



A DUTY DONE

(A summary of operations by the Royal Australian Regiment in the Vietnam War 1965-1972)

By

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Fred Fairhead



DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO SERVED

**A History of the Royal Australian Regiment
in the Vietnam War 1965-1972**

by

Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Fred Fairhead

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**To Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War for the Regiment
Cover Photograph**

Troops from 5 Platoon, B Company, 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in a Helicopter extraction from near the fishing village of Lang Phuoc Hai on 26 August 1967. The troops are wearing 'Patrol Order' as the operation was a one-day Cordon and Search of Lang Phuoc Hai.

(Australian War Memorial

Negative No: EKN/67/0130/VN)

Also by the Author: A Potted History of the Royal Australian Regiment in the Korean War 1950-1953

Published by the RARA SA Inc April 2011

In addition to the acknowledgments I have made in the Preface I would also like to thank my dear wife Di who I first met in a rubber plantation at Nui Dat many years ago; she has been very patient and understanding over these past three years for which I am very grateful.

For continuing spiritual inspiration during the long journey of this work I also acknowledge the music of The Master – Ludwig Van Beethoven, especially his Missa solemnis in D, opus 123 – “dona nobis pacem”.

I am also grateful to my good friend Bob Hogarth for keeping me in the sea of objectivity and away from the shoals of subjectivity and for his useful comments on the book's structure.

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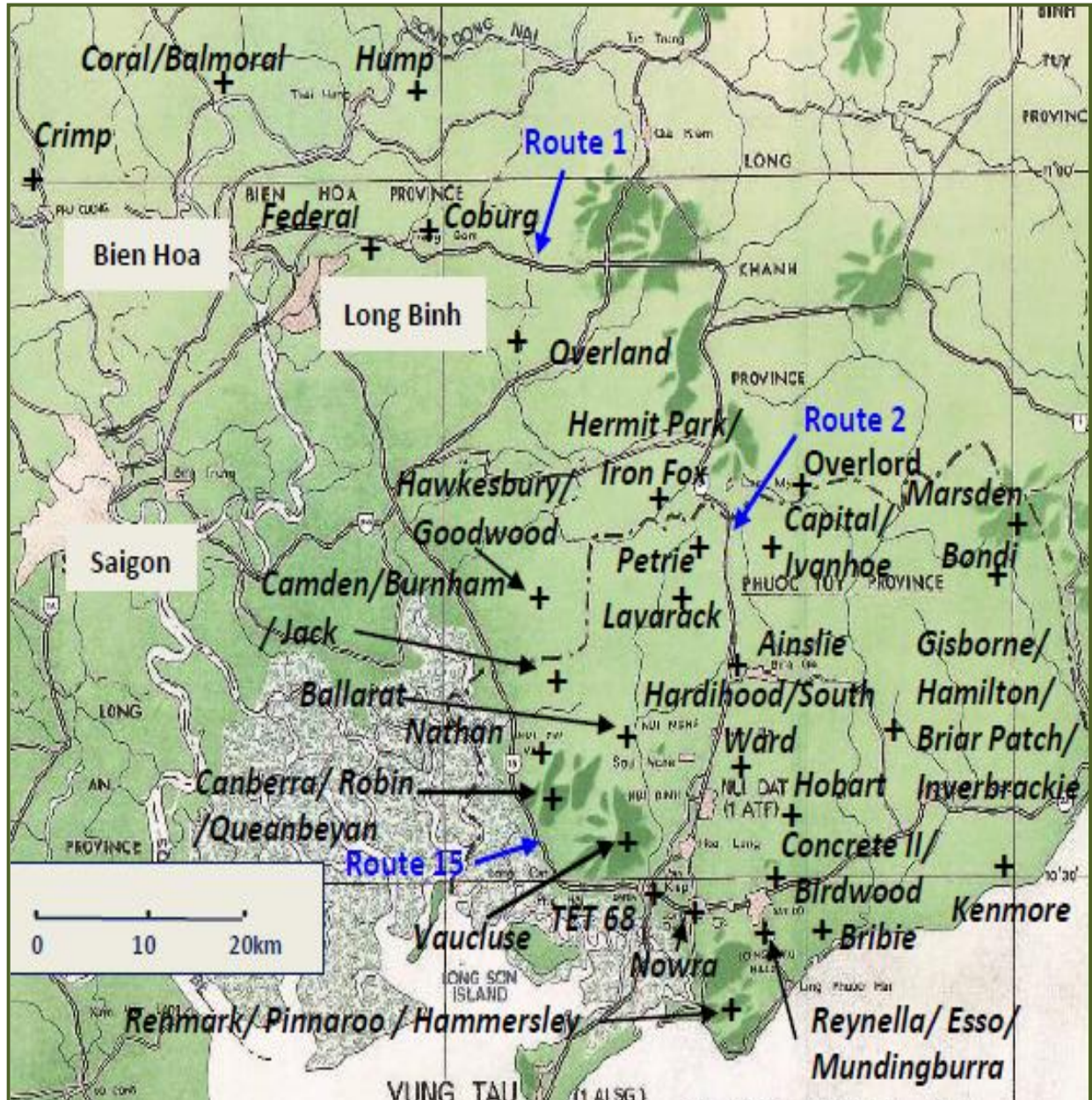
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Foreword

The most precious commodity with which the Army deals is the individual soldier who is the heart and soul of our combat forces"

General J Lawton Collins

Fred Fairhead's first venture into research and analysis of the Royal Australian Regiment's operational history covered the period of the Korean War (1950 – 1953) in which three of the Regiments battalions served. It was a modest publication of thirty pages and described by Fred as a "potted history".

This examination of the Regiment's actions in Vietnam (1962 – 1972) in which all nine battalions served, some more than once, is a far more detailed and searching analysis of operations. In many respects Fred has developed a style somewhat similar to that of the well known American military historian Brigadier General S L A "SLAM" Marshall in his books "Battles in The Monsoon" and West to Cambodia". Marshall's books attracted much attention and some debate. It seems probable to me that this book will also follow that course.

Fred has used his abundant skills of research and analysis to produce a first class history of the Regiment's contributions during the Vietnam conflict. He has pursued with considerable vigour the need to establish the factual detail of each encounter with the enemy. In that respect alone this endeavour is timely, as the numbers of veterans who took part in those engagements is diminishing and once concise recall is fading. His investigations have shown we cannot always rely on war diaries and after action reports. His efforts to determine the precise events of each engagement have enabled him to produce what is possibly the definitive history of the Regiment's involvement and contribution in Vietnam.

In describing over 50 operations in the seven year period, the book has given particular emphasis to two aspects of the actions involved; ie: an analysis of the rights and wrongs for dealing with enemy bunker systems and the tragic consequences of constructing the ill-fated barrier minefield had on Infantry and supporting combat engineers.

Throughout its deployment Regiment constantly sought to overcome the problem of how to defeat bunkers. The book highlights the constant failure to conduct proper reconnaissance of enemy defended positions. This despite the emphasis placed on the need for reconnaissance at all levels of training. The entry of the Centurion Tank on the battlefield, when available, helped to resolve such engagements in favour of the Regiment's soldiers. However, mines presented a much greater difficulty as Fred has emphasised from his own experiences, particularly in areas such as the Long Hais, the Long Green and the Light Green. I am immediately reminded of the following statement by Field Marshall Sir William Slim:

"Everything that is shot or thrown at you or dropped on you in war is most unpleasant but, of all the horrible devices, the most terrifying... is the land mine."

Fred's use of maps is particularly useful, indeed essential, if the reader is to understand the progress of the action. These have been based on Fred's research of contact/incident reports, supplemented by war diaries, daily operational logs from supporting units such as armour, artillery and engineers and personal interviews. I have no doubt that some will question the accuracy of the maps and even the detail of actions. It is not unusual for individuals involved in those actions to have conflicting recollections of events.

To some degree the engagements at and around Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral have in the past not been given due recognition. The same can be said of Binh Ba. However, these were significant actions, which involved other arms and services and inflicted severe losses on the enemy. Fred has researched these and uncovered previously overlooked detail. Both Coral/Balmoral and Binh Ba were awarded as Battle Honours to the Regiment and for that alone deserve greater recognition, which Fred has skillfully done.

Fred has alluded to the inconsistent and inequitable awards for gallantry, especially for junior officers and Other Ranks that occurred far too often in the Vietnam War. I suspect he has many supporters. It is difficult to accept that in over the ten years of constant operations by the nine battalions of the Regiment that not one Victoria Cross was awarded to a member of The Regiment.

I found Fred's use of End Notes particularly useful. They provide additional detail helpful to the reader without cluttering or detracting from the action being described.

If, as seems likely from what has been written about the recent Defence White paper, that the battalions of the Regiment are about to lose their armoured personnel carriers, etc and return to the traditional role of "light infantry" then those responsible for the development of doctrine, the production of training pamphlets and the review of training would do well to look closely at this analysis of operations in Vietnam.

Each year the Commandant, United States Marine Corps selects one book that he believes is both relevant and timeless for reading by all marines. Perhaps the Colonel Commandant, Royal Australian Regiment should institute a similar award and start by selecting this book.

At the very least this book should become required reading at the Australian Defence Force Academy, The Royal Military College and Infantry Corps courses.

Looking to the future, I hope Fred can be encouraged to continue his research, analysis and writing to record the history of The Regiment post 1999.

Dulce bellum inexpertis. ("War is delightful to those who have not experienced it") - Erasmus

Laurie Lewis AM
Brigadier (Retired)

Preface

Purpose

This book was written to provide an understanding of the extent of the Royal Australian Regiment's involvement and the nature of its role in the Vietnam War. As such the book is more about what the battalions did and less about why, though I have occasionally indulged myself by mentioning some of the injudicious decisions made by both government and high command.

The book does not intend to summarise official histories or to supplant battalion histories and other privately written publications which describe and evaluate specific aspects of the war. Rather, my aim was to provide an understanding of the operations conducted by the Regiment as its role evolved over the seven years it was committed to the war; to that extent some 55 operations are described to varying degree.

Methodology

The book attempts to illustrate the nature of those operations, especially the actions at company, platoon and section level where most of it occurred. Operations that resulted in *Battle Honours* are mentioned, ie: Operation Coburg (*Bien Hoa*); Operation Toan Thang 1 (*Coral and Balmoral*); Operation Goodwood (*Hat Dich*); Operation Smithfield (*Long Tan*) and Operation Lavarack/Hammer (*Binh Ba*).

I have endeavoured to spread the description of other operations and actions across all battalions to demonstrate that many experiences were shared over time, although clearly there were variations in operational concepts and patterns over the seven year period.

Invariably, the battalions of the Regiment formed the tactical foundation for operations; mostly in tandem, frequently two together and less often, three together. All operations were supported by other arms and services and I acknowledge the significant, sometimes critical support that was provided. However, as this work is essentially to do with the Regiment's involvement in the war, except in some special cases I have given no detailed description of the involvement of others.

In the process of selecting suitable operations I was guided by the availability of operational reports that were lucid and accurate. After selecting a particular operation I accessed it on the Australian War Memorial's (AWM) website www.awm.gov.au/diaries/seaasia/index.asp. Initially I prepared a map of the area of operations; downloaded the After Action Report, especially the 'Sequence of Events' and the 'Contacts/Incidents Summary'; selected particular contacts/incidents and downloaded the 'Contact Report' for them. Where there was uncertainty I drew on other Formation/ Unit War Diaries, eg Headquarters 1 Australian Task Force's (HQ 1ATF) daily Sitreps and Intsums and the operations logs from support units, eg Engineer, Artillery and Armoured Units. In a number of cases the citation for honours and awards provided additional information for some actions. To clarify casualties for a particular action I accessed the Headquarters 1 Australian Logistic Support Group (HQ 1ALSG) war diaries which included weekly casualty lists.

The Enemy. Whilst recognising that the correct terminology for the two main types of enemy force faced in the war, ie the *People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)* and the *National Liberation Front (NLF)*, I have stayed with the terminology of the time, ie *North Vietnamese Army (NVA)* and the *Viet Cong (VC)* respectively. Furthermore, I have given no general description of the enemy the battalions confronted, other than those that were specifically involved in the actions described, though I have from time to time mentioned enemy tactics and weapon skills. I have also in most instances, described enemy casualties in general rather than specific terms, ie to avoid the 'body count' mentality that pervaded at the time and which was both odious and non productive.

At the end of the book I have included 'End Notes' to expand on some of the incidents and events described in the text plus some personal anecdotes. Veterans would be aware that over the six and half years the Regiment was involved in the war there were a number of serious setbacks, some of which were caused by bad decisions, poor leadership or inexperience; however, invariably none were the fault

of the battalions' other ranks, ie the 'Diggers'. The NCOs in Vietnam were less experienced than those who served in the Korean War but there is no doubt they were much better prepared through a rigorous and comprehensive training programme the battalions did before deploying to Vietnam, especially those that went later.

As mentioned previously, the book is by no means intended to be a definitive history of the Regiments' involvement in the Vietnam War. While most of the material used in the book was obtained from the AWM's collection, the following additional sources are also gratefully acknowledged:

- *McNeill, Ian (1993). To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950–1966. The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1975.*
- *McNeill, Ian and Ekins, Ashley (2003). On the Offensive: The Australian Army in the Vietnam War 1967-68.*
- *McNeill, Ian and Ekins, Ashley (2012). Fighting to the Finish:*
- *For the account of Operation Bribie, WO1 (Retd) RW (Spike) Jones, MM who I was privileged to have as my Intelligence Sergeant in 1968-70; and, Maj (Retd) DJ Watts, A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment.*
- *For the account of the Battle of Suoi Cha Pha, Lt Col (Retd) Graham (Pud) Ross, MC.*
- *For the account of the C Company 7RAR action in February 1968, Sgt (Retd) Ed Czerwinski.*
- *For the account of the 2RAR contacts on Australia Day 1968, Capt (Retd) Barry Corse, Lt Col (Retd) John George and Col (Retd) Peter Langford.*
- *For the account of the Battles of FSB Coral and Balmoral: Col (Retd) Ian Ahearn, Col (Retd) Neil Bradley (RNZA), Maj (Retd) Ray Curtis, Lt Col (Retd) Tony Jensen, Col (Retd) Gerry McCormack and Brig (Retd) Neil Weekes, MC.*
- *McAulay, Lex (1988). The Battle of Coral.*
- *For 3RAR's first tour of duty in Vietnam, WO2 (Retd) Ken Duthie, Capt (Retd) Peter Fraser and Maj Gen (Retd) Hori Howard AO MC, for the research material and comments they provided.*
- *Scott, Peter (2007). Command in Vietnam (3RAR).*
- *For 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC)'s tour of duty: Maj Gen (Retd) David Butler AO, DSO, Silver Star*
- *For the account of the C Company 8RAR August 1970 Ambush, Maj (Retd) Chad Sherrin, MM.*
- *Lockhart, Greg (2007). The Minefield: An Australian Tragedy in Vietnam.*
- *Avery, Brian (2004). We Too Were ANZACS.*
- *Taylor, Gerry (2001). Last Out (D Company 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC).*
- *Palmer, Alexander (1995). Vietnam Veterans – Honours and Awards, Army*

Other than the need to acknowledge the above, there are no copyright restrictions from the author.

I am privileged to have had the Foreword written by Laurie Lewis whom I served under at RMC and in 2PIR. I am also grateful to George Mansford, not only because of the poem he wrote for the 'in memoriam' end to this history, but also because he counted me as being one of his 'Mad Galahs'.

Finally, I hope the men from the Regiment who read this account and who were personally involved in the various battles, contacts, incidents and other general mayhem described therein are not disturbed by it. I found describing some events invoked memories which although one might prefer not to remember, nevertheless should not and cannot be forgotten.

Fred Fairhead
Erindale SA

(2PIR 1965-67; 6RAR, 1967-69; 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC), 1969-70; 8/9RAR, 1976-77)

Chapter I: Introduction

The Indo China Wars

The Vietnam War or as it is also known , the Second Indo China War, was a Cold War military conflict that occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1955 until 1975 when Saigon fell. The war followed the First Indochina War which was a war of national liberation fought in French Indochina from 1946 to 1954, between the Colonial French, supported by the Vietnam Emperor's National Army, and the Communist forces of Hồ Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp (Viet Minh or People's Army of Vietnam). Most of the fighting took place in Tonkin in Northern Vietnam, although the conflict engulfed the entire country and also extended into the neighboring French Indochina protectorates of Laos and Cambodia. The fighting ended with a massive French defeat in May 1954 at the battle of Điện Biên Phủ.

Australia's Involvement in the War

The involvement of Australian forces in the Vietnam War was a gradual process of escalating commitment which took place over a period of several years against a background of Government concerns with regional security and fear of Communist expansion. The cornerstone of Australian defence planning in the early 1960s was 'forward defence', a concept which complemented the United States policy of 'containment' of Communism in South-East Asia.

On the other hand, the North Vietnamese, supported by insurgent forces in the South, the Viet Cong, again saw it as a war of national liberation, this time against a dictatorial and oppressive regime in Saigon.

In 1961 and again in 1962 the South Vietnamese requested assistance from Australia to improve security and assist in economic and social development. In August 1962 a team of thirty Australian Army advisers was sent to Vietnam to operate within the United States military advisory system of over 2,000 advisers already there. Although it was announced by the Government in 1965 that the US had requested Australia provide combat troops ie, a battalion group, in reality Australia invited itself to the war. This was done in the hope it would encourage the United States to take a more active role in the defence alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the US, ie the ANZUS Treaty. History has shown that not only was this reasoning seriously flawed it also failed in its strategic objective.

In 1965 the first major unit was sent to the war, ie the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) followed shortly by 105 Field Battery, a Cavalry Troop ,Combat Engineers and a Headquarters located in Saigon, ie HQ Australian Force Vietnam (HQ AFV). In 1966, the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) was deployed to Phuoc Tuy Province and based at Nui Dat and was the operational component of the Army's involvement from 1966 to 1971. At its height, the Task Force comprised: a Headquarters; three Infantry Battalions; a SAS Squadron; a Squadron of each Centurion Main Battle Tanks and M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers; a Field Regiment of Artillery, including a New Zealand Battery, augmented by US Army medium and heavy artillery; a Squadron of Field Engineers and an Engineer Construction Squadron; a Flight of Army Aviation Light Aircraft; Tactical Communications; Intelligence; a Reinforcement Unit; Topographic Survey, Civil Affairs, Medical, Transport, Supply and Repair Units. The total strength of the Task Force was about 5000 men.

Logistic support for 1ATF was provided by the 1st Australian Logistic Support Group (1ALSG) located at Vung Tau. The group of units included an Ordnance Depot providing combat supplies, a Field Hospital, Engineer supplies, Transport, Repair, Fixed Communications, Military Police units and an Amenities and Welfare Unit which included a Rest Centre (The Badcoe Club) for out-of-operations leave.1 ALSG's total strength was about 1100 men and women.

