

THE BATTLE OF LONG TAN

18 August 1966 – Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam

Facts Sheet

- Battle of Long Tan events
- Australian Military Involvement in Vietnam

Prepared by:
Martin Walsh
Red Dune Films

Ver 4 – Apr 2016

Contact:

Producer - Martin Walsh
+612 8005 0141
mwalsh@reddunefilms.com

Battle of Long Tan Events

- **Date and Location**
 - The Battle of Long Tan took place on 18 August 1966, in a rubber plantation called Long Tan, approximately 5km's away from the 1ATF (Australian Task Force) base at Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam.

- **Total Australian and enemy casualties as a result of the Battle of Long Tan**
 - Australian
 - 18 killed (17 from D Coy, 6RAR and 1 from 3Trp, 1APC Squadron)
 - 24 wounded
 - NVA and VC¹
 - Up to 800 killed (Officially 245 bodies were counted on the battlefield but many more bodies were found over the following two weeks after the battle and the Vietnamese routinely took most of their dead away from battlefields)
 - More than 1,000 wounded
 - 2 wounded 275 Viet Cong Main Force Regiment soldiers were captured on the battlefield
 - 1 wounded D445 Viet Cong Provincial Mobile Battalion soldier was captured on the battlefield

- **Total number of forces opposing each other on the battlefield at Long Tan**
 - Australia & New Zealand
 - 105 soldiers from D Coy, 6RAR, Australian Army
 - 3 man Forward Artillery Observation party from 161 Battery, 16 Field Regiment, RNZA
 - **Total 108 soldiers**
 - NVA and VC²
 - 2,000 soldiers from the 275 Viet Cong Main Force Regiment including support elements (effectively an NVA Regiment as it was formed in the north)
 - 550 soldiers from D445 Viet Cong Provincial Mobile Battalion (local force VC) including support elements
 - 500 soldiers from an unidentified North Vietnamese Battalion.
 - **Total 2,500 to 3,000 soldiers** (But it is estimated that only around 2,000-2,500 took a direct part in the battle)

Detailed facts:

- **The patrol was in response to a mortaring of the 1ATF (Australian Task Force) base at 2.43am on the morning of 17th August**
 - 82 enemy mortar rounds impacted the base
 - 24 Australians were wounded, two seriously
 - Seven vehicles were lightly damaged and 21 tents damaged

- **The patrol given to D Coy on 18th August 1966 was codenamed Operation Vendetta**

- **The Australians were outnumbered 20 to 1 at the battle of Long Tan**

- **The majority of the battle was fought in a blinding monsoon, thunder storm**

- **The entire battle took place over an area no bigger than two football fields**

- **The rubber plantation at Long Tan was approximately 5km's from the artillery at Nui Dat**

¹ To Long Tan, Ian McNeill: Enemy body count on battle field and information gathered from captured documents including the diary of the VC commander at Long Tan.

² AWM Records: Australian Army Intelligence Report – information from enemy prisoners and captured documents. Intel Summary No.79, 24 August 1966, 1 ATF Commanders Diary.

- **The battle lasted 3.5 hours with the last contacts occurring around 7.10pm, 18 August 1966**

- **Artillery at Nui Dat fired almost non-stop for 5 hours in support of the battle**
 - Regimental Fire Missions (involving all 18 Australian & NZ artillery guns firing at once and 6 of the US guns as well) had not been fired since the Korean war and will probably never be fired again
 - Lightning twice hit the artillery positions
 - Two artillery gunners passed out from cordite fumes from the guns as the fumes could not disperse due to the weather
 - Artillery fire was eventually being brought in “Danger Close” to within 50 metres of the Australian positions

