

THE BATTLE OF LONG TAN

South Vietnam: 18 August 1966

Biography

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HARRY SMITH, MC SG (Retired):

Commanding Officer (CO)

Delta Company, 6th Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), Australian Army at Long Tan

Almost every single soldier from D Company, 6RAR and other units Harry Smith has served with, or alongside throughout his career, credit the character, personality, skills and professionalism of Harry for D Coy's survival and success against the overwhelming odds at The Battle of Long Tan. This is his story.....

I was born in Hobart, Tasmania in July 1933, son of Ron Smith, who served as a sergeant in the General Grant tanks of the 2/9th Armoured Division. He worked at Cadbury's Chocolate factory in the Production Department for 48 years, starting as a messenger clerk and retiring as a director. Dad was awarded an OBE for services to the community in 1966.

I attended Hobart High School where I served five years in the school cadet corps, reaching the rank of cadet lieutenant in my last year, despite having been dishonourably 'stood down' from the school unit for a short period some years earlier. I had 'borrowed' some ammunition after a Vickers machine-gun range practice so I could shoot rabbits with my issue .303 rifle while at Brighton Military Camp. On this particular range day, the Regular Army officer decided to actually inspect webbing pouches in addition to the usual verbal warning and caught me red-handed with twenty or so .303 rounds, an offence that required punitive measures, albeit more embarrassing than serious. I think that my father's admonition was more frightening than being disciplined by the headmaster and the cadet corps officers.

In those days, Brighton Camp had a large undeveloped land area to the north that abounded with rabbits. During summer holidays, I used to get out of bed early and stalk rabbits up and down the sandy gullies and ravines, blowing many to pieces with the overly large calibre rabbit gun. These exploits probably contributed to me earning a marksman's badge in range shooting.



Major Harry Smith. 1967

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After leaving school at the end of 1950, I chose to enrol in a seven-year-long diploma course in metallurgy at night school rather than go to university, much to my father's disgust. At that time I worked as a laboratory assistant with Austral Bronze at Derwent Park, just north of Hobart. I was attending night school five nights a week, but I still managed to skate and sail when time permitted.

Unlike youths of today I led a very sheltered and disciplined life, having to explain to my father if I was an hour late home after work. Once, I recall falling asleep on the train and having to return from New Norfolk by a later train at 2.00 a.m. I then had to try and explain to Dad where I had been since 10.00 p.m. My zest for work, study and sporting activities left me no time for interests in such things as girls, hotels, drinking or smoking. Guided by Dad, who was a good carpenter, I built a new Rainbow dinghy and took out the Tasmanian Rainbow Championship and was runner-up in the Australian Championship in the summer of 1950-51.

Towards the end of 1951 my number came up in the original 90-day National Service ballot for eighteen-year-olds, and I was inducted in January 1952, serving again at Brighton Camp. With my earlier cadet training and military aptitudes I soon rose to the exalted rank of lance corporal and then to full corporal; I was enjoying army life despite the cold Tasmanian weather. After the 90 days' National Service, I returned to work at Austral Bronze to find my job was no longer available. I gave the seven-year diploma a big miss and joined the Regular Army in May 1952.

After a non-commissioned officer's (NCO) course I was given the temporary rank of corporal and the job of section instructor, training National Servicemen, back at Brighton. It was a job that required me to be up and dressed by reveille and to stay up to lights out daily—fourteen hours a day, often seven days a week for the fourteen-week intakes. It was at Brighton, in the NCO's mess at age nineteen that I first tasted alcohol and took up smoking—both socially required habits for a new corporal. Girls were still not on the agenda, given the long work hours and the camp being so far from town.

At about this time Dad suggested to me that if I seriously insisted on staying in the army, I should use my educational qualifications and apply for the new Officer Cadet School (OCS) at Portsea, Victoria. I was duly selected, and travelled across Bass Strait by ship, my first 'overseas' trip, to commence the Second Course OCS intake in July 1952. This was six months of rigid discipline plus physical, military field and academic training at the highest level outside of the Royal Military College (RMC) at Duntroon. Some of the activities that occurred might be described these days as bastardisation, but we took it all in good spirits. Unlike many of the students, who had come straight out of civy street, I already had some insight into military life.