Australian Withdrawal from the War

In June 1969, as the South Vietnamese armed forces assumed greater defence responsibility, President Nixon announced that the US would begin to withdraw its forces. Following US withdrawals in 1970, Australia announced a reduction of one battalion from 1ATF when 8RAR was not replaced at the end of

its tour in October 1970. In 1971 the Regiment's commitment reduced further when in October 1971, 3RAR was not replaced. This left 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) as the last battalion to leave Nui Dat on 7th November 1971 for Vung Tau; and with D Company the last to leave Vung Tau on 29th February 1972.

The Royal Australian Regiment—A Summary of the Operational Tasks

The Battalions were given a variety of operational tasks, including:

- Cordon and Search of villages suspected of concealing enemy guerillas, weapons and supplies;
- To dominate the Task Force Area of Operations by company patrols and ambushing (usually at platoon level);
- Reconnaissance with supporting arms, eg Artillery, Armour and Combat Engineers, into known enemy occupied areas within a prescribed area of operations. Known as 'Search and Destroy' and from January 1968, as 'Reconnaissance in Force' operations, the rifle companies and platoons usually operated independently of each other within that area. Contact with the enemy occurred mainly at platoon and company level and frequently with the enemy located in defensive positions, known as 'Bunker Systems', eg: 7RAR on *Operation Ballarat (Battle of Suoi Chau Pha)* and 4RAR on *Operation Ivanhoe*. Battalion Headquarters, elements of Support Company and supporting Artillery usually operated from a Fire Support Base though in the early days, ie 1965/66/67, Battalion Headquarters was usually mobile with the rifle companies;
- Battalion operations within the populated areas of the Province, known as 'Pacification Operations' where the objective was to separate the enemy from the civilian population thus denying supplies, recruits and intelligence. It was during these operations that the enemy's use of land mines mainly occurred (*see Operations Reynella, Esso and Mundingburra*);
- Battalion operations during specific threats, eg Tet Offensives when battalions were deployed across likely enemy approaches to vital areas, eg Long Binh (*see Operations Coburg and Toan Thang I*);
- Ready (immediate) Reaction to an emerging enemy threat, usually at company level though in February 1967 the whole of 6RAR was reacted – *see Operation Bribie*;
- Training Units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), usually at the 'Horseshoe' Defensive Position;
- Providing protection for engineering tasks, eg land clearing and mine laying;

Fire Support Bases

After the early battles such as *Long Tan*, it was clear the enemy had no field artillery support, at least not in Phuoc Tuy Province. This allowed a concept of establishing Fire Support Bases (FSB) where Battalion Headquarters could be based for an operation together with the Fire Support Coordination Centre which coordinated fire support to the rifle companies and platoons, notably by the Direct Support field artillery battery and the mortar platoon both located in the FSB together with US Army medium artillery, armoured sub units and other Support Company platoons.

The method of deploying battalions on operations varied however, in the main they were either by helicopter...



4RAR/NZ Battalion departing Nui Dat on 3 November 1968.
Photograph by courtesy of Gerry Loveridge ex 4RAR

by Armoured Personnel Carrier.....

Soldiers from 6RAR boarding APC's of A Squadron 3rd Cavalry Regiment at Nui Dat for Operation Ingham in November 1966.
AWM PO 1404.030



or, in the traditional Infantry way
- by foot

Troops from 3RAR patrolling through the Binh Ba Rubber Plantation in January 1968.
AWM CAM/68/0003/VN

Cycle of Battalion Operational Tours of Vietnam

Bn	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
1RAR	May	May		Apr	Feb			
2RAR			Apr	May		Apr	Jun	
3RAR				Dec	Nov		Feb	Oct
4RAR				May	May		May	Mar
5RAR		Apr	May		Feb	Feb		
6RAR		May	May		May	May		
7RAR			Apr	Apr		Feb	Mar	
8RAR					Nov	Nov		
9RAR				Nov	Nov			

..... = relieved by ie: 1→5 →7→1→5→7→3
 6→2→4→6→2→4
 3→9→8

Battalion	Commanding Officers	Regimental Sergeant Majors
1RAR	IR Brumfield/AV Preece	JD McKay/JG Currie(κ)/WJ Birkett
1RAR	PH Bennett	DC Dalton(κ)
2RAR	NR Charlesworth	LJ Moon(κ)
2RAR	JM Church	LA Williams(κ)
3RAR	JJ Shelton	V Murdoch
3RAR	FP Scott	WJ Hill
4RAR	LR Greville	C Toghill(κ)
4RAR	JC Hughes	WTC Thompson
5RAR	JA Warr	LT Foale(κ)
5RAR	CN Khan	CR Vagg(κ)
6RAR	CM Townsend	GE Chinn(κ)
6RAR	DM Butler	J Cruickshank(κ)
7RAR	EH Smith	AP Thompson (κ)
7RAR	RA Grey	R Bandy(κ)
8RAR	KJ O'Neill	GJC Lee(κ)
9RAR	AL Morrison	D Cassidy(κ)

Note: All 17 Commanding Officers served in Korea and 13 of the 18 Regimental Sergeant Majors (κ).

Chapter II: The Regiment Goes to War

1RAR 1965

While training at Holsworthy, NSW, in March 1965, 1RAR was warned for service in South Vietnam. After rapid preparation, including a ten day exercise (Sky High II), 1RAR (*Lt Col IR Brumfield, CO and WO1 JD McKay, RSM*) deployed to Vietnam by five Qantas charter aircraft (1 to 10 June) and with B, Support and Administrative Companies departing on *HMAS Sydney* on 27 May and arriving Vung Tau on 8 June.

By 10 June the Battalion had concentrated at the Bien Hoa air base and placed under command of the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade (173 Abn) which, in May 1965, was the first US ground combat formation committed to the war. In addition to 1RAR and 161 Battery RNZ Artillery,

the Brigade comprised the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 503rd Infantry Regiment (1) and integral artillery, engineers and assault helicopters. 1RAR formed part of the perimeter for the defence of the base. The Battalion was to assume responsibility for its Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) by 20 June; before that it conducted intensive training with helicopters and APCs and patrolling with the US Battalions.

On 25 June, the Battalion conducted its first operation, a one day 'Search and Destroy Operation' a few kilometres to the east of Bien Hoa. The operation went smoothly however, on return to base the next day, a grenade accident in C Company killed two soldiers (*Pte MA Bourke and Pte WT Carroll*) and wounded another six, one of whom later died (*Pte A Van Valen*).

Despite misgivings by the Army regarding how the Americans would employ 1RAR and considerable confusion at Defence Head level on its operational parameters, the Battalion nevertheless settled into a comprehensive pattern of patrolling within its TAOR. In early July 1965, 173 Abn conducted a brigade Search and Destroy operation into War Zone D to evaluate the Brigade's airborne operations. 1RAR's Area of Operations (AO) was from the Dong Nai River to a distance of about 10 Kms North. On 7 July, 6 Platoon (*2Lt PA Sibree*) contacted an enemy section resulting in two soldiers being seriously wounded

(*Pte ER Weatherall*) and a Section 2iC (*LCpl DM Munday*) who, despite his savage wounds, continued to direct the Section Machine Gun. On 8 July 12 Platoon (*2Lt CE Leggett*) while in defence of Battalion Headquarters received fire resulting in the first 1RAR soldier to be killed in action (*Pte WL Nalder*).



Private GW House digging a weapon pit on the 1RAR perimeter in the flat country north of the Bien Hoa airbase.
AWM DNE/65/0045/VN

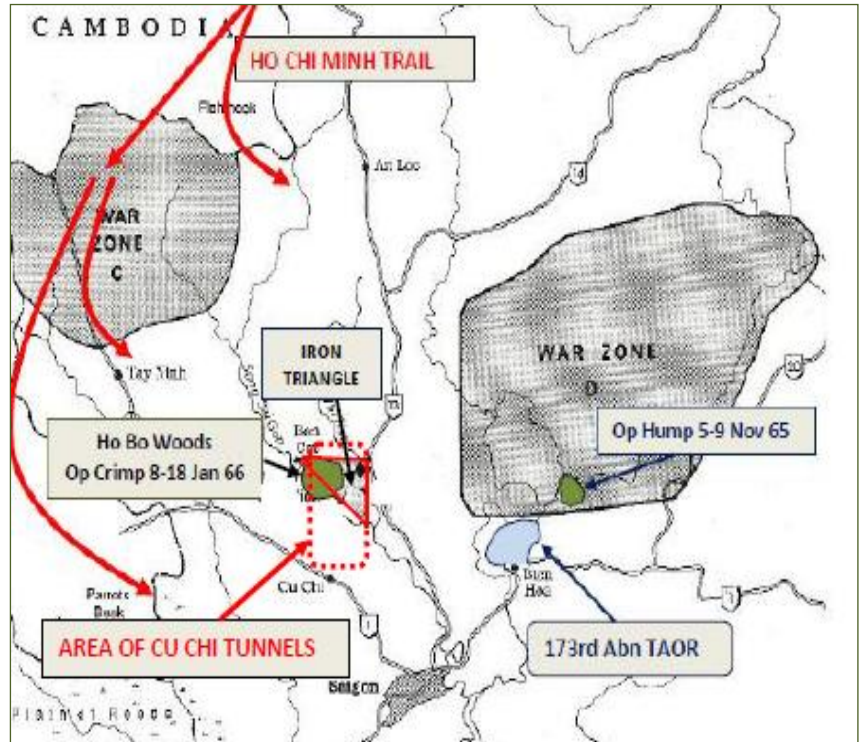


For his bravery on 7 July 1966, LCpl DM Munday was awarded a Military Medal

Note(1). In WWII, the 503rd as the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment did the 1943 airborne assault onto Nadzab in the Markham Valley in New Guinea.

During late July and early September 1965, 173rd Abn operated in Phuoc Tuy Province and Pleiku (II Corps). On these occasions 1RAR was placed under the operational control of 2nd Brigade, 1st US Infantry Division and became responsible for the whole of the 173rd Bde's TAOR (see map on page 16).

From July until the end of September, 1RAR was involved in a further 8 Search and Destroy or Patrolling Operations, which were principally related to the security of the Bien Hoa Air Base. From October 1965 through into 1966, the Battalion became involved in a number of brigade and battalion operations aimed at extending allied control of the enemy dominated areas of 'War Zone D', the 'Iron Triangle' and the 'Ho Bo Woods'.

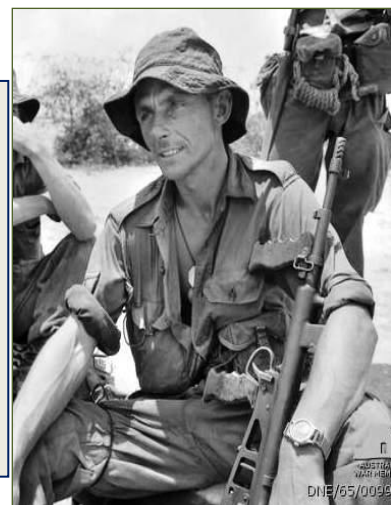


This area was adjacent to the southern end of the *Ho Chi Minh Trail* from where supplies and reinforcements entered South Vietnam and had been used extensively by the *Viet Minh* during the First Indo China War with many fortifications constructed including a maze of underground tunnels. The Viet Cong replaced the Viet Minh and commencing in 1963 added several hundreds of kilometres of tunnels, which in 1966 had become important staging areas for operations against Saigon – see 'Cu Chi Tunnels'. In addition to the tunnel complex, the *Iron Triangle* was heavily defended with mines, booby traps and snipers, which together with heavy undergrowth made a very dangerous environment for the men of 1RAR.

The '*Ho Bo Woods*' was another French owned rubber plantation. It was used by the VC as a base area and was laced with tunnels and underground complexes and consisted of rubber plantations, sparse to dense woods and open rice paddies. The central area of the Ho Bo consisted of rubber trees and dense woods; however, secondary growth throughout the area varied from light to thick with the centre being the lightest area (See also *Operation Crimp*).



Left: Private KC Briggs from 1RAR Signals Platoon returning from a Search and Destroy operation conducted in War Zone D in July 1965. Note the WWII 37 Pattern Web Equipment and AB Boots
Right: Pte RJ Humbles armed with a WWII Owen Machine Carbine which in due course was replaced by the M16 Rifle.
 AWM DNE/65/0098/VN
 AWM DNE/65/0099/VN



Operation Hump: 5 – 9 November 1965

'War Zone D' was also a hazardous place in which to operate as 1RAR was to find out during *Operation Hump* in early November 1965; it had been joined by 105 Field Battery on its first operation, though A and C Companies retained Forward Observer Parties from 161 Field Battery

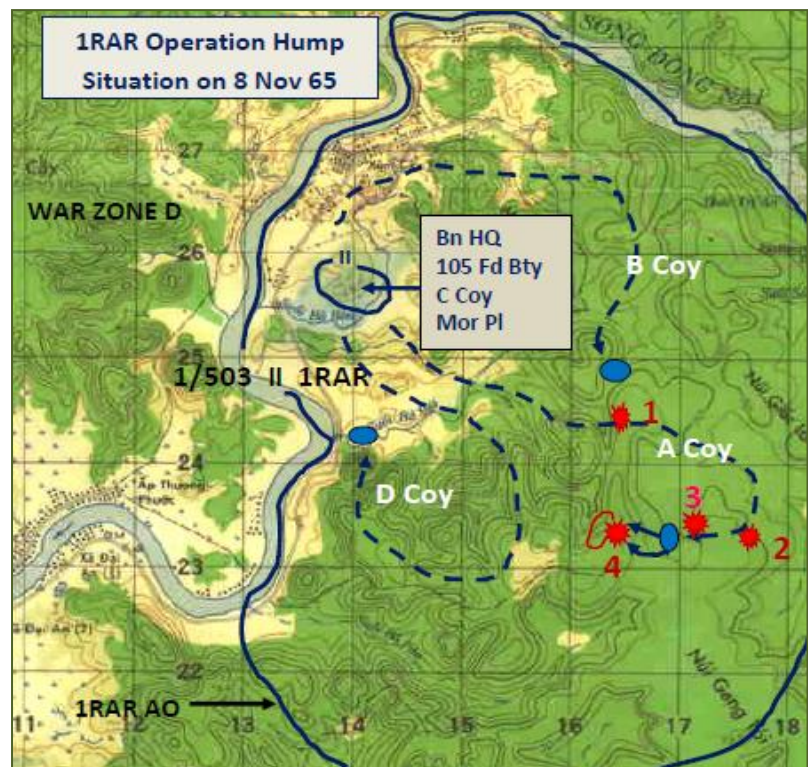
A Company (*Maj JB Healy*), patrolling in the east of the AO, had minor contacts on 6 November (1) and mid morning on 8 November (2). At about 2.30pm that day, 2 Platoon (*Lt IM Guild*) was investigating a VC camp of 6 bunkers dug into anthills when it was fired upon by an enemy scout and a short time later 1 Platoon (*Sgt GH Peterson*) killed two VC at the same location (3).

At about 4.30 as the Company commenced to climb the leech infested rainforest slopes of the *Gang Toi Hills*, where it was thought a VC Headquarters was hidden, 1 Platoon had reached the crest of the ridgeline when it was engaged by 3 machine guns, rifles and grenades from enemy bunkers (4). Five men were wounded in this first exchange but all except *L Cpl RH Parker* who was most likely dead, managed to withdraw from the killing ground. 3 Platoon (*2Lt CG Williams*) was ordered to move up on the left of 1 Platoon and had advanced some 50 metres when its left flank was engaged by 3 machine guns from another part of the enemy defensive position.

As the Platoon advanced by fire and movement the lead section's machine gunner, *Pte PR Gillson* was hit several times. The Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt C Fawcett*) moved forward while under intense enemy fire, confirmed that *Gillson* was dead but could not retrieve his body as it had wedged in tree roots. In the meantime the Forward Observer (*Capt BA Murphy RNZA*) had directed fire from 105 Battery onto the enemy position. Given that the guns, enemy and A Company were in a virtual straight line this was both skillful and courageous because he was also constantly under enemy fire. By now it was 6.30 and as the enemy was clearly at least of company strength and in a well prepared defended position, A Company withdrew, reluctantly leaving the two dead soldiers on the battlefield. (2) Operational imperatives did not allow 1RAR to return to the scene.

Operation Hump was to be *Lt Col Brumfield's* last operation as CO of 1RAR; in December 1985 he returned to Australia with chronic medical (back) problems and was replaced by *Lt Col AV Preece*, who had been the CO of AATTV. The RSMs also changed with *WO1 McKay* being replaced by first *WO2 JG Currie* and then *WO1 WJ Birkett*

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The following awards were made for the A Coy action on 8 Nov:

- **Military Cross: Capt BA Murphy, RNZA**
- **Military Medal: Sgt C Fawcett**
- **Medal for Gallantry: Maj JB Healy**

Note (2). LCpl Parker and Pte Gillson were eventually listed as Missing In Action. Their remains were recovered in April 2007 and repatriated to Australia on 6th June 2007.

Operation Crimp: 8 – 18 January 1966

Operation Crimp, also known as the Battle of the Ho Bo Woods, was the first Divisional level operation in Vietnam and involved the 173rd Abn and the 3rd Brigade of the 1st US Infantry Division. The operation targeted a key Viet Cong Headquarters that was believed to be concealed underground. Heavy fighting resulted in significant casualties on both sides, but the combined American and Australian force was able to uncover an extensive tunnel network covering more than 200 square kilometres, ie the Cu Chi Tunnels – see map on page 16. Despite some success, the allied force was only able to partially clear the area and it remained a key communist transit and supply base throughout the war. The tunnels were later used as a staging area for the attack on Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive before heavy bombing from American B-52 bombers in 1970 largely destroyed them.

Between 1-7 January, 1RAR participated in *Operation Marauder*, conducted in the northern part of the Plain of Reeds and was deployed direct from that operation to *Operation Crimp*. On 8 January, 1RAR was inserted into the north of the AO with a primary role of a blocking force.

As it turned out the battalion basically landed on top of the tunnel system concealing the VC Headquarters that had been the target of the operation. Consequently, no sooner had the lead elements commenced to move from the LZ to its position, when VC defenders began to engage the companies in order to delay their advance and allow the headquarters personnel to escape through the tunnel system. The lead section of 12 Platoon (*2Lt JR Bourke*) was ambushed by one such group with the forward scout and the section commander being badly wounded. Two stretcher bearers (*Ptes NW Horne and MAF Wilson*) who went forward to assist were both killed and 2Lt Bourke then rushed forward to rescue the wounded and was himself shot through the jaw by a sniper but continued to pull the wounded soldier to safety.