- **Weapons and ammunition**
 - Approximately 400,000 rounds of ammunition were fired by both sides
 - The artillery at Nui Dat fired in excess of 3,500 rounds
 - More than 20 rounds of enemy mortar rounds were dropped on or near D Coy units during the battle
 - The Australians captured more than –
 - 60+ enemy weapons
 - 10,500+ rounds of ammunition
 - 300+ hand grenades
 - 100+ rounds of rockets and mortars
 - These figures are highly unusual as the enemy always took their weapons and dead from the battlefields. The unusually high number of weapons left behind is further evidence of the destruction inflicted on the enemy

- **D Company, 6RAR at Long Tan comprised:**
 - 105 Australian regular and national service soldiers
 - 3 person New Zealand forward artillery observer party
 - Each rifleman carried 3 x 20 round magazines and another 60 rounds in boxes in their packs
 - Each M60 machine gun team (3 men) carried 5 x 100 round belts and another 5 x 100 round belts in their packs
 - D Coy departed Nui Dat base at 11am, 18 August 1966
 - D Coy met up with B Coy at 1pm
 - D Coy left B Coy at 3pm approximately 2km’s from the Long Tan rubber plantation
 - D Coy first engaged the enemy at 3.40pm
 - Ammunition resupply by chopper received by D Coy around 6pm
 - Reinforcements from B Coy on foot reached the D Coy position at 7pm
 - Reinforcements from A Coy riding in 10 x 3 Trp APC’s reached the D Coy position at 7.10pm
 - 17 members of D Coy were killed (see Appendix for names, ages and locations)
 - 11 National Servicemen, Australian Army
 - 6 Regular, Australian Army
 - 21 members of D Coy were wounded

- **3 Troop, 1APC Squadron at Long Tan comprised:**
 - 10 x M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC’s)
 - 22 troopers from 3 Troop
 - 1 member of 3 Troop died of wounds received in the battle

- **B Coy, 6RAR comprised:**
 - 32 soldiers

- **A Coy, 6RAR comprised:**
 - 100+ soldiers

- **Four artillery batteries from 1 Field Regiment at Nui Dat were used in the battle**
 - 6 x M101A1 105mm L5 pack howitzers of 161 Field Battery, Royal New Zealand Army
 - 6 x M101A1 105mm L5 pack howitzers of 103 Field Battery, Royal Australian Army
 - 6 x M101A1 105mm L5 pack howitzers 105 Field Battery, Royal Australian Army
 - 6 x M109 Self Propelled 155mm guns of A Battery, 2/35th Howitzer Battalion, US Army

- **Two Huey UH-1B Iroquois Choppers from 9 Squadron RAAF were used for the critical ammunition resupply**
 - Helicopter A2-1020
 - Flight Lieutenant (Pilot) Frank Riley
 - Flight Lieutenant (Co-pilot) Bob Grandin
 - Leading Aircraftmen (LAC) 'Blue' Collins
 - Leading Aircraftmen (LAC) George Stirling
 - Helicopter A2-1022
 - Flight Lieutenant (Pilot) Cliff Dohle
 - Flight Lieutenant (Co-pilot) Bruce Lane
 - Corporal W.R. Harrington
 - Leading Aircraftmen (LAC) B.B. Hill

- **Seven RAAF Huey UH-1B Iroquois plus one American Medical Company (Air Ambulance) Choppers were used for the medical evacuation of the wounded and dead Australians**
 - 12.00 midnight First chopper lands at improvised landing zone on edge of Long Tan rubber plantation
 - Medical evacuations
 - 5 seriously wounded
 - 12 lightly wounded
 - 5 dead
 - 00.34am All medical helicopter evacuations were complete
 - Aircraft and crews from 9 Squadron who flew the medical evacuation flight
 - A2-1019 Shepherd, Middleton
 - A2-1020 Riley, Grandin, Collins, Stirling
 - A2-1021 Macintosh, Sharpley, Taylor
 - A2-1022 Dohle, Lane, Harrington, Hill
 - A2-1023 Hayes, Munday, Buttris, Rowe
 - A2-1024 Hindley, Champion, Williams
 - A2-1025 Scott, Banfield, Roche