I enjoyed and excelled at practical work in the field and did fairly well in academic studies, coming out first in the Field Prize and second in the Staff Prize at the end of the course. I graduated near the top of the class as the lowest form of officer in the army: a 'one-pip' second lieutenant on less pay than a corporal. I felt that most regular soldiers and officers, especially RMC graduates, despised us. This

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attitude appeared to continue for many years, in fact right up to the late 1970s when a few OCS officers finally rose to the rank of colonel and brigadier.

In the latter weeks of OCS, cadets were asked where they would like to be posted and in which corps they wanted to serve. Following in my dad's footsteps, I requested the Armoured Corps School at Puckapunyal in Victoria for corps training. I was hoping for a posting to sunny Queensland, well away from the cold Tasmanian and Victorian climates. As it happened, I was posted to Infantry and the Corps School at Seymour—I suppose not far from my first choice of Puckapunyal, which was only 25 kilometres away!

During the three months' Infantry School corps training, my previous experience managed to get me top marks in all phases of weapons and fieldwork. I was then posted as a platoon commander—not to Queensland—but back to the winter frosts of 18 National Service Training Battalion at Brighton, Tasmania. Perhaps I was sent there to help keep the rabbit plague in line! These were days when showers were out because all the water pipes were frozen and we pulled on uniforms over warm pyjamas. It was here we had to stand under tin shelters hour upon hour, day after day, intake after intake, controlling rifle and machine-gun practices—without ear protection—and the medical experts later wondered why most army people had 'industrial or high frequency deafness'. I went through nearly three years of fourteen-hour days and nights training intakes of National Servicemen, along with further education in officer training—at the hands of RMC officers fresh from active service in Korea. My experience with them and Regular Army NCOs taught me a lot about things military. And in the brief breaks between National Service intakes I was able to find time for the odd visit to the ice-skating rink and to learn something about normal life.

I learnt too much too quickly, and despite family wishes, and the advice of my seniors, married at an early age—much too early! I was only able to travel the thirty kilometres home to my wife's flat once or twice a week, if reluctantly granted overnight leave by the CO, who of course lived in married quarters right on the Brighton base. My parents helped me finance a small soft-top convertible Morris Minor tourer that I unfortunately ran under the tray of a turning truck. Veering to the right, I assumed it was turning right at a country road intersection, but it then went left as I steered around that side to pass. I converted the Morris to a topless model, fortunately ducking instinctively just in time to avoid being decapitated. Consequently, I was without wheels for some weeks and not a favourite son at home.

An RMC officer who visited Brighton regularly from a CMF adjutant's posting at Launceston to see a pleasant WRAAC officer, who later became his wife, was Captain Colin 'Mousy' Townsend. Thirteen years later, he was to be my battalion CO in Vietnam in 1966.

In retrospect, one bright light in the Brighton period was being sent off to the RAAF base Williamtown, NSW, to get my parachute wings, considered as requisite training for all young officers. I remember looking at the 30-metre-high 'Polish Tower' jump trainer with pangs of nervous fear at the thought of leaping off attached to a flimsy line slowed by a fan, let alone the thought of jumping out of an aeroplane eight times to get the prized wings badge. Yet, after the three weeks of Intensive and

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repetitious ground training the drills became instinctive and when the time to jump finally came, that was also instinctive, despite a very rapid pulse pumping adrenalin and the butterflies in the pit of my stomach. Of course, as is human nature, instructors who were already well qualified had to add nervous colour by humorously highlighting what could go wrong!

This was my first step into what was to become a career allied to parachuting and other Special Forces activities. It was also the first of five hundred enjoyable jumps in later years. Unfortunately in 1975, parachute jumping put an end to my career after I suffered serious disc injury in a military free-fall parachute accident.

After three years training National Servicemen at Brighton, relief came in mid-1955 when I was posted as a platoon commander to service in Korea. But before I left, the war finished and I was re-posted, in December 1955, to the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR) in Malaya as a platoon commander reinforcement officer for active service in the Malayan Emergency. Here I was assigned to be 9 Platoon Commander, Charlie Company, at Sungei Siput operational base, about a hundred kilometres south from the main barracks base on Penang Island, a tourist resort area to which leave was granted about three days a month.