CO 1RAR pushed the other companies around D Company to move towards the battalion's original blocking position. Soon it was also in contact with small groups of Viet Cong from positions behind trees and in bunkers, while others popped up from spider holes and tunnel entrances. By the end of the first day 1RAR had lost 3 men killed and 15 wounded while the Forward Observer with B Company (*Capt KW Bade*) was also killed when the Company Headquarters was attacked by a command detonated mine.

Over the next few days the Battalion supported by sappers from 3 Field Troop (*Capt AH MacGregor*) systematically searched the tunnel complex housing the enemy headquarters. Some 56 square kilometres were penetrated and in the process not only captured substantial amounts of weapons, ammunition and supplies but also documents, which provided significant intelligence. On 11 January, a 'Tunnel Rat' (*Cpl RW Bowtell*) became trapped in an underground tunnel; a 1RAR soldier (*Pte JP Daly*) at great risk to himself, made several unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the Sapper.

The operation concluded on 14 January by which time 1RAR had effectively destroyed the headquarters of the *Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh VC Unit* at a cost of 8 killed and 29 wounded.



The following awards were made for Op Crimp:

- **Military Cross: Capt AH Macgregor**
- **Medal for Gallantry: 2Lt JR Bourke**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Pte JP Daly**

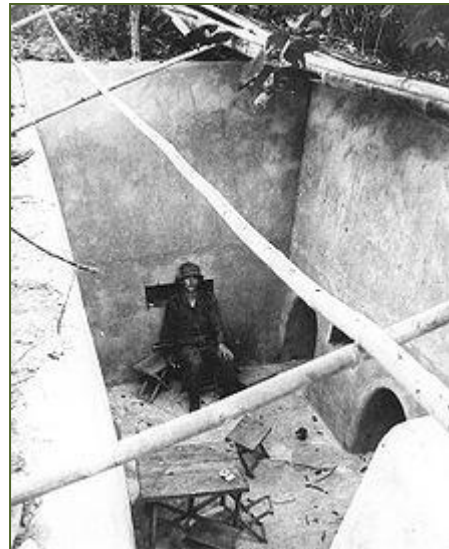
1RAR troops after landing from 173rd Abn Bde helicopters on Operation Marauder.

AWM SHA/66/0007/VN



2nd Lieutenant JP Dwyer, OC 7 Platoon C Company 1RAR; standing in front of a typical Viet Cong bunker in the Ho Bo Woods during Operation Crimp. A Tracker Dog and Handler are to the rear.

AWM KEL/66/0020/VN)



Underground Command Post with roof removed and entry/exit tunnels shown at right.

After **Operation Crimp** 1RAR conducted a number of search and destroy operations, mainly in War Zone D. In March/April 1966 the Battalion was detached from 173rd Abn and placed under operational control of the 1st US Infantry Division for **Operation Abilene** in Phuoc Tuy Province. 1RAR operated from the Courtenay Rubber Plantation in the north to Binh Ba in the south and during the operation US and ARVN forces resettled the village of Long Tan and partially destroyed the village of Long Phuoc in advance of the establishment of the 1st Australian Task Force at Nui Dat.

The Task Force is Established and 5RAR and 6RAR go to War

Not long after 1RAR had arrived in Vietnam, discussion and debate on a wider role for Australia in the war had begun. By mid July 1965 planning had commenced in earnest to deploy a two-battalion Task Force however, a Government decision in August 1965 directed that such planning be discontinued. After several months of indecision the Government finally agreed in March 1966 to send a Task force in May or June 1966. Given the restrictions that had been placed on any prior detailed planning, it was clearly going to be a difficult task to prepare a sensible plan for the deployment.

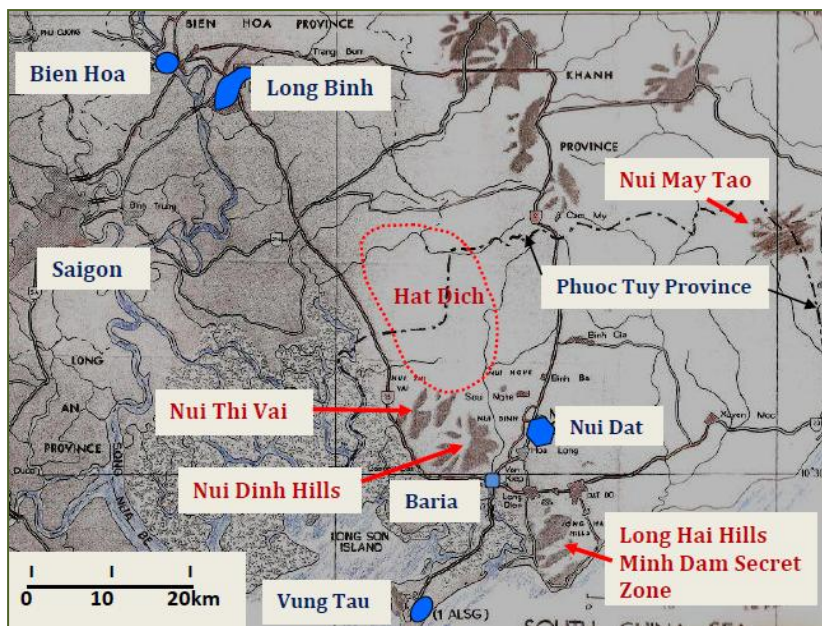
In March 1966 it was also decided that the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) would be assigned to Phuoc Tuy Province and be under the Operational Control of a US Army Corps Headquarters, ie II Field Force Vietnam (IIFV) based at Bien Hoa. For a number of reasons, especially its isolation from the populated areas, the location of the forward operational base for 1ATF was selected at Nui Dat while the 1st Australian Logistics Support Group (1ALSG) was to be located at the port city of Vung Tau, some 25 Km to the south west ([see map on page 20](#)).

5RAR and 6RAR had been raised in March and June 1965 from 1RAR and 2RAR respectively and now went to higher levels of operational training including at the Jungle Training Centre (JTC) at Canungra, Queensland. Both battalions had received National Servicemen as reinforcements, who in March 1966 the Government had approved for operational duty in Vietnam. 5RAR (*Lt Col JA Warr, CO and WO1 LT Foale, RSM*) was designated to be the first battalion to deploy with 6RAR (*Lt Col CM Townsend, CO and WO1 GE Chinn, RSM*) replacing 1RAR in June 1966.

5RAR was complete in Vung Tau by early May and conducted intense in-country training. In the meantime, local government authorities had been in the process, albeit incomplete, of removing people from villages close to Nui Dat as they were a known haven for VC units and supporters. Indeed, except for a small portion of the Province, ie a narrow corridor running from the Provincial Capitol Baria to the port city of Vung Tau, the Province was very much under the control of the VC.

Removing the population was a prerequisite for the occupation of Nui Dat because unlike the US, the Australians refused to have any local people either in or near the base.

The preliminary operations to clear these villages were controlled by 173rd Abn Brigade, which suffered heavy casualties (23 killed and 160 wounded), most of them in contact with *D445 VC Battalion*, which was to be a protagonist for the battalions of the Regiment for many years to come.



Operation Hardihood: 24 May-15 June 1966.

The operation to establish the Task Force at Nui Dat was planned in three phases:

- I. 24 May to 4 June:** 173 Abn with 5RAR Group under operational control, conduct clearing operations in AO Hardihood
- II. 5 to 15 June:** With the Base Area secured by 5RAR, the remainder of the Task Force, less 6RAR and 3 SAS Squadron deploys to Nui Dat;
- III. 16 to 23 June:** Remainder of tactical units, including 6RAR and 3SAS deploy to Nui Dat

On 24 May 1966, 5RAR moved to a LZ secured by the 2/503 Battalion 173rd Abn. 5RAR's mission was to "secure and defend the base area for occupation by 1ATF". A US Army Helicopter Company moved the Battalion in four flights of each 30 helicopters; this was complete by 11.30am after which the companies moved off on their assigned tasks. 105 Field Battery which had redeployed from Bien Hoa, was in Direct Support from a gun position located just north of Baria.



Men from 5RAR patrol through an overgrown plantation on 26 May 1966. Note the second man is carrying an Owen Gun
AWM FOR/66/0436/VN

After patrolling all day in dense scrub and very hot conditions, late in the afternoon the rifle companies began to harbour for the night; as A Company (*Maj AP Cassidy*) and B Company (*Maj MB McQualter*) were doing this a contact occurred between them with a small enemy group. The Battalion's first battle casualty occurred when a B Company soldier was seriously wounded as a result of friendly fire (*Pte EW Noack*). Some hours later the soldier died from his wounds.

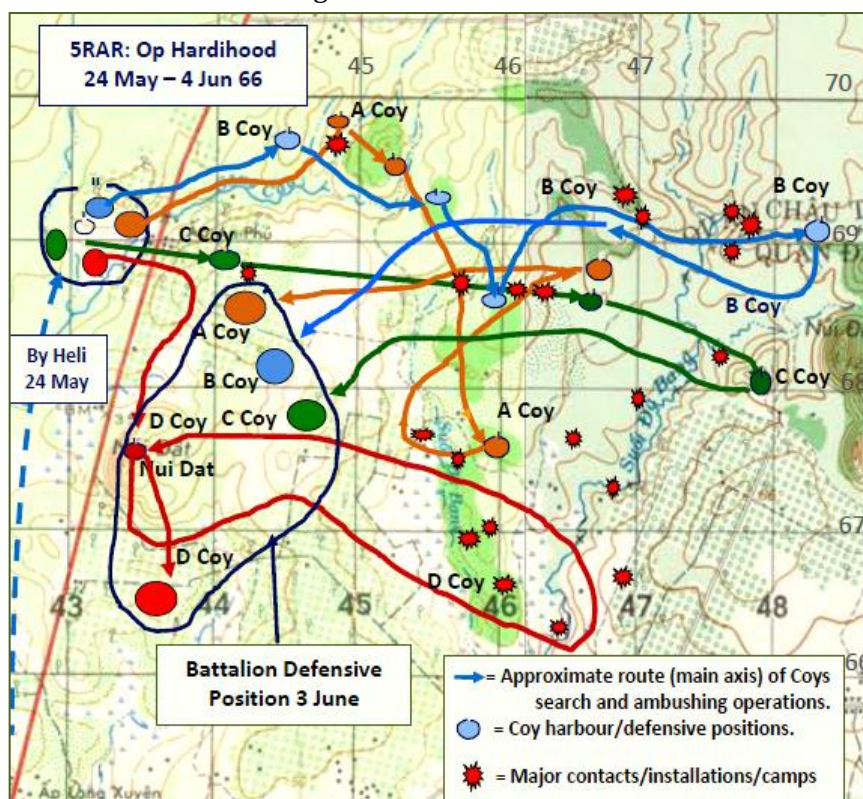
During this early phase, 5RAR made contact with or sighted about 90 VC and inflicted about 20 casualties; a number of tunnels, food caches and VC camps were also discovered especially adjacent to water courses.

On 3 June 5RAR occupied a temporary defensive position prior to the Task Force (less 6RAR and 3SAS Squadron) arriving from Vung Tau on 5 June. On that day HQ 1ATF assumed command of the area from 173rd Abn.

While the Task Force set about establishing the base, building roads, water points and maintenance areas etc, 5RAR continued to conduct an intensive patrol programme to secure the area. Several contacts were made with local force enemy who also launched a number of mortar attacks including one against a D Company (*Maj PN Greenhalgh*)

patrol on 10 June; both 82 mm mortars and 120mm mortars were used with the latter from a base plate on the eastern slope of the Nui Dinh Hills (3). Two men were killed (*Cpl BF Coupe and Pte LT Farren*) and three wounded, two seriously, in the attack. On 12 June D Company in APCs conducted an operation to search for mortars in the village of Hoa Long and discovered the weapons were being moved to and from the nearby village of Long Phuoc which was subsequently destroyed by 6RAR (see *Operation Enoggera*).

As a result of intelligence that a VC Regiment may be moving against the Task Force, 6RAR was deployed to Nui Dat two days earlier than planned on 14 June. This must have been a welcome move given how thin on the ground it had been for the past fortnight at Nui Dat.



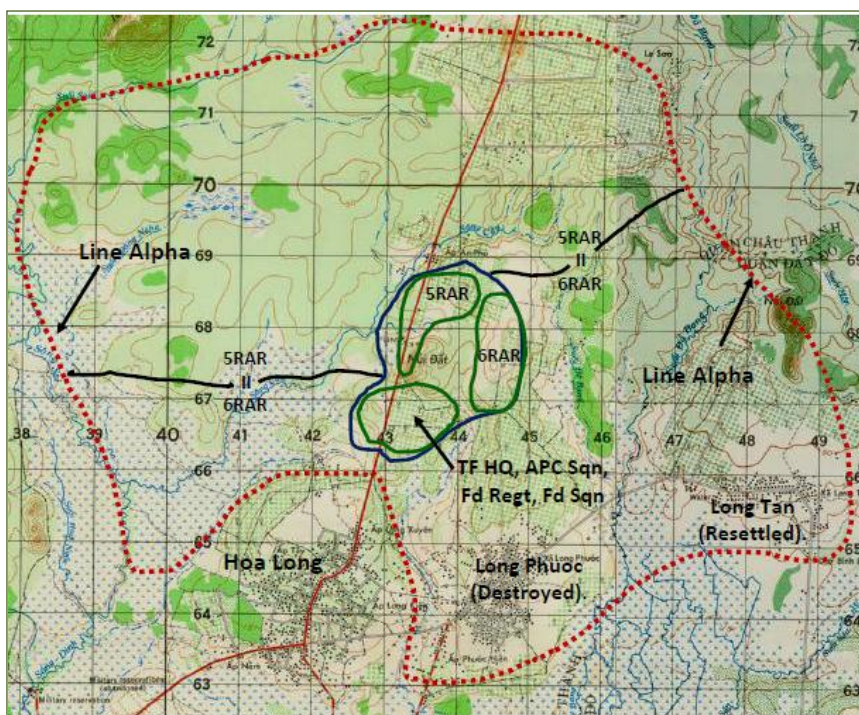
Men from 5RAR patrolling through and paddy fields near Ap An Phu on 26th May 1966.
AWM FOR/66/0436/VN



Note 3. Following an examination of shell fragments from craters it was discovered some were 105mm artillery rounds which it was strongly suspected were fired by ARVN gunners in the vicinity of Baria.

Line Alpha

As mentioned earlier, the Task Force insisted on a no civilian zone around the Base at Nui Dat – this was



designated as Line Alpha (---) which was divided between 5RAR and 6RAR to clear. By late June both battalions had occupied defensive positions at the Nui Dat Base and were committed to half their strength to daily patrols in AOs within Line Alpha and a similar proportion on Platoon ambushes by night. At that stage the tactical situation was as shown on the map (see also [End Notes paragraph 1 for a more detailed map of the layout at Nui Dat](#)).

Both Battalions had been in contact with enemy apparently operating from Long Phuoc. In late June, 6RAR was tasked on *Operation Enoggera* to clear the village of enemy hides which in

effect meant destroying the village. A series of enemy tunnels and fortifications were located and large quantities of food supplies found which were given to the civilian population.



Left: Troops from C Coy 6RAR moving into Long Phuoc on Op Enoggera; and Right: Pte J Bartrim (left with Owen Gun) and Maj BW McFarlane with rice found in a tunnel cache.

AWM CUN/66/0504/VN
AWM CUN/66/0557/VN

Chapter III: Early Operations

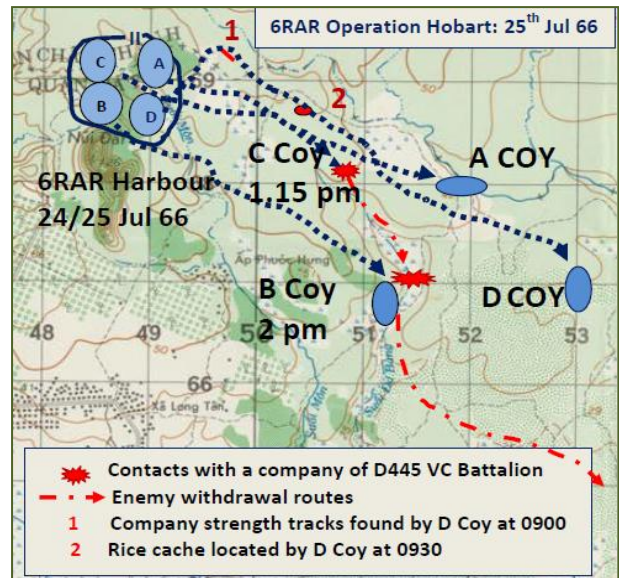
Operation Hobart: 24 to 29 July 1966

Through July and into August the battalions conducted a series of operations within the 1ATF TAOR. On one of these, 6RAR was to experience at first hand the substantial fighting capabilities of *D445 VC Battalion*. 6RAR's mission was to Search and Destroy east and north east of the resettled village of Long Tan.

On 24 July 6RAR moved by foot from Nui Dat to a battalion night harbour position. At first light on 25 July the companies, led by D Company (*Maj HA Smith*) commenced their allotted patrol tasks; by mid morning D Company had found evidence of enemy in the area (Notes 1 and 2) and a few hours later at approximately 1.15 pm, C Company (*Capt PJS Harris*) contacted a company size enemy group which responded with two machine guns that were quickly neutralised by a platoon machine gunner (*Pte WJ Winterford*) whose sustained fire forced the enemy to withdraw to the south east.

B Company (*Maj NE Ford*) heard the C Company contact and deployed into a quick defensive position to block the enemy withdrawal. At approximately 2 pm, sentries deployed some 50 metres in front of 6 Platoon (*2Lt HD Shortt*) engaged an approaching group of enemy which responded with automatic fire and grenades. After 10 minutes the enemy ceased firing and was thought to have withdrawn but in fact was deploying its main body preparatory to attacking the platoon.

As 6 Platoon commenced a sweep of the contact area it was engaged by heavy fire at close range causing a number of casualties including the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt KJ Brady*) who was replaced by a Section Commander (*Cpl RBD Rutherford*) who tended the wounded and distributed ammunition while under heavy mortar fire.. The enemy continued to mortar the company position with 60 mm mortars causing further wounded including the FO (*Capt KP Murphy*) before making a clean break and orderly withdrawal to the southeast; bugles and whistles were used as signals. The Company lost two men killed (*Cpl JW Norris and Pte AT Purcell*) and 12 wounded in the action while the enemy lost at least 20 killed and wounded. The Company Commander's assessment of the enemy at the time was that they were determined, had good battle skills and had impressive firepower. This was an important action because it demonstrated that the fighting ability of the enemy was clearly far superior to the opposition which the Regiment had faced previously in Malaya and Borneo (See also End Notes, paragraph 2). Operation Hobart continued to 28 July discovering a number of enemy company size base camps thus disrupting *D445 Battalion's* capacity to operate in the area; however, the enemy's capacity to concentrate significant forces within 1ATF's TAOR was given stark realism a week or so later when another, more savage encounter was to occur just some two kilometres due west of the B Company experience ie, the *Battle of Long Tan*.