- **The main enemy force facing D Coy at Long Tan comprised:**
 - Viet Cong 5th Infantry Division totalling 3,000+ soldiers
 - 275 Viet Cong Main Force Regiment (effectively an NVA Regiment as it was formed in North Vietnam)
 - 2,000 soldiers + support elements
 - Unidentified North Vietnamese Army Battalion, most likely 33rd NVA Regiment
 - 500 soldiers
 - D445 Viet Cong Mobile Provincial Battalion

- 550 soldiers + support elements
- 274 Viet Cong Main Force Regiment of the VC 5th Division comprising around 2,000 soldiers was in a position North West of the 1ATF base at Nui Dat on 18th August 1966 to ambush any US reinforcements from Saigon

- **The stated aim of the enemy at the Battle of Long Tan (from interrogation of captured enemy on battlefield and captured documents) was:**
 - The VC 275 Regiment along with D445 Battalion and an NVA Battalion would lure an enemy Australian Battalion out of the task force base to destroy them and then attack the Australian base. 274 Regiment would then ambush any reinforcements from Saigon. Wiping out the Australians at Nui Dat would force them to leave Vietnam.

- **The battle of Long Tan severely weakened the enemy in Phuoc Tuy province and they never again posed a direct serious threat to the Nui Dat base.**

- **Australia went on to completely secure Phuoc Tuy province and improve the lives of the South Vietnamese people living there contrary to the rest of Vietnam. This was not achieved anywhere else in South Vietnam.**

- **The Australian memorial cross in the rubber plantation at Long Tan is one of only two foreign war memorials allowed in Vietnam.**

- **The following awards and decorations were given*:**
 - The Presidential Unit Citation
 - This is the highest award that can be awarded to a unit for gallantry against the enemy. D Coy wear it proudly as the award has been given to Australian Units on only three occasions, Long Tan, Vietnam, to a Rifle Company, another a Battalion, 3RAR for Kapyong, Korea and the third to 13 Squadron, RAAF in 1942.
 - Distinguished Service Order (DSO)
 - Brigadier O.D. Jackson
 - Lieutenant-Colonel C. Townsend
 - Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)
 - Captain M. Stanley (NZ)
 - Military Cross (MC)
 - Major H. A. Smith
 - Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM),
 - Warrant Officer 2 J. W. Kirby
 - Corporal J. Carter
 - Military Medal (MM)
 - Sergeant R. S. Buick
 - Private R. M. Eglinton
 - Mentioned in Dispatches (MID)
 - Lieutenant F. A. Roberts
 - Second Lieutenant G. M. Kendall
 - Second Lieutenant D. R. Sabben
 - Corporal P. N. Dobson
 - Corporal W. R. Moore
 - Lance Bombadier W. Walker (NZ)
 - Private W. A. Akell

- ***After two Australian Government inquiries (2008 and 2009), the following additional awards have been given and others upgraded:**
 - Harry Smith, Commander D Company 6RAR, will be offered the Star of Gallantry (equivalent to the Distinguished Service Order)
 - Platoon Commanders Dave Sabben and Geoff Kendall, will be offered the Medal for Gallantry (equivalent to the Military Cross).
 - The strength of D Company 6RAR in Vietnam on 18 August 1966 will receive approval to wear the former Republic of Vietnam's Gallantry Cross with Palm Unit Citation Emblem.
 - Flight Lieutenant Cliff Dohle be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the contemporary equivalent award to the Distinguished Flying Cross, the original award for which he was properly recommended in 1966 by all levels of Australian command in Vietnam.
 - Delta Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), be awarded the Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry for its performance at the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966.

- **The following Australians were Killed in Action (KIA):**

Pte Aldersea, Richard A.