I had to leave my young pregnant wife in Hobart until British Army-sponsored married quarters accommodation became available many months later. We had decided on having a baby on the strength of my posting to Korea and my possible loss in action. At the time, we felt it was bound to be a son, to continue the family bloodline.

The Emergency was a daily routine of ambush, village food checks, security patrols and jungle patrols. I was sent down to Singapore and across to Kota Tingi by train to attend a four-week UK jungle patrol course. It was on the return train trip that I first saw blood and gore in a big way. The train, the Singapore Express, travelling at high speed, hit a British Army Saracen armoured car which had stalled at a road crossing, opening it up like a can of sardines and spreading the mangled corpses of the eight British soldier occupants along the railway line for hundreds of metres. I was involved with others in picking up fingers, arms and other pieces of bodies, an experience that matured me significantly and a sight which has always plagued my memories thereafter, surpassed only by what I saw on the battlefield at Long Tan.

Around May 1956 I was able to get married quarters on Penang in the Military Complex for my now very pregnant wife. On the base officers' wives addressed their counterparts by their husband's rank—and of course my wife was married to a lowly second lieutenant and therefore had few friends. She was not impressed by this situation, nor with all the time I was away at Sungei Siput. Fortunately a faithful and friendly amah (Malayan housekeeper) was provided under the British Army system to help with our baby girl, Deborah Anne, born in June 1956. The amah was also company when I was away, which was most of the time.

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While based at Sungei Siput, I came to fire my first angry shot. I was ordered to take out a small patrol with a tracker dog to try and locate a wounded communist terrorist. When I went on forward of the dog handler, who had led us to him, to investigate the find I saw a terrorist about ten metres away, appearing to be removing a grenade from his belt. I shot him with my .30 calibre M1 carbine. I recall firing far too many rounds into him—it was an overreaction, but I just wanted him well dead and unable to throw the grenade at the patrol or me. We did not find a grenade. This operation was written up as 'based on good information, was well planned and efficiently executed by the Platoon Commander'. 'Executed' was perhaps an appropriate term as the killing might not have been necessary, but at that stage I was not taking chances and we faced similar situations later in Vietnam.

It was over the Christmas period of 1956-57 that I earned the lasting nickname of 'Harry the Ratcatcher'. I was required to carry out the duties of orderly officer at the battalion base at Kuala Kangsar for about three weeks. I was extensively briefed by our strict disciplinarian ex-Scots Guards adjutant, Captain Don Ramsay, to curb the noise emanating from some of the huts after lights out. After many successive but unsuccessful investigative incursions into the barracks area, I walked into the offending hut some nights later to discover a group of well-oiled soldiers noisily playing poker and two-up. I announced something like 'At last—got you—you rats.' From then on, my nickname followed me everywhere, although after Long Tan some changed the name to 'Cong-Catcher', but I am quite happy to live with 'Harry the Ratcatcher'.

The battalion was ordered to lay ambushes on the Thailand border near a town of Kroh. I was selected to lead the Charlie Company patrol and moved off to Kroh for two months. We laid ambushes on likely tracks atop high mountains but my group saw no action. But we gained considerable and valuable experience in jungle ambushes, resupply by aircraft and helicopters, along with the use of artillery and air support supplied by British forces.

I returned to Sydney where I continued serving with 2RAR. The lonely existence in Malaya plus the lack of a stable family home and close friends had not endeared service life to my wife. We had two other children, Sharon and Brett, born in 1958 and 1961. Sharon was another lovely girl, although my wife and I were still hoping for a son and so we continued on to a third child, to whom I gave three Christian names in case he wanted to become an RMC officer. Years later Brett wanted to join the navy, but was refused because of a medical history of sporting injuries.