The following awards were made for the contacts on 25 July:

- **Military Medal:** Pte WJ Winterford, MG No1, C Coy; Cpl RBD Rutherford, Sect Comd, 6 Pl.
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Capt KP Murphy RNZA

Maj NE Ford, OC B Coy on the radio with 2Lt WE Kingston, OC 4 Platoon on his right.

AWM FOR/66/0607/VN

Battle of Long Tan: 18 August 1966

Long Tan is undoubtedly the most documented battle fought by the Regiment in Vietnam and it is not necessary to dwell on the details of it. On 18 August 1969, when 6RAR /NZ (ANZAC) Battalion commemorated the battle and honoured the fallen with the Assault Pioneer Platoon erecting the Long Tan Cross on the site where 11 Platoon had fought so valiantly and had lost so many, it was clear just how close the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army attackers had got to D Company's position, especially 10 Platoon (2Lt GM Kendall); and, how great the individual soldier's battle skills and discipline must have been to have held off the enemy until relief arrived in the nick of time with the heavy machine guns of 3 Troop, 1 APC Squadron with A Company 6RAR embarked. Prior to that, B Company Headquarters with a composite Platoon (2Lt JP O'Halloran) had also joined in the battle on D Company's right flank.

There is no question that the artillery support from 1st Field Regiment's three Field Batteries was a decisive factor in allowing D Company to hold its position and inflicted severe casualties on the enemy; these were estimated at nearly 2000 dead and wounded, caused by the combined arms skills of Australian and New Zealand Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry. Importantly, the potent direct fire support of the APCs was identified and used to great effect on many subsequent operations.

Clearly the battle was a major defeat for the principal enemy Main Force elements in Phuoc Tuy Province, which were forced to withdraw to bases distant from the populated area. This allowed the Task Force to consolidate its defences at the Nui Dat Base, which was never threatened again by Main Force regimental size forces and the Australian presence in Phuoc Tuy Province would not be again seriously challenged.

In a war where engagement with the enemy was mainly at company level, this battle stands out as probably the greatest challenge the Regiment faced. The men of D Company set the standard for battlefield skills and courage and as the CO 6RAR said in his 'Order of the Day for the Victory of Long Tan' – *"We now know the dangers which face us, our strength, the heights which we can achieve and a confidence in our skill at arms which will be a sustaining influence for the Sixth Battalion for years to come"*.

Long Tan Cross 18 August 1969. Original members of D Company form a Guard of Honour – from left to right: Cpl RD Brown, LCpl MG Campbell, Cpl BR Reilly, Sgt JE Beere, Cpl WJ O'Rourke (3 APC Troop), Sgt NJ Rankin, Cpl GR Richardson, Cpl WA Akell, Cpl B Halls and Cpl WA Roche. Another veteran, Cpl ID Munro was absent because he had been seriously wounded by an M16 mine a few days earlier. The Pipers are (left) Cpl DG Newland and (right) Cpl GJ Black

AWM BEL/69/0556/VN



Awards: All men who served in D Company were awarded the US Presidential Citation (1968) and subsequently, the Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry (2010) and the Vietnamese Unit Citation. Individual awards went to: Maj HA Smith a Military Cross which many years later was upgraded to a Star of Gallantry (2008); WO2 JW Kirby a Distinguished Conduct Medal; Sgt RS Buick and Pte RM Eglinton a Military Medal; and, 2Lts GM Kendall and DR Sabben, Mentioned In Despatches which were upgraded to Medal For Gallantry (MG) in 2008. In 2004 a number of D Company men were given approval to wear South Vietnamese honours; in addition to those listed above, these awards went to Cpl WR Moore (MID), LCpl WA Roche and L Cpl BE Magnussen - Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star; Pte WA Akell (MID), Pte NR Bextrum, Pte IM Campbell, Pte NJ Grimes, Pte AJ May and Pte GM Peters – Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star.

(See also End Notes paragraph 3)

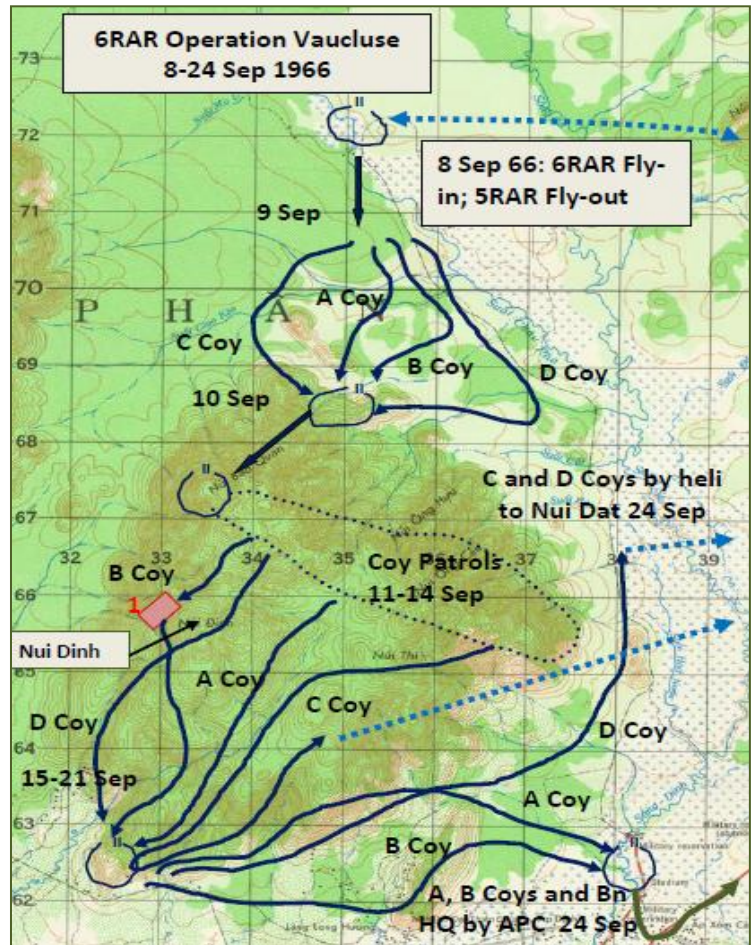
Clearing the Task Force TAOR to the West

After the Battle of Long Tan, 1ATF concentrated on clearing the TAOR of enemy bases and improving the defences at the Nui Dat Base. One area that needed to be cleared was to the west of Nui Dat including the hills of Nui Dinh and Nui Thi Vai.

The first operation to action this was **Operation Vaucluse**, conducted by 6RAR in the Nui Dinh Hills from 8 to 24 September 1966. On 8 September a US Air Mobile Company flew the battalion to a Landing Zone secured by 5RAR as its extraction Pickup Zone from *Operation Toledo* (23 August – 8 September).

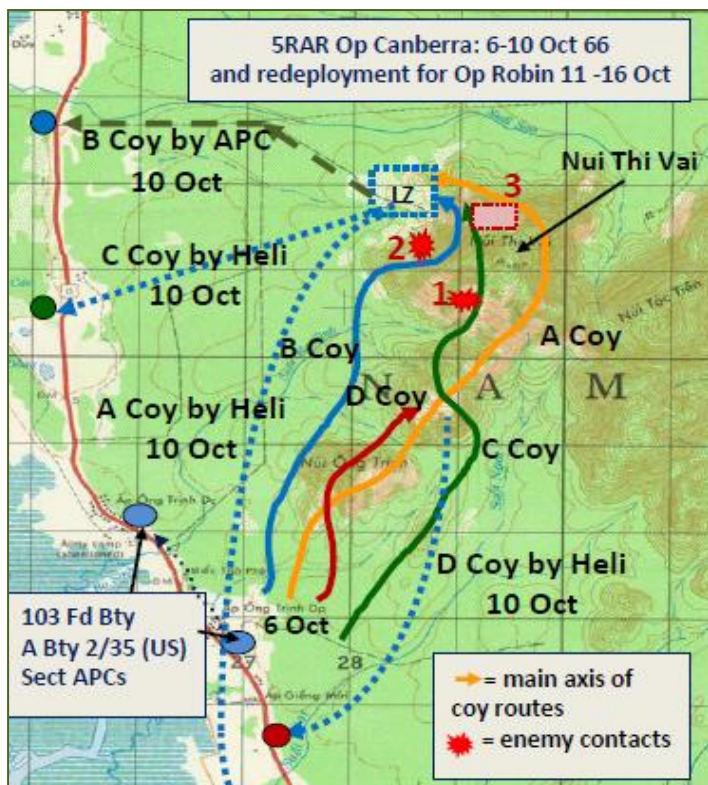
On 9 September, following a predawn B 52 bombing strike (the first of many in 1ATF's area of operations), the Battalion commenced a phased operation into the hills, concentrating in a Battalion Harbour on 10 September.

Although there were only a few contacts with the enemy, a large number of permanent installations were discovered and documents and supplies captured. In particular a large (200 x 200 metres square) camp was found (1) and destroyed by B Company (*Maj NE Ford*) on 17 September. This camp, of some 20 huts with defensive weapon pits and tunnels, had been occupied by the Chau Duc District Unit that had left on 14 September.



Troops from C Company 6RAR patrolling in thick country on the Nui Dinh Hills.
AWM FOR/66/0796/VN

In October 1966, the US commenced its build up of forces with a brigade of the 4th US Infantry Division arriving in Vung Tau for movement to Bear Cat. 1 ATF was responsible for the security of Route 15, the main route between Vung Tau and Saigon, as it passed through Phuoc Tuy Province. The task of clearing the Nui Ong Trinh and Nui Thi Vai hills was given to 5RAR reinforced by a company of 6RAR. Thus began a series of operations: **Canberra** (6-10 October) to clear the Nui Thi Vai; **Robin** (11-16 October) to picket Route 15; and, **Queanbeyan** (17-26 October) to continue the clearance of the Nui Thi Vai.



Operation Canberra began with 5RAR deploying by APC and Troop Carrying Vehicles (TCV), ie trucks to a concentration area due south of the Nui Thi Vai Hills. Its mission was to clear the hills west of the 30 Easting and progress was steady through very rough terrain. On 8 October there were two contacts with the enemy: by 8 Platoon C Company (*Lt GR Wainwright*) (1) which resulted in 7 men wounded when a booby trap was detonated during a sweep of the area. At about 2pm, two B Company (*Maj BM McQualter*) Forward Scouts (*Ptes CG Cogswell and AD Hillier*) discovered more booby traps and whilst disarming them heard and saw a large number of VC (2). Pte Cogswell moved forward and observed and reported through Pte Hillier on the enemy for nearly an hour before the company prepared to attack the position; however, as HQ 1 ATF had warned the enemy could well be *HQ 274 VC Regiment*, B Company was ordered to withdraw whilst airstrikes were conducted

on the enemy position.

On 9 October C Company (*Maj JF Miller*) located a large camp to the north west of the summit (3) which was some 300 x 400 metres in size with 15 huts, caves, a water supply system, medical supplies and a factory for making booby traps. On 10 October the Battalion redeployed for *Operation Robin*; however, it was to return a week later on *Operation Queanbeyan*.



Right: Troops of C Company 5RAR advancing through thick scrub and bamboo on the Nui Thi Vai on 8 October 1966.
AWM FOR/66/0881/VN

Left: L Cpl RP Shoebridge (left) and L Cpl DA Bryant carrying Pte DG Riik, wounded in the 8 Platoon incident on 8th Oct.
AWM COA/66/0877/VN



Awards for the B Coy contact on 8 October were:

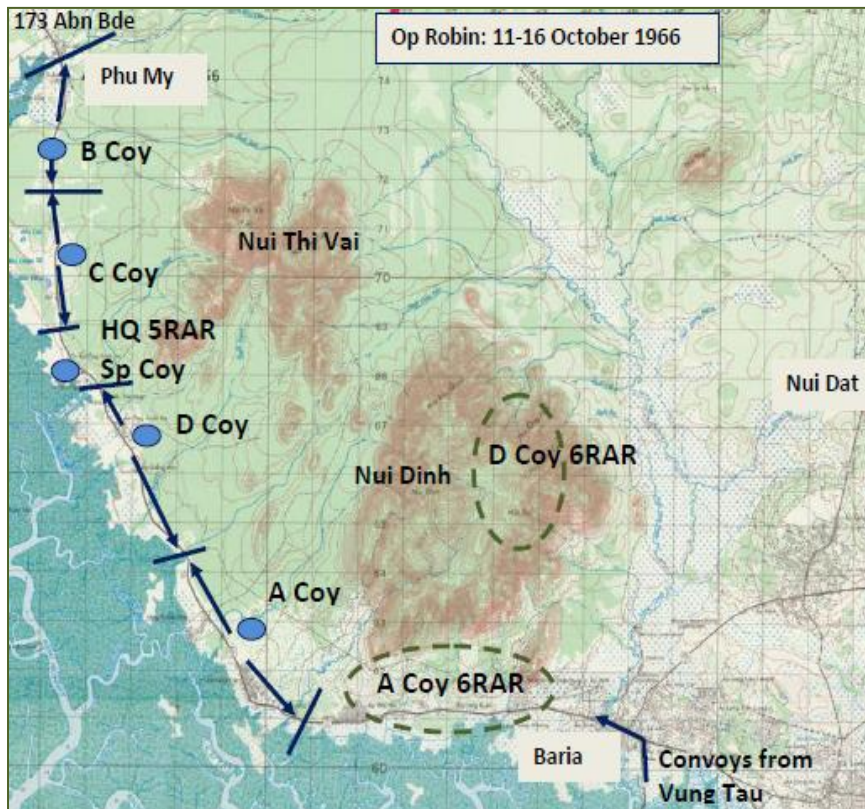
- Military Medal: Pte CG Cogswell, Forward Scout;
- Mentioned In Despatches: Pte AD Hillier, Forward Scout

Operation Robin involved the whole of 1ATF with A Company 6RAR covering the Highway south from 5RAR to Baria and with D Company deployed into the Nui Dinh Hills to prevent VC observation of the US convoys.

5RAR's task was to secure the highway between 9 am and 4 pm daily when two 50 truck convoys carrying troops of the 3rd Brigade 4 US Infantry Division passed on their way to their base at Bearcat.

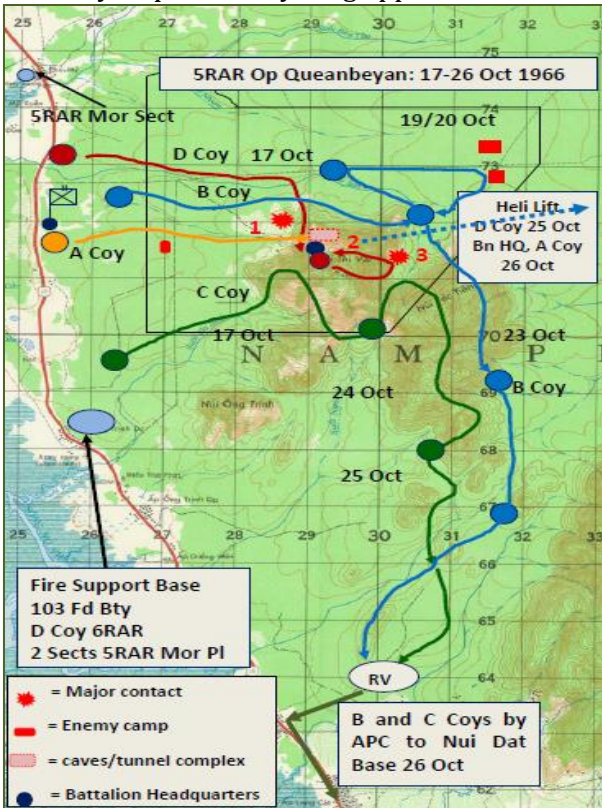
Each Rifle Company had a Section of APCs and a Combat Engineer Team to clear the road of mines and booby traps each morning. There was also a threat from snipers and the companies were required to patrol through a zone of 1500 metres either side of the Highway.

The uncontrolled activities of local ARVN and Regional Force Units, such as those based in the old French Fort (below), were also a problem, particularly the indiscriminate use of booby traps placed inside culverts and land mines laid but not recorded..



The two Indo China Wars come together on Route 15 during Operation Robin. Troops from Support Company 5RAR near an old French Fort at Ap Ong Trinh
AWM PO 1404.002

Operation Queanbeyan was in a sense a continuation of **Operation Canberra** and commenced as securely as possible by long approaches that commenced before first light on 17 October. It wasn't long



before the lead elements moving up the long approach to the summit from the west came into contact with enemy positions and booby traps used as early warning devices. Early in the afternoon a reconnaissance party from Battalion Headquarters was fired upon and the Anti Tank Platoon (2Lt MGJ Deak), which was higher up the hill, was ordered to clear back down the slope. The terrain was strewn with boulders, thick bush and large trees amongst the rocks. The VC position was in a huge a pile of boulders in which they had many shelters and tunnels to use as fire positions.

As the Anti Tank Platoon began its move it was engaged by a number of enemy (1), fatally wounding the lead Section Commander (Cpl NJ Womal) who was treated by the Platoon Stretcher Bearer (Pte P Fraser) while under continuous fire from the sniper that had hit Cpl Womal. As the Platoon attempted to extricate the forward section the Platoon Commander directed supporting fire from A Company (Maj PG Cole) and then from a Light Fire Team of US Army helicopters causing the enemy to withdraw. (See End Notes paragraph 4 for a description of a RAAF Light Fire Team).

On 18 October the Assault Pioneer Platoon (2Lt JD McAloney) was tasked to clear the caves that the VC had fought from against the Anti Tank Platoon the previous day. As the Platoon Commander entered a cave to disarm a booby trap a sniper engaged him and the sentry he had posted, fatally wounding him (Pte DH D'Antoine). After retrieving the wounded soldier 2Lt McAloney cleared the cave where the sniper had been with grenades and subsequently with a team of flamethrowers. The enemy position had been occupied by a company size group probably from the same unit that B Company had come across on Operation Canberra, ie 274 VC Regiment.

Also on 18 October a RAAF Iroquois helicopter had an engine failure and crashed near a C Company LZ trapping one of the pilots. As the aircraft began to burn a C Company rifleman (Pte WR Cavanagh) removed part of the nose to allow him to free the pilot.

On 21 October, A Company located the radio station of the Deputy Commander of 274 Regiment, together with some vital documents, including his diary. The radio was carefully hidden on the third level of the caves (2) and was a recent Chinese model.

Also on 21 October, D Company (Maj PN Greenhalgh) was tasked to search the eastern slopes of Nui Thi Vai and at about 4 pm, 10 Platoon (2Lt DC Rainer) discovered a well camouflaged group of occupied huts (3) surrounded by a belt of mines and booby traps. After a close reconnaissance 2Lt Rainer led his Platoon in an attack that killed 10 of the 11 VC in the camp.

