signals.

In early May 1968 a mini Tet Offensive was launched by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese 7<sup>th</sup> Division against an area of operation called 'Surfers', this area of operations was used by Australian, New Zealand and American troops. 1RAR and 3RAR were deployed to disrupt the enemy activity, support for these diggers was to come from FSB Coral and Balmoral using Artillery and Mortars.

This reading is too short to give homage to this action as for 26 days the battle ebbed and flowed, artillery at times fired splintex over open sights due to the close proximity of the enemy, the Centurion Tanks, although somewhat restricted by the jungle denseness provided excellent fire support for the Infantry and Firebases.

Casualties of this action were 26 Australians killed and 99 wounded, Enemy losses were 276 killed (body count) a further 56 possible KIA, 7 known wounded, 3 detained, 11 captured, and 2 surrendered.

Two other lesser known Vietnam battles, but equally significant as all action is, are the battles of 'Bien Hoa', and 'Bin Ba'.

In 1968 ANZAC units were formed whereas a Company of an Infantry unit was manned by Kiwis. These Companies were give the phonetic call-signs of 'Whisky' and 'Victor'.

Vietnam was a war that extended all branches of our armed forces not just Army. Navy, Airforce, Military Nurses and civilians alike were all stepping forward showing courage, teamwork, mateship and commitment to each other, and those at home. Duty done they returned to a less than respectful reception by both those who served previously and civilians alike.

We all who served did our duty to and for our nation, our mates and families. We were not beaten, our combat war ended the beginning of 1973 with the Paris Peace Accords, the second Vietnam War involving the US and her Allies had ceased, our Combat troops were withdrawn, conflict between North and South Vietnam continued as a Conventional War.

When invasion of the South took place by the North in 1975 the conventional war, the third Vietnam War was concluded. Ironically, we had an Embassy in Hanoi at this time.

**LEST WE FORGET (*What really happened*).**

Watson Young