Further absence on exercises, my overenthusiastic devotion to poorly paid military life and volunteering for commando-type activities in preference to mundane married life did not help my marriage. I eventually had the choice of leaving the army, trying to find civil employment and living a normal domestic life with my family in one area, or staying on in the army. Having no other trade or skill I chose to stay in the army, borrowed money to add to my War Service loan and left my family in a nice house in a suburb outside Sydney.

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After a period of Special Forces training with 2 Commando Company in Melbourne, in 1965 I was posted to 6RAR at Enoggera, outside Brisbane, and promoted to acting major and company commander of Delta Company. I discovered the battalion commander was Lieutenant Colonel 'Mousy' Townsend, who did not take kindly to my commando green beret and promptly ordered me off to the quartermaster's store to get the regulation British-style cumbersome peaked cap. I suppose I should have gone to the store before reporting to the CO. He also did not take kindly to my 'modus operandi' of training my company along commando lines with eight-kilometre runs each morning. I was accused of elevating my company above the standards required for an infantry battalion, apart from also leading young officers astray by teaching them to do parachute rolls out of the top-floor officers' mess windows, with at least one broken ankle resulting from these hijinks.

Colonel Townsend and I rarely saw eye to eye on any subject. In my first annual confidential report he intimated I was disloyal, but then agreed we were training for what was a company patrol action war and that each company commander had the right to use his own personal techniques. The colonel had seen a year in Korean service in cold, open country, whereas I had seen two years of tropical patrol warfare in Malaya, in terrain similar to Vietnam. I wanted to implement what I knew of tropical warfare and Special Forces techniques. Maybe a 'Mouse' and a 'Ratcatcher' were incompatible!

During the pre-Vietnam training exercises I continued to push my company harder and further than others. While I attracted the wrath of the CO, it put a feather in the company's hat. My company, as a group, knew they could always do what was required of them under pressure and this put them in good shape for what was to happen in Vietnam. From then on, it always seemed that whenever there was a long patrol or quick reaction required the job always fell to Delta Company.

While Colin Townsend was a very popular commander, he and I often seemed to be in conflict, which was probably a combination of two factors. I was far more outspoken than most of the other company commanders and refused to be what was known as a 'yes man'. Also, I could make quick common sense decisions and get on with the job, rather than sit around and procrastinate, which may have given him the impression that I was at risk of making hasty decisions.

Nevertheless, in early June 1966 I found myself saying goodbye to friends at Enoggera and embarking onto a chartered Hoeing 707 which flew us north via a brief stopover in Manila to Join our Advance Party at Vung Tau in South Vietnam.

Battle of Long Tan

For more than three and a half hours, in the pouring rain amid the shattered trees of a rubber plantation called Long Tan, 33 year old Major Harry Smith led and directed the 108 besieged soldiers of D Company 6RAR against an overwhelming enemy force of 2,500 battle hardened Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army soldiers.

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The best summary of what Harry did on 18 August 1966 during The Battle of Long Tan is outlined in the wording of his Military Cross citation:

Major Harry Arthur Smith was commissioned from the Officer Cadet School on 13 December 1952 and first saw active service with 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment during the Malaya Emergency 1955-1957.

In August 1966 Major Smith commanded D Company 6th Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment. On 18 August 1966, D Company began a Search and Destroy Patrol in Phuoc Tuy Province South Vietnam. During the patrol, the leading platoon contacted what appeared to be a small Viet Cong patrol in thick rubber. The enemy soon proved to be the vanguard of a regimental size force, and the platoon engagement quickly developed into a Company battle. The Viet Cong attacking from two flanks and supported by intense mortar and recoilless rifle fire, soon penetrated between the leading platoon and the rest of the company.

Despite the intense and accurate enemy fire, Major Smith formed the remainder of his company into a small defensive perimeter from which he made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to relieve the leading platoon whilst halting numerous attacks from both flanks on his own position.

Throughout the action, he directed the fire of his company and of his supporting artillery batteries with such effectiveness that the enemy finally disengaged and withdrew, leaving behind over 200 dead.

But for the determination and outstanding leadership shown by this officer D Company might well have been annihilated.

During the whole of the engagement, he had complete control of the situation. He exercised his command with calmness, determination and confidence, and demonstrated professional competence, leadership and inspiration to an exceptional degree. There is no doubt that his leadership and his disregard for his own personal safety inspired his soldiers to a performance of duty of a high order.