After what had been a very fruitful operation the Battalion returned to Nui Dat on 25 and 26 October for a well earned rest.

Awards for Op Queanbeyan were:

- **Military Cross:** 2Lt MGJ Deak (see 17 Oct); 2LtJD McAloney (see 18 Oct); 2Lt DC Rainer (see 21 Oct).
- **Military Medal:** Pte P Fraser, Stretcher Bearer with the Anti Tk Pl (see 17 Oct);
- **Mentioned In Despatches :** Pte WR Cavanagh, Rifleman in C Coy; Cpl NJ Womal (Posthumous), Sect Comd (see 17 Oct)

By the end of 1966, 5RAR and 6RAR had cleared the Nui Dinh and Nui Thi Vai of major enemy occupation, though it was expected the enemy would return from time to time. Dislodging the enemy from the remaining hill sanctuaries would take longer to achieve: the *Long Hai Hills* in the south of the Province were first penetrated by 5 RAR in February 1967 on *Operation Renmark* and again in February 1968 by 2RAR and 3RAR in *Operation Pinaroo* (27 February- 15 April 1968). By then the VC had been provided with an almost limitless supply of M16 anti-personnel mines and M26 Grenades from the 1ATF minefield making operations in these hills even more perilous. The main home base of *D445 VC Battalion*, the '*Minh Dam Secret Zone*' was finally destroyed by 8RAR in February 1970 (see *Operation Hammersley*).

The largest enemy mountain base in the Núi Mây Tào in the far north east of Phuoc Tuy Province was finally cleared by 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion in December 1969 (see *Operation Marsden*).

2Lt MJ Roe, OC 12 Platoon, D Company 5RAR; he was one of the first National Service Officers to serve in the Regiment. The photograph was taken during Operation Camden (Jan 1967) a Cordon and Search Operation of Hoa Long Village which will be remembered as the venue for Saturday Night Dances - see sign below! The Platoon Interpreter and Local Policeman are standing next to him.

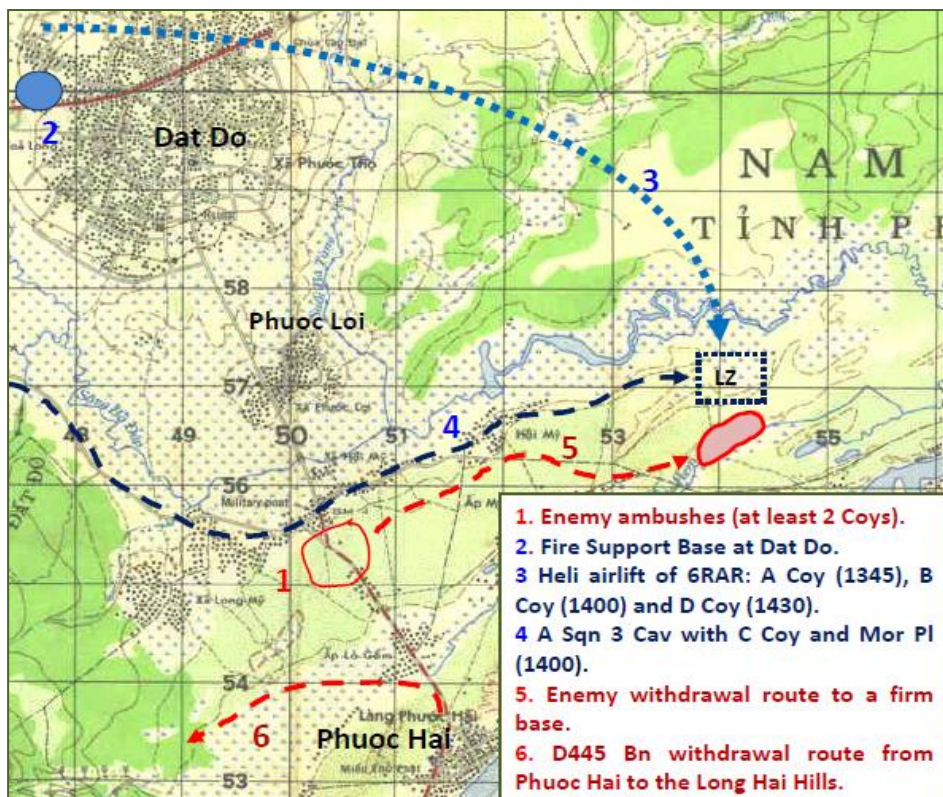
Photograph courtesy of Lt Col (Retd) Melford Roe



Operation Bribie: 17/18 February 1967

Operation Bribie was an important operation for a number of reasons: it was one of the few battalion size battles fought by the Regiment in the war; it demonstrated yet again how inadequate planning and preparation at formation level can lead to tragic consequences; it reaffirmed the need for reconnaissance to establish the flanks of an enemy position before assaulting it; it also reaffirmed the enemy's considerable battle skills and that he was prepared to stay and defend to allow the withdrawal of important assets such as a headquarters; and, significantly, it was the catalyst for the deployment of a squadron of Centurion Main Battle Tanks to the theatre.

Planning for the operation by HQ 1ATF (*Brig SC Graham*) was done with inadequate intelligence on the enemy; as a result, 6RAR was committed piecemeal and the CO 6RAR given a tactical constraint that further prejudiced the outcome of the battle that was to follow. HQ 1ATF believed the Nui Dat Base was under threat from attack by *5VC Division* and directed that 6RAR was not to get so deeply involved with the enemy to the extent that disengagement and extraction back to Nui Dat would not be possible that



afternoon. This raises the question, if the situation was that serious, why was 6RAR sent on a mission to intercept an enemy force which clearly required a full battalion and a properly prepared battle plan to deal with it?

In the early hours of 17 February, HQ 1ATF received reports from Local Forces at Dat Do that a large number of enemy (at least two companies) had occupied Phuoc Hai and adjacent villages. Importantly, it was also reported the enemy had fired 60mm and 82mm mortars and possibly a 75mm Recoilless Rifle into the Regional Force outpost at

Phuoc Hai. This should have alerted planners the enemy was substantial with NVA elements involved; and particularly when by mid morning, it was reported to HQ 1ATF the enemy had established well defended positions astride Route 44 to ambush relieving forces moving south from Dat Do (**Note 1**).

By this time, 6RAR had been placed on 15 minutes notice to move; as had A Company 5RAR to air assault Dat Do airfield to secure it as a gun position for 101 Field Battery to support the 6RAR operation (**Note 2**). A Company (*Maj OJ O'Brien*) was tasked to move to a LZ (**Note 3**) secured by C Company (*Major BW McFarlane*); however, the air move occurred *before* A Squadron 3 Cavalry (*Major GJ Murphy*) with C Company embarked had arrived to secure the LZ (**Note 4**). In addition, HQ 1ATF had approved airstrikes on the enemy's withdrawal route (**Note 5**) which prevented artillery being used to support the move by 6RAR.

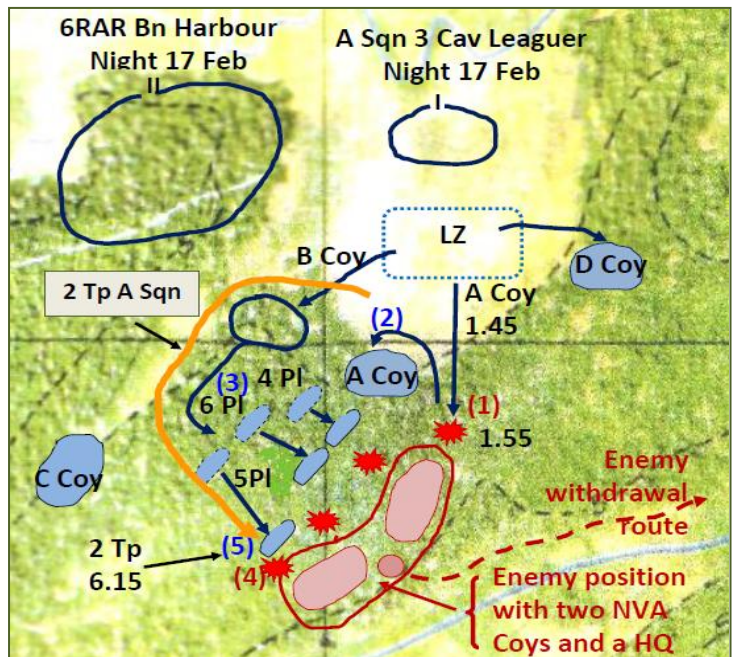
A Company left the LZ and had advanced about 200 metres when at 1.55 pm, 2 Platoon (2Lt GJ Ackland) came under heavy fire from an enemy position (1) which it assaulted with small arms and grenades led by the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt FX Alcorta). This happened without any artillery support because the fly-in was still occurring (B Company arrived in two lifts separated by 50 minutes due to aircraft refueling), there was no Command and Control Airship available for the CO and of course the mortars were with the APC's and hadn't arrived. After suffering several casualties A Company withdrew to form a secure perimeter on the jungle edge to evacuate its casualties (2).

By now the remainder of the Battalion had arrived with B Company (Maj IB Mackay) deploying to the west of A Company, C Company further west and D Company (Maj HA Smith) in reserve. The reports received by CO 6RAR from A Company had not indicated that the enemy was occupying a formed defensive position, ie with bunkers, but rather a camp with huts and weapon pits. This misleading advice was to have dire consequences for B Company because rather than conducting detailed reconnaissance and preparation of a deliberate attack plan, B Company, with fire support from A Company, was ordered to conduct a quick attack and as it turned out, into the teeth of the enemy defences.

B Company assaulted with two platoons up, 4 Platoon (2Lt J Sullivan) on the left and 5 Platoon (2Lt JP O'Halloran) on the right with 6 Platoon (Sgt KJ Brady) in reserve (3). 4 Platoon was soon in trouble from accurate and sustained machine gun fire and 6 Platoon was pushed through on its right to try and relieve the pressure but was also held up by intense enemy fire.

On the right flank, 5 Platoon had become isolated but was ordered to assault the enemy position that had pinned down 4 and 6 Platoons. As it started to do so it was enveloped in a withering burst of fire including from 3 previously undisclosed machine guns on the right flank (4). Every man in the right forward section was killed or wounded except the Section Commander (Cpl RW Jones) who continued to direct covering fire while he reorganized the section. While attempting to provide cover to extract the wounded, the reserve section machine gun group was also killed. The 5 Platoon Stretcher Bearer (Pte RB Odendahl) moved forward under heavy fire to treat the wounded while the Platoon was reinforced with a section from 6 Platoon brought forward by the 5 Platoon Sergeant (Sgt MV McCullough); however, as they arrived they and the wounded were hit by two 'drop-short' artillery rounds. Two more 5 Platoon men were killed and two wounded while six of the seven 6 Platoon reinforcements were also wounded. It was only now (at about 5pm) that the Cavalry Squadron, which had been waiting near the LZ, was tasked to retrieve the wounded from 5 Platoon and to extract B Company from the contact area. Incredibly also at this time, HQ 1ATF was giving directions for 6RAR to break contact and to commence a helicopter extraction back to Nui Dat. Clearly that was now impossible.

2 Troop A Squadron (2Lt DJ Watts) after some difficulty, (blame the fog of war) finally found B Company at about 6.15pm just after the enemy had counter attacked to remove the many enemy dead from the battlefield. As 2 Troop was evacuating the wounded, a carrier loaded with wounded was hit by two recoilless rifle anti-tank rounds killing the driver, wounding the vehicle commander, the medical orderly and re-wounding some of the wounded (5). The vehicle could not be recovered and was destroyed in situ. By about 7.30pm B Company in the carriers arrived back near the LZ where the wounded were quickly evacuated. Seven men, believed dead had been left behind on the battlefield as they were too close to the enemy position to recover without risk of further losses. The Battalion and



the Cavalry Squadron occupied night positions and the enemy position pounded with artillery, mortars and airstrikes.

The following morning 6RAR assaulted back into the battleground but as was expected the enemy had withdrawn during the night. Six bodies from 5 Platoon were recovered and amazingly, one wounded (*LCpl VK Otway*) who had not only survived being surrounded by enemy all night but also from the firepower that had been delivered around him, though he had been wounded again by shrapnel.

The enemy position had been prepared prior to the operations on Route 44 and the Headquarters for the operation (probably a battalion of *275 Regiment*) commanded operations from this position. It was a well prepared defensive position with weapon pits skillfully sited and camouflaged for all-round defence and almost impossible to locate by aerial reconnaissance. It is likely that at least two NVA companies were involved and possibly some guides from *D445 VC Battalion* which had previously withdrawn to the Long Hai Hills. Enemy losses were thought to be about a hundred killed and wounded while Australian losses were eight killed (*LCpl KM Rooney, Ptes PJ Arnold, MJ Birchell, AW Rich, WM Riley, BD Waters, DR Webster and Tpr VI Pomroy*) and twenty seven wounded. But for outstanding leadership, especially at Platoon and Section level and the superb fighting qualities of the soldiers, the casualties would undoubtedly have been much greater. One useful outcome of this savage battle was that it identified the need for Main Battle Tanks to provide the infantry with a powerful direct fire support weapon when in close contact with the enemy. The recommendations that came from Bribie led eventually to the deployment of a Squadron of Centurion Tanks to 1ATF.

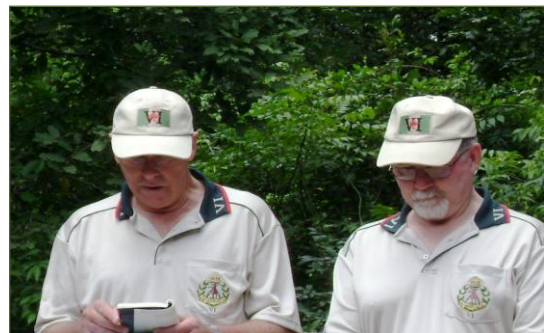
Right: The 5 PI right assault section on 16 February. The only man not killed or wounded was the Section Commander, Cpl RW Jones (front left). L Cpl VK Otway is at centre rear; he also served with 2RAR in Korea including at the 'Battle of The Hook'.

AWM PO2452.002 and courtesy of JP O'Halloran



Above: 5 PI HQ on 16 February. From left Sgt MV McCullough, 2Lt JP O'Halloran, Pte MG Nicholls, Sgt Tuan (ARVN) and Pte RB Odendahl, the 5 PI Stretcher Bearer.

AWM PO2452.001



Above: The author (left) and Rod Graham, ex 6 PI B Coy, on 4 July 2011 at the approximate position of 4 PI in the assault. We read all 7 verses of Binyon's "For the Fallen". The location of Bribie was land cleared in 1969 but 40 years of re-growth gives a very similar landscape today.

Photograph courtesy of Di Fairhead (ex 1AFH)

Awards for Operation Bribie were:

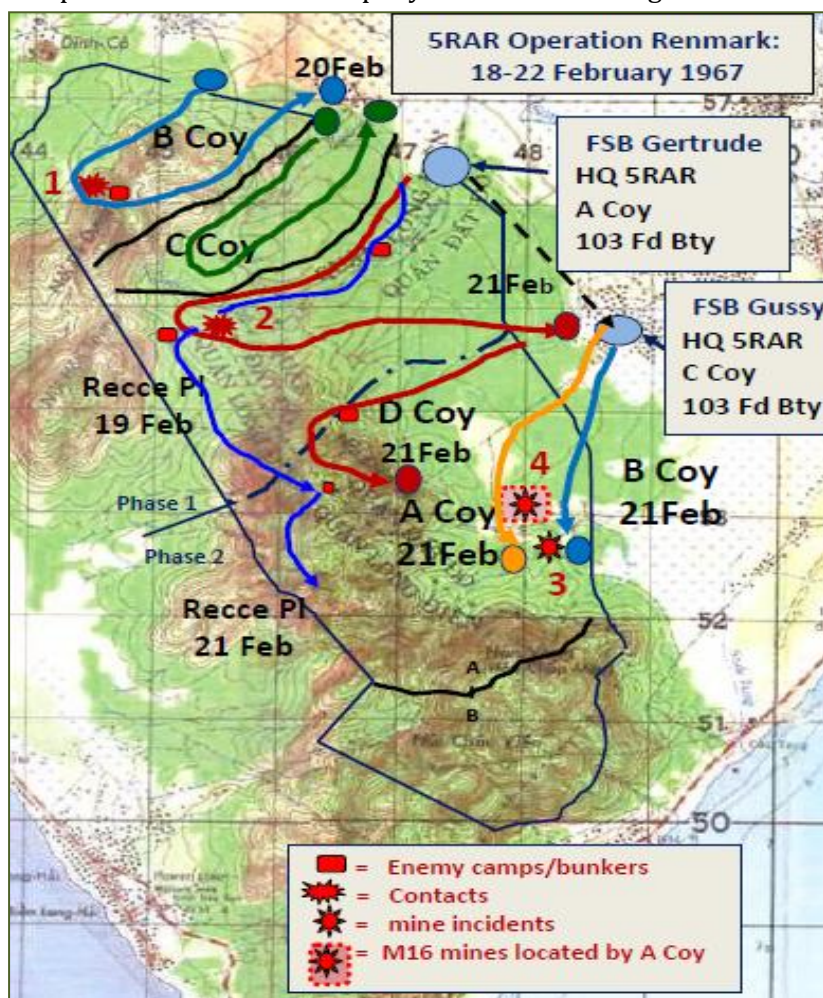
- **Military Medal:** Cpl RW Jones and Pte RB Odendahl;
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** 2Lt JP O'Halloran; 2 Lt GJ Ackland; Pte BK Bartsch, Machine Gunner in 5 PI; Pte CJ Gannon, Machine Gunner in 6 PI; L Cpl KM Rooney (Posthumous), Sect Comd in 5 PI; L Cpl DA Thomas, 6 PI.

Operation Renmark – The Long Hais and Land Mines

February 1967 was also not a good month for 5RAR. On 14 February the Battalion lost the Commander of C Company (*Maj DM Bourne*), the Company 2IC (*Capt RB Milligan*) and the Artillery Forward Observer (*Capt P Williams, RNZA*). They were killed by an ARVN booby trap which detonated outside the village of An Nhut; 13 other men were wounded.

On 18 February, the Battalion commenced *Operation Renmark* a search and destroy operation in the Long Hai Hills which had been a sanctuary for enemy forces since the First Indochina War against the French. Indeed the enemy name for the area, the *Minh Dam Secret Zone*, was named after Viet Minh heroes. The operation had been planned to commence early on the 18 February but was delayed by the commitment of A Company (*Maj OM Carroll*) to 6RAR's operation in the Light Green (*Bribie*) and started at 3.30 pm. By last light the companies had deployed on the northwestern edge of the AO ready to commence the two-phase search and destroy operation in allotted search areas.