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 20; Regular Army enlistee
Born: Perth, WA
Civ: Lube attendant; Married
KIA - Chest wounds
Commem: Karrakatta Cemetery, WA

Cpl Clements, Peter E

Unit: 1 APC Sqn; Age: 21; Regular Army enlistee
Born: Cunderdin, WA
Single
WIA - died at hospital
Commem: Moora Cemetery, WA

Pte Drabble, Glenn A

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman
Born: Brisbane, Q.
Civ: Blinds installer; Single
KIA - Gunshot wound to head
Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q
Buried at: Pinnaroo Cemetery, Q

Pte Gant, Kenneth H

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman
Born: Brisbane, Q
Civ: Butcher; Single
KIA - Gunshot wounds
Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q
Buried at: Mt Gravatt Cemetery, Q

Pte Grant, Ernest F

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 20; Regular Army enlistee
Born: Thurgoona, NSW
Civ: Farm hand; Single
KIA - Gunshot wounds
Commem: Albury Cemetery, NSW

Pte Grice, Victor R

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman
Born: Ballarat V
Civ: Storeman; Single
KIA
Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q
Buried at: Pinnaroo Lawn Cemetery, Q

Pte Houston, James M	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 22; Regular Army enlistee Born: Wallsend, NSW Civ: Station hand; Married KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q Buried at: Mt Thompson Crematorium, Q
L/Cpl Jewry, Jack	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman Born: St Mary's NSW Civ: Apprentice electrician; Married KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, NSW Buried at: Pine Grove Memorial Park, NSW
Pte Large, Paul A	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 22; National Serviceman Born: Wellington, NSW Civ: Manager; Single KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, NSW Buried at: Coolah Cemetery, NSW
Pte McCormack, A F	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman Born: Launceston, Tas Civ: Clerk; Single WIA - Died at hospital
Pte McCormack, Dennis J	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman Born: Adelaide, SA Civ: Labourer; Single KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q Buried at: Pinnaroo Cemetery, Q
Pte Mitchell, Warren D	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman Born: Dalby, Q Civ: Clerk; Single KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q Buried at: Mt Gravatt Cemetery, Q
Pte Salverton, Douglas J	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 20; National Serviceman Born: Brisbane, Q Civ: Student; Single KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, Q Buried at: Mt Gravatt Cemetery, Q
2Lt Sharp, Gordon C	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman Born: Tamworth, NSW Civ: Television cameraman; Single KIA - Gunshot wounds Commem: Garden of Remembrance, NSW Buried at: Tamworth Memorial Park, NSW
Pte Thomas, David J	Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; Regular Army enlistee Born: Bendigo, V Civ: Skilled labourer; Single KIA - Chest wounds Commem: Kangaroo Flat Cemetery, V

Pte Topp, Francis B

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 19; Regular Army enlistee
Born: Toowoomba, Q
Single
KIA
Commem: Helidon Cemetery, Q

Pte Wales, Maxwell R

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 22; Regular Army enlistee
Born: Goondiwindi, Q
Single
KIA
Commem: Moree Cemetery, NSW

Pte Whiston, Colin J

Unit: 6RAR; Age: 21; National Serviceman
Born: Sydney, NSW
Civ: Postman; Single
KIA - Gunshot wounds
Commem: Garden of Remembrance, V
Buried at: Crib Point Cemetery, V

Vietnam War

- **The 1 Australian Task Force base (1ATF) at Nui Dat was established on 5th June 1966**
- **Australia was one of only a few countries to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam soon after the Vietnam War. Australia officially established diplomatic relations on 26th February 1973.**
- **Australian Defence Force in Vietnam and Conscription**
 - 59,000 Australians served in Vietnam
 - A total of 508 were killed in Vietnam
 - A total of 3,100 were wounded in Vietnam
 - 804,000 Australian males registered for National Service
 - 63,000 Australians were conscripted into National Service
 - 18,000 National Servicemen served in Vietnam
 - 200 were killed
 - 1,279 were wounded
 - Peak Australian troop deployment in Vietnam was 7,672
- **New Zealand Defence Force in Vietnam**
 - 3,500 served in Vietnam
 - 37 were killed in Vietnam
 - 187 were wounded in Vietnam
 - Peak NZ troop deployment in Vietnam was 552