His display of command, leadership and professionalism is an inspiration to all.

After Long Tan

In August 1967, almost immediately after our Vietnam tour, most of our National Servicemen were discharged and returned to civilian life. I was posted back to Special Forces and given command of 1st Commando Company at Georges Heights, Sydney, until December 1969. With 1 Commando I

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was able to qualify at free-fall parachuting and improve my qualifications in other skills, such as rappelling from helicopters, small craft operations and the like.

I don't want to dwell on Vietnam experiences after Long Tan, other than to say my company saw more than its fair share of action in 1966-67. The total of killed and wounded was indeed depressing, not just for families and loved ones, but for all of us who served. Apart from Long Tan where Delta Company lost seventeen KIA and twenty-one WIA, the tragic New Zealand artillery accident in early 1967 took another four KIA and fourteen WIA. Add another two KIA and twelve WIA in other actions and the total of 70 casualties for a rifle company of around 120 strong was a massive and very sad 60 per cent. 11 Platoon was the worst hit, with thirteen KIA and eight WIA at Long Tan and out of a nominal active strength of about thirty, suffered fourteen KIA and twenty WIA over the year.

While much has been said about post-traumatic stress disorder in Vietnam veterans, I have to say that in 2003 I know of very few Delta Company survivors suffering from the problem. Yet they would have more cause than most, certainly more than those veterans who never saw a shot fired.

Nevertheless, I know I, and most others, get very emotional when I think of those we lost and how the rest of us were lucky to survive. As with other Delta Company veterans, a tear or two comes to my eyes whenever I dwell on the tour, or hear the familiar and sad bugle call of the 'Last Post' at commemorative services. Many of us prefer to stay away from such ceremonies. I keep well away.



Major Harry Smith being presented the Military Cross in 1967.

Back home in August 1967, the war behind me, I was fortunate to have several attachments from 1 Commando to SAS Regiment in Perth, one trip to an SAS Squadron in PNG, and an SAS parachuting exercise up at Port Hedland, one of the hardest drop zones I ever encountered. It is no wonder I am 50 mm shorter now than in 1966! In Perth I qualified as a rappelling instructor. An EAAP Iroquois pilot, Geoff Banfield, almost dropped me into the local sewage farm by way of his idea of a joke. I dangled on the end of a 50-metre rope with my feet just on the top layer of wet compost as part of a 'hoi extraction' technique exercise. Geoff had been one of our most supportive 9 Squadron pilots in Vietnam, always willing to drop into our company LZ or deliver supplies into difficult jungle landing zones. Unfortunately, he passed away due to cancer at Noosa in 1996.

Army activities and exercises did not decrease and my wife was sick and tired of following me around from posting to posting, twelve months here, eighteen months there, living in all sorts of married quarters accommodation, such as substandard high-rise Housing Commission flats in Melbourne. Tired of trying to raise three young children, with no stable friends for her and the children, she demanded a home base, along with my resignation from the army to take up some civil vocation and

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be like a normal husband. This plea had been made before, but it was only after Vietnam that I had saved enough money to be able to purchase a house with the aid of a War Service housing loan. I had no civil vocation or trade and loved the army, so we agreed to separate and went our own ways. I am still on very good terms with my three children and five grandchildren.

While with 1 Commando in Sydney and through my diving association with the RAN Diving School, I was able to live on board HMAS Penguin at Balmoral. Here, at a RAN sailing activity, I met a WRAN officer, Anne, the lady who later became my second wife. The navy used very heavy Bosun dinghies and I became involved with the task of introducing lighter and faster Corsair yachts to the three armed services. I was involved in all sorts of peculiar activities, such as submarine operations and underwater demolitions, as well as free-fall parachuting. I recall being the first army guy to trial a new Drager oxygen underwater breathing apparatus for the army. I tested it in a water jump at Port Stephens, dropping out of the parachute harness as I hit the water. I swam underwater for some time, but then started to feel quite ill. I surfaced, signalling the Zodiac rescue boat, and then found that no 'Sodasorb' gas absorbent had been placed in the canister by the maintenance team and that I had almost expired from CO₂ poisoning! Nevertheless I really enjoyed my two-year posting to 1 Commando, despite long hours with night and weekend work conducting various commando courses mainly associated with amphibious and airborne raids.