On 19 and 20 February both B Company (*Maj MB McQualter*) and the newly formed Reconnaissance (Recce) Platoon (*2Lt MG Deak*) operating with D Company (*Maj PN Greenhalgh*) had found enemy camps with bunkers. B Company also had a fleeting contact with the enemy (1) and the Recce Platoon



contacted 4 VC killing one (2).

On 21 February, Phase Two of the operation commenced with B Company heading south in APCs to its allotted search area. At about 2 pm the lead carrier struck an improvised anti tank mine (a 5 inch US naval shell) which killed the crew (*LCpl KL Mitchinson* and *Tpr RP Wilson*), three B Company soldiers (*LCpl GB Green*, *Ptes DM Clark* and *MD Poole*) and wounded nine others (3). As the group reacted with counter ambush drills and the Company Commander with medics moved forward on foot to help the wounded, an M16 mine was activated killing two more soldiers (*Ptes RW Sandow* and *JC Webster*) and wounding a further nineteen, including the Company Commander and 4 Platoon Commander (*Lt J Carruthers*) both of whom later died. The 5RAR RMO (*Capt HAD White*) was flown in by the 'Possum' helicopter (*Lt JD Campbell*) which landed near the wounded, ie in the minefield. *Capt White* tended the wounded with help from the B Company medic

(*Cpl RF Nichols*) and stretcher-bearers. The wounded were then evacuated to a safe area by the 'Possum' helicopter. By this time, the Artillery Forward Observer (*Lt MG Langley*) had assumed command of B Company and supervised the evacuation of the wounded and the local defence of the position. A Company was sent to the area and as it approached B Company, discovered further clusters of M16 mines (4).

With seven dead and twenty six wounded, most of whom were repatriated to Australia the following week, this incident was one of the most destructive the Regiment would suffer from mines during the war; the sense of hopelessness and frustration felt in the Battalion was compounded when on the following day, HQ 1 ATF ordered 5RAR to return to Nui Dat because of a perceived enemy threat to the Base. Despite explaining to all ranks the reason why the Battalion left the scene so quickly, it nevertheless cast a pall of gloom over the Battalion. There was also reason for bitterness in that while the Battalion had taken care to conceal its operational intentions, HQ 1ATF had allowed the Cavalry Squadron to sweep the foot of the Long Hais only days before. It was reasonable to assume that this activity would have alerted the VC to future intentions and they had prepared mine defences accordingly.



OC 5RAR Reconnaissance Platoon, 2Lt MG Deak and (rear) Cpl GE Leach, 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron RAE. The Platoon had just reached the summit of the Long Hais on 21 February 1968, the first to do so.
 Photograph by courtesy of Michael Baron Von Berg, MC

Awards for the 21 February Action were:

- **Military Cross: Lt MG Langley.**
- **Distinguished Flying Cross: Lt JD Campbell.**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Capt HAD White.**

The Legacy of 5RAR and 6RAR.

The difficulty 5RAR and 6RAR had in establishing the Australian presence in Phuoc Tuy Province cannot be overstated. With little or no engineering construction or logistic support, the Battalions were required to occupy and prepare the defensive positions at Nui Dat while simultaneously conducting a rigorous patrol programme in a TAOR in which the enemy was able to operate at will, especially at night.

The Battalions had deployed at extremely short notice compared with the lead time for later deployments and arguably, in the worst time of the year, ie the wet season when the heat and humidity were intolerable for troops who were not acclimatized to such conditions. For the better part of their tour most troops lived in 'hutchies' and even when tentage did arrive it was missing uprights and ridgepoles - shades of the Crimean War and boxes of left foot boots! There was not enough weapons to defend the Nui Dat Base when the Battalions were out on operations, eg machine guns and .50 calibre HMGs, a weapon not known to the Australian Infantry, had to be scrounged from US Army sources to fill the gap. In the beginning there were not even enough rifle magazines to carry more than peace-time first lines of ammunition.

As a result of the many operations conducted by 5RAR and 6RAR, the enemy's control over the populated areas was dramatically reduced and many safe havens destroyed or made untenable throughout the 1ATF TAOR. In addition to these strenuous operations, the Battalions were also required to secure and prepare the defences at the Horseshoe Feature (D Company 5RAR) and to commence construction of the fence for the ill-fated Barrier Minefield that was to run south from the Horseshoe to the sea at Phuoc Hai. History shows that these two fine Battalions provided a solid base on which those that followed were able to build. It still wasn't going to be easy however, 5RAR and 6RAR had made it less difficult. D Company 5RAR also correctly lays claim to the original owners of Nui Dat Hill - see the poem [at the End Notes paragraph 5.](#)

Chapter IV: The Operational Intensity Rises

7RAR was raised at Puckapunyal on 1 September 1965, mainly with men from 3RAR and the second intake of National Servicemen. After a period on intense training the Battalion was ready for operational service in June 1966 and was providing reinforcements to Vietnam. After a period of further exercises and company training at JTC Canungra, 7RAR (*Lt Col EH Smith, CO and WO1 AP Thomson, RSM*) deployed to Vietnam on *HMAS Sydney* in April 1967, relieving 5RAR on 26 April 1967.

A month later, 2RAR (*Lt Col NR Charlesworth, CO and WO1 RL Moon, RSM*) which had completed four months of intensive training at JTC and exercises at Tin Can Bay and Shoalwater Bay, relieved 6RAR. The Battalion was joined in-country by V Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (RNZIR).

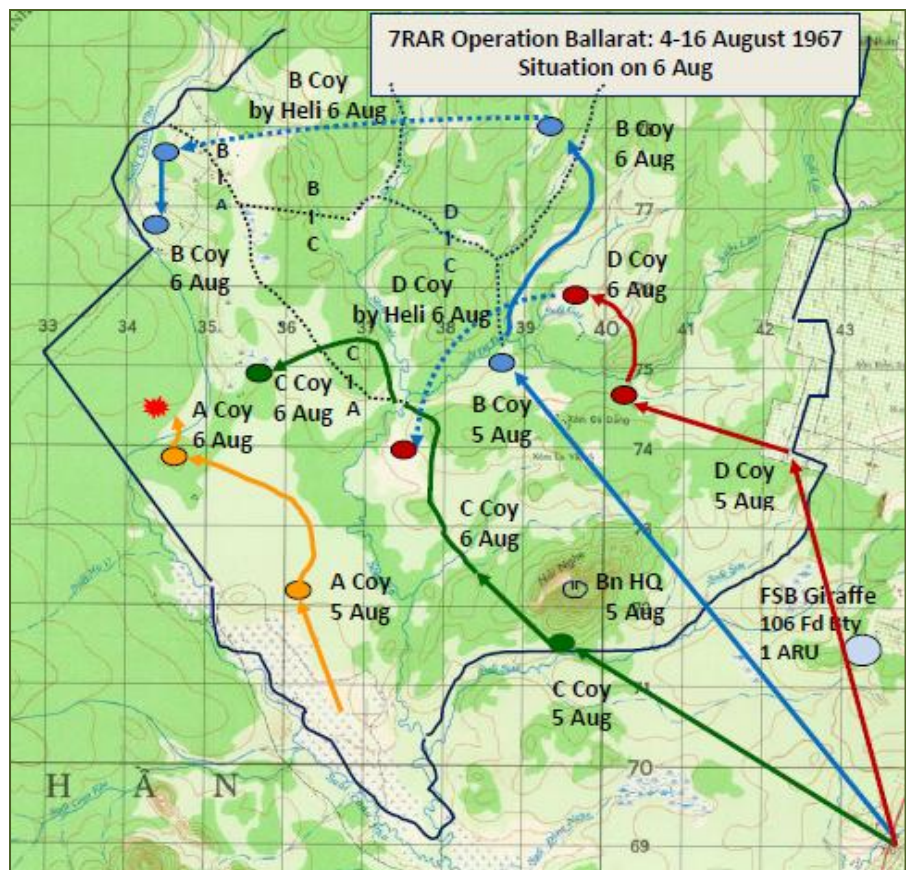
In August 1967, after both Battalions had conducted operations in the 1ATF TAOR, continued construction of the Horseshoe defensive position and the barrier minefield fence, 2RAR and 7RAR began a series of operations.

The first of these was **Operation Ballarat** which involved 7RAR conducting a Search and Destroy operation in an AO to the south east periphery of the 'Hat Dich' base area where 274 VC Regt was frequently based. 2RAR supported the operation, including providing protection for engineering works on Route 2.

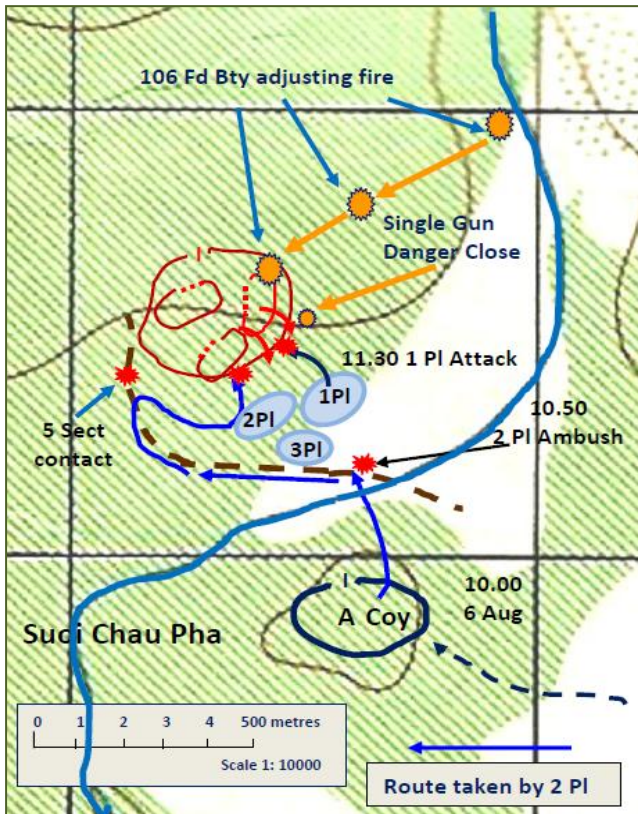
CO 7RAR decided to move the rifle companies by foot from the Nui Dat Base into the Area of Operations (AO); all companies carried five days rations though A Company (*Maj EJ O'Donnell*), which had been patrolling in the southern section of the AO since 3 August received a resupply on 5 August. As a security measure the resupply by RAAF Helicopters was done using SAS insertion techniques and completed in less than three minutes.

By that evening the Companies were basically ready to commence patrolling in the search areas (*see map*). The operation commenced in

earnest on 6 August and by late morning the Battalion was embroiled in a battle in which A Company demonstrated all of the fighting qualities that are synonymous with the Regiment – this was the 'Battle of Suoi Chau Pha'.



Battle of Suoi Chau Pha



By 10 am on 6 August, A Company was positioned to cross the Suoi (Stream) Chau Pha. 2 Platoon (2Lt GH Ross) was first to cross to secure the area north of the river for the remainder of the company to cross. The platoon had moved about 100m north of the river when 5 Section (Cpl GD Tredrea) found a track with fresh (wet) footprints. An immediate ambush was set and a few minutes later at 10.50, a VC reconnaissance patrol of two men entered the ambush and were killed. The remainder of A Company then crossed the river and secured the area; 2 Platoon was ordered to sweep along the track to the west. The track turned north (see map) and about 200 metres on, another VC was contacted and killed by 5 Section. Almost immediately 2 Platoon came under MG and rifle fire from an enemy squad to the northeast. 5 Section was put in a fire support position and the rest of the platoon launched a right flank attack but was engaged by heavy fire to the north including at least 7 MGs. An RPG was also used, badly wounding the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt AD Sutherland). The platoon closed with the enemy using fire and movement killing an enemy platoon

commander and machine gunner whose bodies were later recovered. 2 Platoon had lost two killed (Ptes EF Brophy and JM O'Connor) 9 wounded and was pinned down by very heavy and close enemy fire. After about an hour of fighting 1 Platoon (2Lt RC Smith) was ordered to relieve the pressure on 2 Platoon by conducting a right flanking assault which it did with two sections up. As it drew level with the right flank of 2 Platoon, it came under very heavy and accurate fire from LMGs, rifles and RPGs. Both lead Section Commanders (Cpl JF Hayes and Cpl DR Aylett) and a Rifleman (Pte DG Milford) were killed and it was apparent that two enemy platoons were conducting a left flanking assault on 2 Platoon coinciding with 1 Platoon's assault.

As the company concentrated (with 3 Platoon closing in on the rear), the Forward Observer (Lt NJ Clark, a CMF Officer on full-time duty) continued to call down accurate and sustained artillery fire from 106 Field battery including to within 50 metres of his own position; US Army medium (155mm) and heavy (8 in and 175 mm) artillery at Nui Dat also fired on depth targets while a section of the 7RAR mortar platoon was flown to C Company's position to provide further close fire support for A Company. After some three hours of fierce battle the enemy broke contact in an orderly (thinning out) fashion and withdrew to the north.

It was apparent that A Company had run into a full company of 274 VC Regiment's 3rd Battalion together with the Battalion's Reconnaissance Platoon, armed with RPGs. The battle cost 7RAR five soldiers dead and twenty-one wounded one of whom died of wounds (Pte BA Harstad). The enemy casualties were much more severe, caused in the main by artillery fire. To this day, on 6 August each year, 7RAR celebrates 'Suoi Chau Pha Day'.

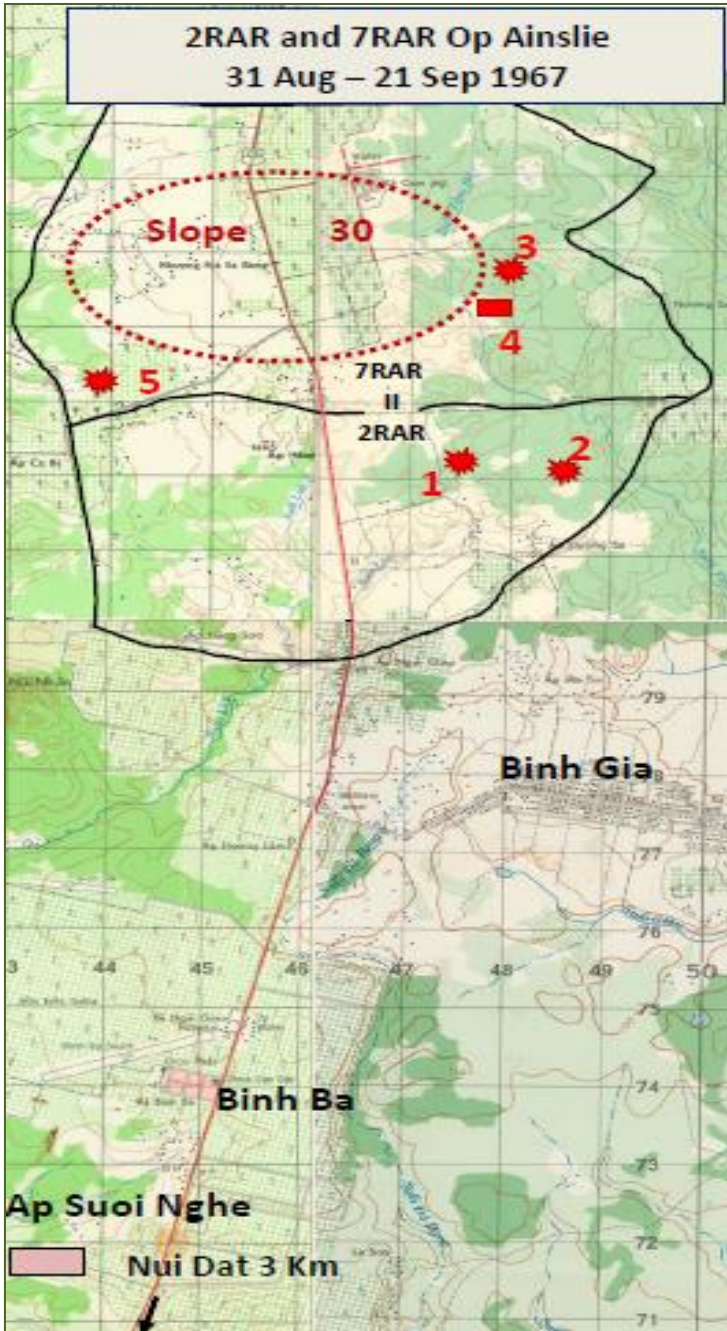
The following awards were made for the battle:

- **Military Cross:** Maj EJ O'Donnell, Lt NJ Clark and 2Lt GH Ross.
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Sgt AD Sutherland.
- **Military Medal:** Pte KR Downward, Forward Scout in 2 PI and Cpl HC Spadbrow, Sect Comd in 1 PI.
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Cpl GD Tredrea, 5 Sect Comd and Pte DF Bathersby, a Machine Gunner in 2 PI

Following *Operation Ballarat* the Task Force conducted a succession of cordon and search operations involving both 2RAR and 7RAR, ie *Operation Mosman* (Hoa Long, 18 August 67), *Operation Burnside* (Dat Do, 24 August 67) and *Operation Ulmarra* (Phuoc Hai, 26 August 67). Whilst the operations were not significantly productive their purpose of demonstrating allied control of these three major villages in the lead up to the Vietnamese elections held on 3 September 67 was considered to be a success. *Operation Ulmarra* is also famous for producing the Vietnam War 'photograph' of 5 Platoon B Company 7RAR's extraction from the PZ on Route 44 just north of Phuoc Hai.

Operation Ainslie 31 August – 21 September 1967

In mid 1967, the VC retained control over a number of strategic areas of Phuoc Tuy Province. One of these, known to the VC as '*Slope 30*,' was some 15 Km north of Nui Dat astride Route 2.



Slope 30 was an important area to the enemy because it was here that coordination occurred for the passage of bulk supplies destined for 5 VC Division, arriving from Saigon in the west, Xuan Loc in the north and from North Vietnam via Cape Ho Tram to the south east (see *Operation Kenmore*).

In August 1967, 1ATF planned an operation involving 2RAR and 7RAR to open Route 2 in conjunction with the US 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment (11 ACR) and to resettle the population located in the *Slope 30* area to a new village to be constructed by 1ATF, ie *Ap Suoi Nghe*.

Operation Ainslie commenced on 31 August when A Company 7RAR (*Maj EJ O'Donnell*) secured the site for the new village for engineers and the Civil Affairs Unit to commence construction. On 4 September, both Battalions deployed into their AOs to secure Route 2 and then to conduct a detailed census of the population prior to their relocation to Ap Suoi Nghe. Some 1100 people were resettled.