I met and admired many devoted CMF commando soldiers, such as Mike Wells and Ian McQuire, who both served full-time duty tours in "Vietnam. Ian was my Delta Company 2IC later in 1967. I considered the commando soldiers were a cut above the average part-time or 'weekend warriors' who seemed to be wasting a large percentage of the Defence budget and in many cases were employed in protected industries and could not go to war anyway.

I was selected for the 1970 Staff College course at Queenscliff, a year of quasi-university type work with military subjects. As a result of my active service experience, I qualified 'psc' (passed Staff College) near the top of the course. Anne was able to follow me to Victoria by being posted to a navy appointment in Melbourne. After Staff College, I was posted to my first-ever staff appointment as DAA&QMG (senior administrative staff officer), HQ Western Command, Perth. As there were no navy officer postings in WA, Anne left the navy and moved over to work and live with me, although I was not yet divorced. I managed to organise the Western Command Army Sailing Club with the newly acquired Corsairs. I took out the WA Corsair Champion Title in late 1971 and then skippered the 15-metre yacht Siska on loan to the Army Club. With the support of the commander, Brigadier George Larkin, I was able to delegate most of my daily duties to my army and public service staffs and concentrate on sailing, with ample reward to the army by way of excellent public relations both on the water and in the media. As well as weekend club races, we sailed three or four twilight races each week with up to 25 passengers, mainly army families, and at 50 cents per sail, we were able to raise funds to maintain the yacht.

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It was in Perth that Alan Bond sailed the first Apollo, then the fastest racing yacht in Australia, and was to take on the Americans for the America's Cup in the larger IS-metre type yachts. Alan wanted the army to provide logistical support for the venture, with my army guys crewing a pace yacht, and to have equal chance of representing on the challenger. This was all approved in principle by the then Minister for the Army, Bob Katter Snr, but an election campaign frightened the politicians, fearing they might be seen to be wasting public funds. So ended the army involvement. It pleased me to see the services become involved in 'adventure training' in later years, including sailing, along with fully paid Whitsunday Islands charter sailing as adventure training. Why not?

At the promotion and selection committee interview in late 1970, my marital status and my 'non-union' attitude was frowned on by the 'establishment' and saw me placed on the 'Y—reconsider' list for promotion, despite my professional record. But in 1972, after serving my penance, I was selected to be the first commander, or chief instructor, of the Army Parachute Training School to be taken over from the BJLAF at Williamtown RAAF Base, near Newcastle. I was then promoted to lieutenant colonel and posted to the UK, Canada, and USA for thirteen months of joint warfare (JW) training and considerable parachuting work. This was all done discreetly under the guise that initially I would be the army senior instructor at the Joint Warfare Centre at Williamtown, but my briefings were quite clear as to my future. Apart from various JW work, I spent most of my time parachuting in the UK, Canada and USA, including HALO (high altitude low opening) jumps from 15,000 metres over Salisbury Plain in the UK. As it was an 'accompanied' posting I was able to prevail on the Civil Court for a decree nisi and marry Anne so that we were able to see the world as well as undertake all the work required of me.

Unlike Australian public servants, I found our overseas military mission staffs were extremely helpful and able to arrange all sorts of visits to various military establishments in a way that we were able to utilise the available allowances and travel arrangements. I bought and sold a lovely 1964 Jaguar car in the UK for £500 and a V6 1964 Ford Mustang for \$500 in the USA, selling both cars on to other army colleagues at nil loss. The 'system' was able to convert my airfares into cash mileage allowances, which enabled us to drive to most areas, making life very pleasant. While I had to pay for my wife's expenses, US army and air force base accommodation in furnished apartments was just \$2 per night. In those days allowances were minimal and public service claim regulations made life difficult until less-stringent attitudes were adopted in later years when staff found they were dealing with human beings rather than cans of bully beef!

We arrived back at Williamtown RAAP Base in NSW in March 1973. While there was some resistance from the RAAP, army policy prevailed and I eventually formed the Army Parachute School with about 100 staff and we got on with training and introducing new equipment to meet the role of training army airborne forces. A company of 3RAR commanded by Major Tony Hammett was the first to be trained there—a project devised by Colonel Owen O'Brien (formerly OC Administrative Company, 6RAR, who flew in with the ammunition resupply at Long Tan) at Army HQ, and myself. My philosophy in 1973 was that the army needed mobile forces that could be delivered by parachute or amphibious means.

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I was personally very fit and active. I enjoyed jumping, up to five times a day when we had courses. I formed the army 'Red Berets' free-fall parachute display team which gave displays at all RAAP air shows and various army displays around the country. For my spare time, I bought a 10-metre yacht hull which I set up in the back yard of our RAAP married quarters home and spent some eight hours at work and another five to six hours a day fitting the yacht out.

The yacht was visible from the officers' mess and most RAAF officers were somewhat bemused by this army officer who jumped out of serviceable aeroplanes, who was married to an ex-navy officer, and who lived in a house on a RAAP base with a yacht in his back yard! They were also convinced I had little idea of what I was doing with the building of the yacht and I was given all sorts of help by RAAP officers who donated their time and labour, plus some surplus RAAP stores to assist with various items. I recall the radio officer, Kev Maddox, insisting on doing all the electrical wiring for me.

In late 1975, I was test-jumping a new free fall parachute from 3,500 metres and it initially failed to open after I pulled the ripcord as my twin altimeters indicated rapidly passing 900 metres. When I rolled over to deploy my small reserve parachute, the main chute came away off my backpack, but opened up between my legs. It caused me to come to a rapid stop from a 200 kph free-fall. This created a massive whiplash, which caused damage to my lower spine, neck and other joints. I was eventually medically downgraded from FE (fit for everywhere) to HO (home only) and unfit for infantry field service. Although I might have been able to continue to serve in some clerical-type work, my aspirations of commanding an infantry battalion and later a task force completely disappeared. My planned military career had evaporated.

I chose to leave the army and resigned to preserve my superannuation benefits rather than take a basic medical pension. I sadly left the service in March 1976. I took up an office job with a Sydney firm known as Beaufort, marketing sea safety equipment for a couple of years until my old injury problems caused me to leave work in 1978. I had bought a house at Bilgola Plateau with the aid of a War Service home loan and long service money, but without an income we chose to live on the yacht and rent the house to supplement my small superannuation income. We slowly sailed up and down the coast to the Whitsundays each year, becoming involved in research for a guidebook to be used by charterers called *The 100 Magic Miles of the Whitsundays*. Our names are still recorded in the Acknowledgments section of the latest edition.

Peter Smeaton, former OC Alpha Company, 6RAR, and I renewed friendships on the water when we were sailing off the Queensland coast in 1985. He unfortunately passed away due to cancer in 1990 after returning from a Melbourne-Osaka race. Charles Mollison, OC Alpha Company at Long Tan, was on his yacht *Dalliance* in the same area at the same time, and he later spent many years cruising around the world. After twenty-odd years, I was to hear their voices again with their very formal radio procedure on an otherwise colourful coastal radio net punctuated by fishermen's procedures—mainly

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four-letter words! I introduced my boat on radio and we all met up in Bundaberg's Mid-Town Marina in July 1985.

That year I went back to school in Brisbane and gained a Marine Master 4 Qualification and took up some light work driving charter boats, along with moving home to Airlie Beach in North Queensland, but could not get permanent work—I was too old and infirm! I began cruising the north and researching another guidebook for the waters between Whitsunday to Weipa, which was to be called the 1000 Magic Miles. Apart from the research, which entailed plotting depths and describing uncharted areas using a satellite navigator and sounder linked to a notebook computer, we had a great time beachcombing, all the time keeping well clear of the many crocodiles and wild pigs. In company with another boat crewed by Jim and Mavis Purcell of Gladstone, we were able to locate about 400 Japanese glass fishing floats plus all sorts of flotsam and jetsam from dinghies to diving gear.