Following the destruction of the now deserted villages, both battalions moved further out from Route 2 to conduct search and destroy operations. A number of contacts were made, installations discovered (and destroyed) and important intelligence on the enemy gained, especially regarding *D445 VC Battalion*. The more significant of these clashes and finds were: On 7 September, D Company 2 RAR (*Maj JC Knell*) contacted a Platoon size group from *D445 VC Battalion* killing two (1);

on 13 September C Company 2RAR (*Maj JP Monteath*) contacted a Platoon of *D445 VC Battalion* killing three (2); the following day 5

Platoon 7RAR (*2Lt WR Harris*) was protecting an engineer party destroying bunkers when VC had crept into the system (3). They were engaged by a sentry (*LCpl MT Lloyd*) who shot all three killing two with the third being killed in a follow-up by the platoon. One of the dead was a courier who was carrying letters including one that had an accurate sketch of the 1ATF Base. The bunker system (4) had been located the previous day by B Company 7RAR (*Maj DJ Mealey*) and had most likely been used in a VC battalion attack on the ARVN post at Xa Bang in July 67.

On 20 September a patrol from 3 Platoon 2RAR (*Sgt JW Twomey*) found a camp (5) and was in the process of ambushing it when a single VC appeared and was engaged; in the firefight the Patrol Commander was shot in the leg and subsequently died.

Operation Ainslie was successful in eradicating the enemy supply base at *Slope 30* and relocating the local population to their new village. It also demonstrated the flexibility required by the Regiment in undertaking unusual tasks for which there had been little or no specific training.

**Early days for 7RAR as a Mechanised Battalion.
L Cpl PJ Kerley, riding a stray pony during Op
Ainslie.**

AWM COL/67/0815/VN



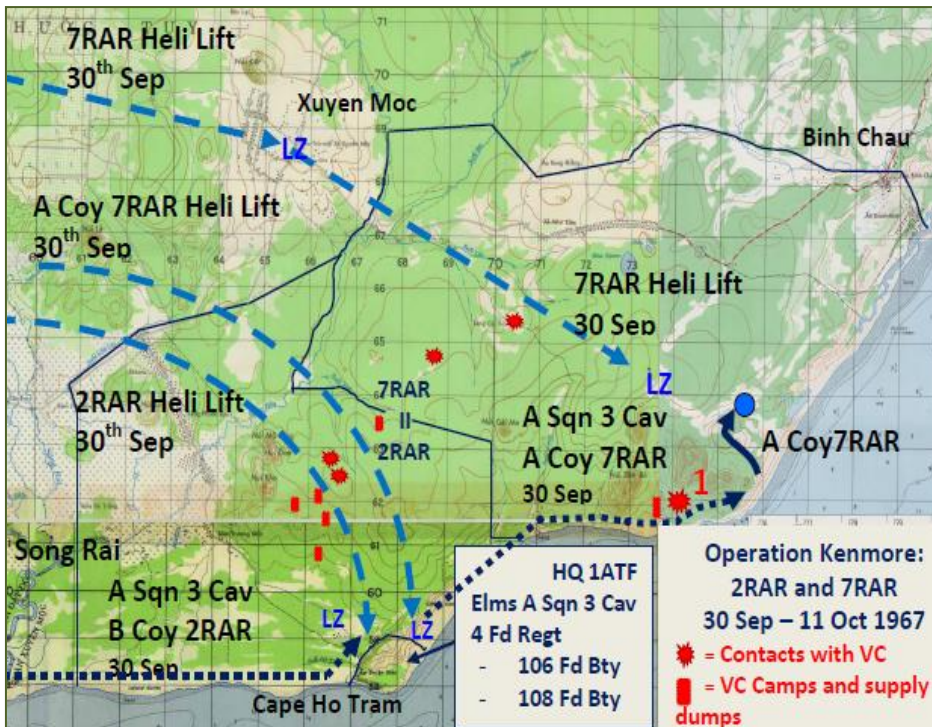
After *Operation Ainslie*, 1 ATF turned its attention to another of the enemy's strategic logistic bases, ie the coastal area south east of the District Centre of Xuyen Moc between the Song Rai River and the village of Binh Cha. This included Cape Ho Tram which was linked to *Slope 30* as an important supply network for 5 VC Division. In this case, the supplies came by sea from North Vietnam and were received and delivered by specialist VC supply units.

Operation Kenmore: 30 September – 11 October 1967

Operation Kenmore was a 1ATF Search and Destroy operation and was unusual in the sense that HQ 1ATF deployed into the field for the first time as did the bulk of the Task Force. The Task Force was also resupplied by both US Army heavy lift helicopters and over the beach by a 32 Small Ships Squadron Landing Ship Medium. The operation commenced with A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment, B Company 2RAR (*Maj WK Carter*) and a section of mortars moving from a night harbour on the east bank of the Song Rai to secure the LZ at Cape Ho Tram. 108 Field Battery had been deployed to Xuyen Moc to support this phase.

2RAR less C Company (at the Horseshoe) and D Company (providing security for the construction tasks at Ap Suoi Nghe –see *Operation Ainslie*) was then inserted by a US Army Airmobile Company (AMC) followed by 106 Field Battery and Task Force Headquarters. Two hours later A Company 7RAR was inserted, first to Cape Ho Tram and then by APC to its AO; the remainder of 7RAR was then inserted by AMC via Xuyen Moc to its AO. As the rifle companies commenced patrolling it was clear that a number of fortified VC camps and supply dumps had been hurriedly evacuated. Over the next few days the companies searched carefully because of the existence of booby traps and Unexploded Bombs (UXBs)

including Cluster Bomb Units. Although contact with the enemy was light and sporadic, the information gained, especially in the 7RAR AO was very valuable. In particular, an occupied camp located near the coast by a recce patrol (Cpl HC Spadbrow) (1) from 1 Platoon (2Lt RC Smith) which assaulted the camp confirmed from the enemy dead that it was a specialist VC logistics unit responsible for the receipt of supplies arriving by sea from North Vietnam.



A B Company 2RAR
patrol on Op Kenmore.
AWM THU/67/0932/VN

Old Faithful Joins the Fray

In September 1965, 3RAR had returned from active service in Sarawak and occupied Kapyong Lines at Woodside SA. In 1966 the battalion was reformed and commenced training for service in Vietnam and in December 1967 the battalion (*Lt Col JJ Shelton, CO and WO1 V Murdoch, RSM*) deployed to Vietnam by air and in *HMAS Sydney* which transited via Fremantle. It became the third battalion of the Task Force and required an extensive building programme to establish its base area in the southeastern extremity of the Task Force Base.

After a period of acclimatisation, the battalion experienced its first contacts with the enemy in February 1968 during the TET Offensive in Phuoc Tuy Province – [see page48](#).

**3RAR troops disembarking
from a US Army Chinook
at Luscombe Field, Nui
Dat on 27 December 1967.**

AWM SKE/67/1277/VN and THU/67/1275/VN



The Task Force Expands its Borders

In late 1967, HQ 1ATF (*Brig RL Hughes*) examined the need to expand the TAOR to include the whole of Phuoc Tuy Province primarily because of the need to conduct operations in depth into enemy base areas such as the *Hat Dich* and the *May Tao*. This was done in anticipation of the arrival of 3RAR in late 1967 and a squadron of Main Battle Tanks (C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment) in early 1968.

In late January 1968, 1ATF prepared for the biggest operation yet conducted, ie *Operation Coburg*. This operation was the first deployment of 1ATF outside Phuoc Tuy Province and was part of a IIFV operation to prevent the movement of enemy forces to targets during TET and specifically, to prevent enemy rocket attacks against the Long Binh - Bien Hoa Base complexes. It was also the first time a Task Force Maintenance Area (TFMA) was established outside the Australian bases at Nui Dat and Vung Tau drawing supplies direct from US sources at Long Binh. At various stages, all three battalions were involved in the operation at a cost of some 15 killed and 60 wounded, most of whom were evacuated.

Chapter V: TET 1968

Operation Coburg: 24 January-12 February 1968

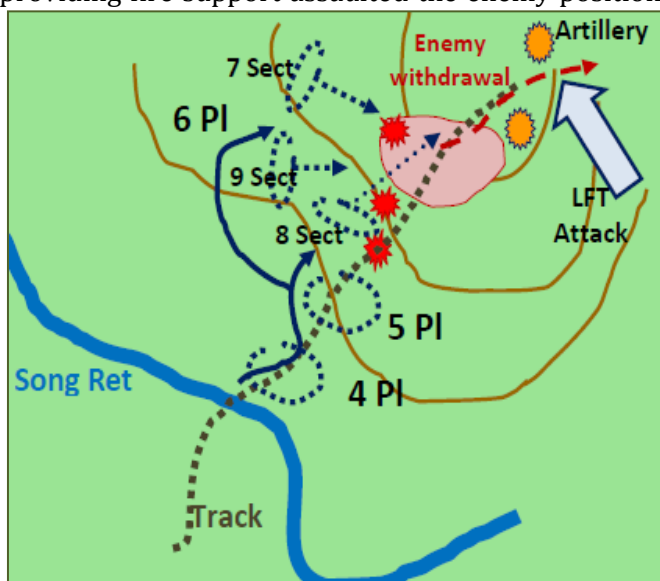
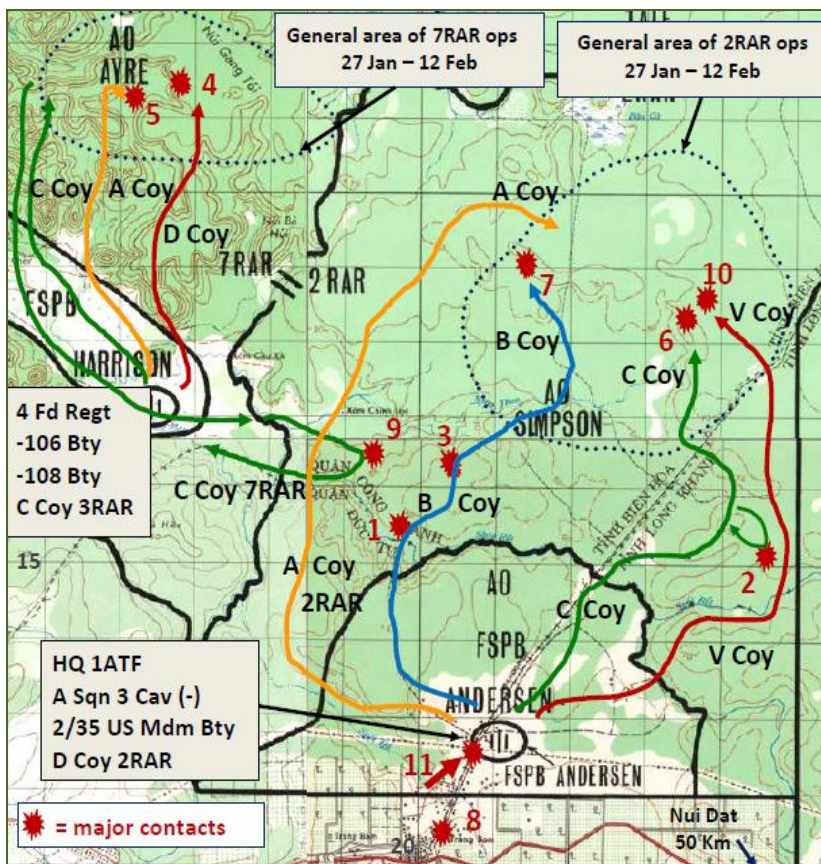
On 24 January 1968, 2RAR deployed by air to FSB Andersen, located just north of Route 1 and some 20 kilometres north east of Long Binh and which had been secured by the US 199th Light Infantry Brigade. Two companies of 7RAR followed in APCs and the remainder of the battalion by air, first to FSB Andersen and then to FSB Harrison with 4 Field Regiment. Both Battalions immediately commenced patrolling into their area of operations.

Australia Day Contacts. The 26 January 1968 was not going to be a day of great celebration for 2RAR though there were plenty of fireworks.

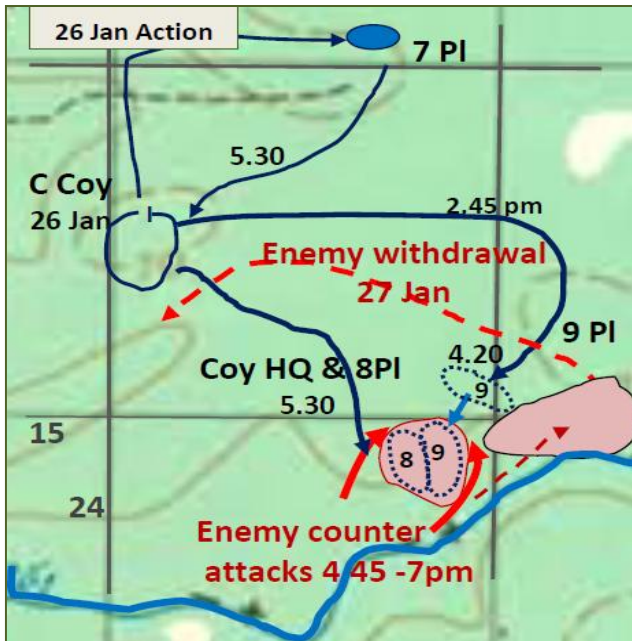
About mid morning, B Company 2RAR (*Maj WK Carter*) had been following a track which crossed the *Song Ret* and 5 Platoon (*Lt EC Pearson*) was moving up a small rise when it contacted an enemy group (1) resulting in the Platoon Commander being wounded. The Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt J Woods*) immediately took command and forced the enemy to withdraw.

6 Platoon (*Lt PJ Langford*) moved to support 5 Platoon on the left flank and with 8 Section (*Cpl GT Hooper*) leading also came into contact with one man fatally wounded (*Pte DW Morrison*). As the enemy was estimated to be of squad size, the platoon manoeuvred further left and with 8 Section providing fire support assaulted the enemy position with 7 Section (*Cpl JT Marsh*) and 9 Section (*LCpl PG Harding*). The Machine Gunner in 7 Section (*Pte RP Binning*) was killed in the assault and at that time it was realised that continued action on the left flank would most likely result in further casualties; the platoon then moved on the right flank with 7 Section giving fire support to 8 Section which managed to clear through the enemy position. The enemy which had numbered about fifteen withdrew to the northeast under fire from artillery and a Light Fire Team.

In what had been a classic Vietnam War platoon action, at least half of the enemy strength had been killed or wounded and were most likely from a Local Force group waiting to support Main Force units such as 274 VC Regiment.



That afternoon, 9 Platoon 2RAR (2Lt B Corse) located what was probably a VC Company in a defended camp (2). The Platoon had surprised the enemy and put in a quick attack, two sections up, occupying the camp by fire and movement with the enemy withdrawing in order also using fire and movement. The enemy then reorganized and returned a few minutes later to counter attack the flanks of 9 Platoon with automatic weapons and LMGs. While the Platoon remained steadfast in front of these attacks which continued for hours, clearly it needed help.



About an hour after the initial contact C Company Headquarters (Maj GE Williams) and 8 Platoon (Lt AJ George), some 800 metres distant moved to reinforce 9 Platoon; the group was then subjected to further attack during which a 9 Platoon Section Commander (Cpl GL Norley) was killed. The following morning the enemy resumed its pressure with an attack on 8 Platoon resulting in a sentry being wounded; while the Medical

Orderly (Pte WJ Davidson) who had repeatedly taken great risks to treat wounded men was himself mortally wounded as he treated the sentry. As the CSM (WO2 RL Jones) organised evacuation of the wounded, the Dustoff helicopter took ground fire wounding a crew member.

With the support from artillery and a Light Fire Team the enemy was forced to withdraw taking a number of casualties. Captured documents indicated the enemy was from 274 VC Regiment and was most likely part of a larger force that didn't want to be held up in its approach to Long Binh and had used counter attacks and sniper fire to prevent interference by the much smaller Australian force.

About mid morning on 27 January, 6 Platoon 2RAR (Lt PJ Langford) contacted what was possibly a VC squad (3) which fired a number of RPGs wounding a further six men while the platoon killed two enemy soldiers.

At about the same time 10 Platoon 7RAR (2Lt DA Webster) was investigating a camp that had been reported as destroyed when it was engaged by an enemy company size force causing one killed (Pte PZ Trzecinski) and ten men wounded (4). The Platoon Sergeant (Sgt RD Allan) crawled through the enemy fire to a position where he could observe and direct artillery and gunships while the remainder of D Company (Maj DE Paterson) concentrated at the patrol base 200 metres away and then moved to 10 Platoons' defensive perimeter. Under cover of gunships, the company attacked the enemy position driving the enemy out with heavy casualties. The camp had been occupied by elements of the C238 (U-1 Province) Mobile Battalion concentrating for an attack on Long Binh.

On 29 January the battalions continued patrolling with 2 Platoon 7RAR (2Lt BP O'Brien) ambushing a VC platoon plus size force which reacted very aggressively (5). After two hours of fighting the enemy broke contact having lost over ten killed. 2 Platoon lost one killed (Pte AEG Bell) and 8 wounded including the Platoon Commander. The enemy was identified as a reconnaissance group moving through the AO to attack Long Binh. On 30 January C Company 2RAR attacked a VC platoon sized base camp forcing the enemy to withdraw (6).

On 31 January, the enemy launched rocket and mortar attacks on the Long Binh/Bien Hoa complexes but they were largely unsuccessful. As a result however, the Task Force operations changed from Reconnaissance In Force to Blocking Operations.

While moving to its blocking position on 31 January, B Company 2RAR located and attacked a defended enemy camp (7). A heavy firefight continued for several hours before contact was broken with the assistance of mortar, artillery and close air support including a Light Fire Team. V Company 2RAR (Maj BTA Worsnop) was moved to B Company to assist with the evacuation of five wounded men during the night. Ten enemy soldiers were killed or wounded.

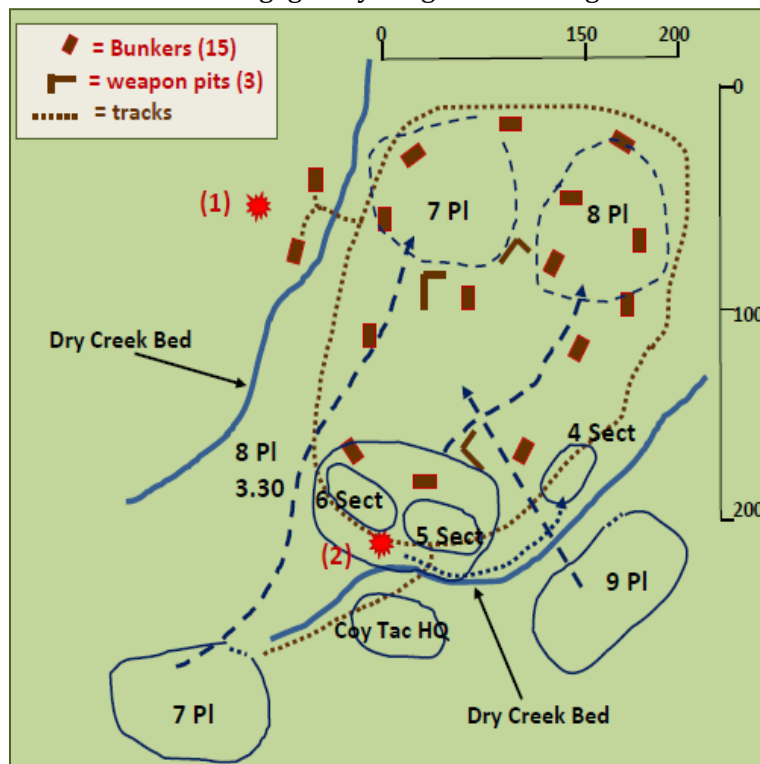
Early the next morning the enemy attacked the village of Trang Bom near FSB Andersen (8). D Company 2RAR (Maj JC Knell) and 2 Troop A Squadron responded and cleared the village in house-to-house fighting.