In 1994 my married life was again under pressure, this time not from the army lifestyle, but on account of my obsession with boating. I agreed to sell our boat and home in the "Whitsundays to retire to Nambour, Queensland, so that Anne could be near her family. Fate moved in and I had to take a sailing yacht as a trade to sell the house. That led me back to racing. One of my crew, Felicia Smith, was an attractive and fit lady introduced by Anne's sister. Little did I realise we were to become close friends, and some six years later, loving partners. I went into a high-tech Jarkan 40 Grand Prix racing yacht called On Silent Wings with ten crew to do all the hard work. With several ex-servicemen in my crew we did very well. Re-named Midnight Special in late 1997 by new owners, she was lost off Eden in the 1998 Sydney-Hobart race. I bought a smaller MASRM 31 and kept on racing—my main hobby in 1950!—and now, only 48 years later!

Aided and abetted by Bob Buick, I launched this book project in October 1997. It flowed on from Bob's own biography and a video presentation by Bob, Dave Sabben, Morrie Stanley and Bob Grandin at the Australian War Memorial. I had declined to take part, as was my usual custom of keeping away from military-type events. But, when we viewed the video portraying the battle in chronological order, my wife said I should have been involved and suggested the main players could put the story down on paper in book form. I was aware there was a resurgence in interest in the Vietnam War and that there was room on bookshelves for the story of Long Tan to be told by those who were actually there on the ground on the day. Apart from the details of the survival of my company against all odds, there were many peripheral issues that could be aired. Although I have no desire to criticise my senior officers, it is best that we voice the true story. This includes why we were sent out to face a VC regiment, to why senior officers were decorated for their role in a battle they never saw, especially as it was at the expense of junior commanders who were there.

In 1998, just after my 66th birthday, my six crew and I took out most of the trophies for the season at the Mooloolaba Yacht Club, in Queensland, on the MASRM that we called Crow Bar. At the same time, I sadly received the news of the loss of two of my former Vietnam soldiers, Bluey Moore and

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Lance Larcombe, with the Big C. Unfortunately, Anne and I parted after thirty years due to irreconcilable differences. Sadly, both Anne and Felicia's estranged husband would lose their battle with cancer inside the next two years. Felicia and I continued sailing together, but sold the racer in favour of a Cavalier 345 cruising yacht and cruised to the Whitsundays in SOOO, then to Lizard Island in 2001 and 2002. On 20 September, 2003, Felicity and I were married in a garden ceremony in Hervey Bay.

I also continued to pursue the matter of Imperial Awards for Long Tan with the Vietnam End of War List Review Committee, which agreed there was a case to review awards downgraded in Vietnam, but of course did nothing concrete to achieve such a review. I also made a submission to the SEA Awards Review, with no success. In 2002 I wrote to the Chief of Army, General Cosgrove, suggesting he might initiate a review, but that fell on deaf ears, despite his approving truck-loads of awards in East Timor.



In mid-2002, I saw the demise of yet another draft of this book caused mainly by arguments over different versions of the same story by Charles Mollison, which did not agree with the facts as told by Adrian Roberts and myself, and those recorded in after action reports. It was impossible to continue with the project and satisfy Charles' demands in trying to tell his story of Alpha Company. I moved to remove him from the authors' consortium and get on with the project, given the story was mainly that of Delta Company's survival against all odds at Long Tan.

Postscript

For the past two decades, Harry Smith has continued a relentless fight for his men and the recognition and justice he feels they deserve for their service and sacrifice at Long Tan. Harry has harassed, cajoled, debated, fought and persuaded politicians, the Australian Defence Force and the media. He has written hundreds of reports, submissions and letters. He has fronted two government inquiries into the medals awarded for Long Tan and he has been partially successful in seeing medals upgraded to their original citations for some of his soldiers. The fight is not over and to this day Harry continues to fight against the bureaucracy for the Long Tan veterans still living and for those who have passed away.

For more information and research about *The Battle of Long Tan*, visit:

<http://battleoflongtan.reddunefilms.com/research>