On 4 February, C Company 7RAR (Maj GK Chapman) was moved by APC east into 2RAR's AO but well south of the 2RAR companies. The Company established a defensive position and commenced platoon patrols; so began a series of heavy contacts with enemy located in a Main Force company bunker system (9).

The first was about mid morning on 5 February when 9 Platoon (Lt KT Lewis) killed a VC and then heard some fifty enemy voices which were engaged with artillery, mortars and a Light Fire Team (LFT), see sketch (1). An hour or so later the platoon was joined by Company HQ and 8 Platoon (Lt MA Moloney) and then commenced to patrol towards the enemy position; as it did, it came under heavy fire from at least five enemy machine guns and after a fire fight withdrew by fire and movement to allow artillery and an airstrike on the enemy position.

The company which had been joined by 7 Platoon (Lt JW Langler) established a firm base from which to conduct further reconnaissance and as it did so it was engaged by enemy machine guns, heavy machine guns and RPGs causing one killed (Pte MW Ayres) and two wounded. Further artillery, mortars, LFT and airstrikes were called down as the Company withdrew to a night defensive position some 800 metre s from the enemy location.

Reconnaissance on 6 February was unsuccessful; however, late morning on 7 February, 8 Platoon discovered a fresh track and while 6 Section (Cpl GL Griffiths) was investigating it sighted and killed a VC and was then engaged by 3 light machine guns and two heavy machine guns, see sketch (2).



Cpl Griffiths neutralised a bunker with a hand grenade, the platoon withdrew with the rest of the company to a firm base to allow artillery, mortars and airstrikes on the enemy position.

By mid afternoon the company returned to the enemy position and deployed as shown on the sketch. 8 Platoon began to advance into the bunker system with 4 Section (Cpl PJ Hope) moving via a creek bed to a flank. Almost immediately the enemy, who had waited for the Australians to enter fire lanes, opened fire with machine guns and RPGs wounding several men including the 5 Section Commander (Cpl ES Czerwinski). The enemy fire not only pinned 8 and 9 Platoons but also kept 7 Platoon's heads down from overshoots. The company's artillery Forward Observer (Capt JH Phillips) called in artillery using delayed fuses and despite being seriously wounded in the head his signaler, (Gnr

MB Williams) maintained the flow of fire orders to the gun line.

The OC 8 Platoon (Lt MA Moloney) although wounded many times from RPG shrapnel and while exposed to heavy fire, organised his men to move to safer positions thereby saving many lives; he then evacuated his casualties and at great risk he attempted to neutralize enemy fire from a bunker, first with grenades, then with M72 rockets and finally with an M79 grenade launcher where he was successful.

A Light Fire Team then engaged the enemy position and again with artillery, much of it danger close. After some two hours the enemy withdrew in good order, overwhelmed by the superior firepower and

leaving evidence of a number of casualties. Incredibly no Australian was killed, no doubt due to their superb battle skills however, fourteen men were wounded half of whom were repatriated to Australia.

At first light on 7 February, V Company 2RAR was attacked by two enemy companies on three sides and subjected to heavy MG and rocket fire (10). At 6.30 am the forward section of 4 Platoon (*Lt AG Howells*) reported a large number of enemy approaching the platoon and the Platoon Commander moved forward to direct defensive fire. After about an hour artillery support eventually forced the enemy to withdraw leaving thirteen dead; eight V Company soldiers (RNZIR) were wounded during the action who were treated in turn by the company medic (*Pte RJ Pritchard*) while under heavy enemy fire.

Between 10 and 14 February 3RAR moved by air from Nui Dat to replace 7RAR which returned to Nui Dat to prepare for its return to Australia in April. 2RAR followed but left two of its 6 rifle companies under operational control of 3RAR which remained until 1 March.

FSB Andersen was subjected to three attacks, the most serious being in the early hours of 18 February when an estimated enemy company attacked (11) supported by mortars which were quickly silenced by the 3RAR Mortar Platoon. Seven Australians were killed including two from 3RAR (*Ptes TJ De Vries Van Leeuwen and JA Doherty*) and 22 wounded in the attack. After a number of minor contacts 3RAR returned to Nui Dat on 1 March thus concluding the operation.

Operation Coburg was an important combat experience for the development of the Regiment's tactical skills. While earlier operations had passing engagements with NVA 'regulars', *Coburg* had frequent contact with the well trained enemy over a considerable period. Junior leaders were to recognise the enemy had substantial capabilities requiring tactical skills and perseverance perhaps at a level not envisaged. This put enormous pressure on the soldiers, especially as fatigue set in which then required a level of diligence by junior leaders they might not have been fully prepared for. (See also End Notes paragraph 6 for comments on the effect sustained operations had on the combat fitness of soldiers).

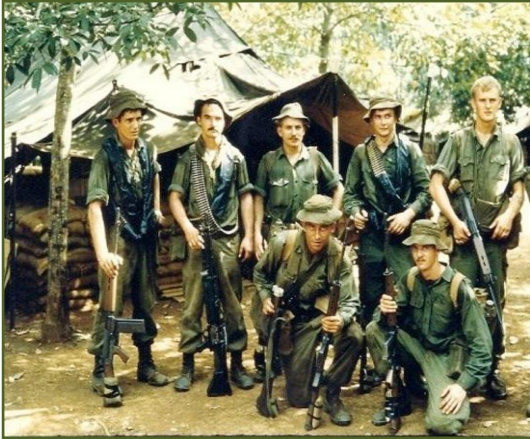
Sadly at the time, this recognition of the enemy's capabilities seemed for whatever reason, not to have been completely absorbed as became evident at the action at FSB Coral three months later.

Nevertheless the operation was successful in seriously hindering the enemy's intentions of attacking Long Binh/Bien Hoa and then withdrawing to bases to the north west of Saigon. Although the enemy's attacks against its major targets were not prevented there is no doubt that the contacts by 2RAR and 7RAR in late January 1968 severely disrupted local force operations and thus the ability to support main force units.

In light of that success, The Regiment and 3 Cavalry Regiment were awarded the *Battle Honour of 'Bien Hoa'*.

The following individual awards were made for Operation Coburg (and in some cases also for other operations):

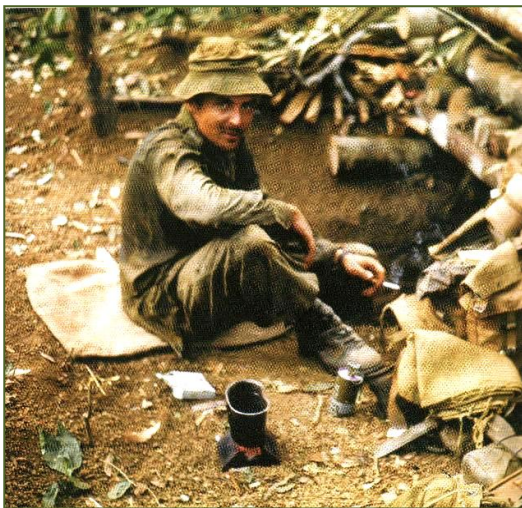
- **Military Cross:** Lt AG Howell (RNZIR), OC 4 PI V Coy 2RAR (see 7 Feb); Maj BTA Worsnop (RNZIR), OC V Coy 2RAR (see 7 Feb), Maj PND White, OC A Coy 2RAR.
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Sgt RD Allan, PI Sgt 12 PI 7RAR (see 27Jan); WO2 RL Jones, CSM C Coy 2RAR (see 26 Jan); Pte RJ Pritchard (RNZASC), Medical Orderly V Coy 2RAR (see 7 Feb); Sgt J Woods, PI Sgt 5 PI 2RAR (see 26-31 Jan).
- **Distinguished Flying Cross:** F/O BH Fooks (RAAF) (see 26 Jan)
- **Military Medal:** Cpl GL Griffiths, Sect Comd 8 PI 7RAR (see 7 Feb); Gnr MB Williams FOs Sig 106 Fd Bty (see 7 Feb).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** 2Lt RW Bimrose, Asst QM 2RAR; Cpl HM Bristowe, Sect Comd 4 PI V Coy 2RAR (see 7 Feb); Maj WK Carter OC B Coy 2RAR (see 31 Jan); Maj GK Chapman OC C Coy 7RAR (see 7 Feb); Cpl WT Woods, Sect Comd 3 PI 2RAR.



3 Section 4 Platoon, 2RAR prior to Op Coburg. The soldier on the far left (Pte AR Richardson) was badly wounded in the 31 Jan contact. Photograph courtesy of Angus Richardson



A RPG-7 held by 2Lt JF Slavin (centre), OC D Company 7RAR, Major DE Paterson (left) and Sergeant RD Allan (DCM) looking on during Op Coburg
AWM CRO/68/0087/VN



See also End Notes paragraph 7 for a description of the ubiquitous RPG).

Left: LCpl SJ Kelly, Support Section C Company 7RAR; sitting in front of one of the bunkers captured by 8 Platoon on 8 Feb 68. Photograph courtesy of the 7RAR Association

Right: From L – Pte (later Cpl) ER Tickner, Pte KJ Wood, LCpl (later Cpl) PJ Hope and in front Pte TE Hunt; all from 4 Section 8 Platoon 7RAR and sitting on one of the enemy bunkers, exhausted after the attack on 7 Feb 68. Photograph courtesy of the 7RAR Association



(See also End Notes paragraph 8)

TET Attacks in Phuoc Tuy Province: February 1968

While the bulk of 1ATF was on *Operation Coburg*, 3RAR was left at Nui Dat to defend the base and to continue its work-up training though one of its companies had deployed to *Operation Coburg* to protect FSB Harrison.

At dawn on **1 February**, the enemy commenced its nationwide TET Offensive including in Phuoc Tuy Province with *D445 VC Battalion* attacking the Provincial Capital, Baria. A Company 3RAR (*Maj BW Howard*) was the 1 ATF Ready Reaction Company though one of its platoons had already deployed to the west of Nui Dat to check on suspected enemy movement.

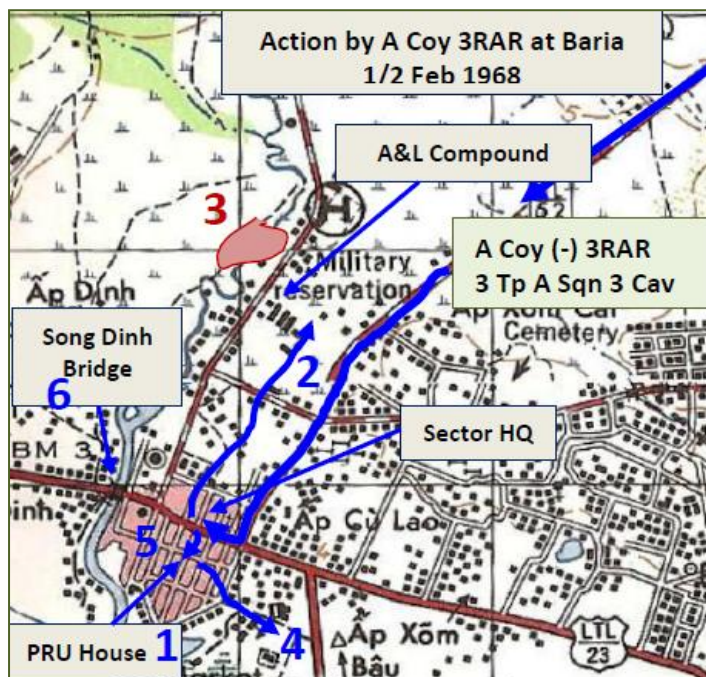
At about 8 am, A Company with 3 Troop A Squadron 3 Cav (*2Lt RLM Tingley*) were directed to deploy to the US Sector Headquarters in Baria and to drive an estimated VC company out of the town.

Minor contact was made with the enemy on the way to Sector HQ and on arrival the company split with Coy HQ and 2 Platoon (*2Lt PH Fraser*) fighting their way to US and Australian Advisers area near the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit's (PRU) building (**1**); 3 Platoon (*Lt HJ Clarsen*) deployed to the ammunition store at the Administrative and Logistics (A&L) Compound (**2**) but less two sections which had inadvertently moved with the Coy HQ group!

In fierce street and house-to-house fighting, 2 Platoon achieved its objective killing a number of VC and having two of its own men wounded. Meanwhile, the under strength 3 Platoon less the APCs which had returned to US Sector Headquarters now found itself dealing with a number of enemy who had occupied towers in the A&L compound. They were successful in doing this but with two men wounded who were evacuated by a US Dustoff helicopter during the fighting. Airstrikes were used to successfully dislodge the enemy in the compound and also to dispose of a company size enemy group which had formed up to assault the compound from a creek line, a hundred metres to the northwest (**3**).

It was now clear the enemy strength had been seriously underestimated as at least three company size groups had been engaged. After responding to a potential further threat at the town picture theatre (**4**), 2 Platoon was reacted to the CIA House some 200 metres west of the earlier fighting (**5**) to rescue the CIA operative. The Platoon, less one section deployed in two APCs and as the Troop Commander's vehicle entered the house compound the other was hit by an RPG wounding both crew. The Troop Commander with the CIA operative and the AATTV Adviser (*WO2 A Parrello*) on board moved to the stricken APC to retrieve the wounded and as it did so it was hit by an RPG killing the CIA operative and mortally wounding *WO2 Parrello*. The APC crew then moved under covering fire from 2 Platoon to the CIA house which was secured by 2 Platoon but was under heavy enemy fire. Meanwhile the company medic (*Cpl JJ Davis*) had on several occasions tended the wounded while under fire including the dying *WO2 Parrello*.

An attempt was made to extricate 2 Platoon by an ARVN Ranger Company but it bogged down suffering a number of casualties. A Company now called for a Light Fire Team and moved 3 Platoon to cover 2 Platoon's withdrawal which was successfully achieved. The company then occupied a night position near the Song Dinh Bridge (**6**) but was very low on ammunition having expended about two first lines during the day (including one carried by the APC Troop). That night two seriously wounded men needed evacuation, however the area was too small for an Iroquois to land and it couldn't hover because of enemy small arms fire. An Army Sioux Helicopter (*Capt JL Coggan*) came to the company's aid and under fire, evacuated the men.

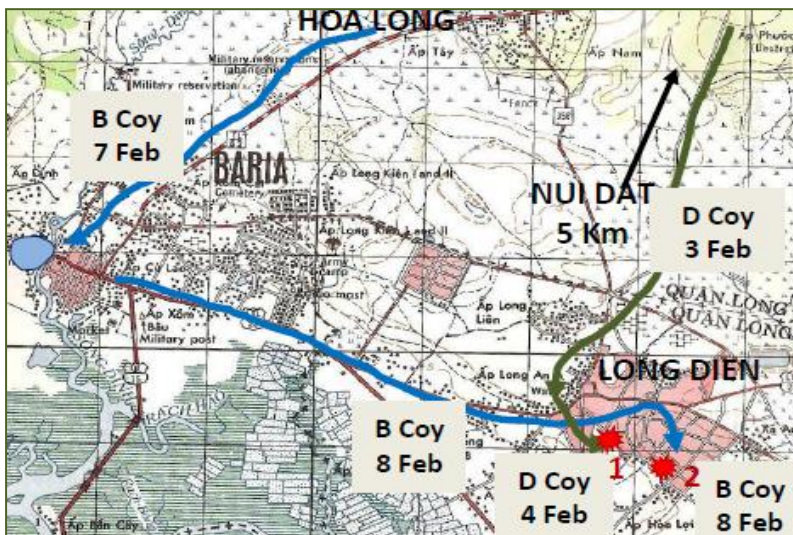


During the night the enemy withdrew having suffered hundreds of casualties from the aggressive fire and movement tactics by A Company and the APC Troop.

Next day an exhausted company returned to Nui Dat knowing it had done a very good job in unfamiliar tactical circumstances for which it had received no prior training, ie urban warfare. It was also established later that the whole of *D445 VC Battalion* reinforced by *Local Guerilla Units* had been A Company's opponent during the 24 hours of battle.

3 February. D Company 3RAR (*Maj PR Phillips*) was tasked to support an ARVN battalion to clear Long Dien which had occupied the town for three days, was at least of platoon strength and was unable to be dislodged by the ARVN battalion. After deploying by APC and harbouring northwest of the town, the company moved at first light on 4 February to clear the market place. After having done so the company was fired at by a group of VC which were cleared by 12 Platoon (*2Lt NB Peatling*) which in turn was engaged from a house by enemy machine gun fire **(1)**.

11 Platoon (less one section) (*Lt MR John*) was tasked to clear the house and came under fire first from an estimated VC squad which it sent packing with several dead and wounded and then, after returning with the third section, was fired at by nearby ARVN troops. The Platoon withdrew to the company position but returned late afternoon when it was engaged by snipers mortally wounding one soldier (*Pte RJ Caston*).



After clearing the town and doing a cordon and search of a nearby hamlet, D Company returned to Nui Dat by foot on 6 February.

7 February. B Company 3RAR (*Maj HW Irwin*) was tasked to secure the approaches to Baria on the west of the Song Dinh and on 8 February to support ARVN forces in clearing an enemy platoon from Long Dien. After securing the bridge over the Song Dinh, B Company moved by ARVN transport on 8 February to Long Dien and by late morning had deployed to the south west of the town.

Later that day, B Company was requested to search for a missing ARVN Battalion Commander and his US Army Adviser. At 6.30 pm 5 Platoon (*2Lt LA Taylor*) made heavy contact with a VC platoon located in and around brick houses **(2)**. During a fierce exchange the platoon suffered two dead (the Platoon Commander and the Platoon Signaler, *Pte GR Godden*) and 5 wounded, one of whom later died (*Pte GF Mathews*). Some 15 of the enemy were killed and one captured before the remainder of B Company arrived to assist.

The company returned to Baria that night in ARVN transport arriving about midnight and returned to Nui Dat by APC on 9 February.

For their roles in these company operations (and in some cases also for other operations) the following awards were made:

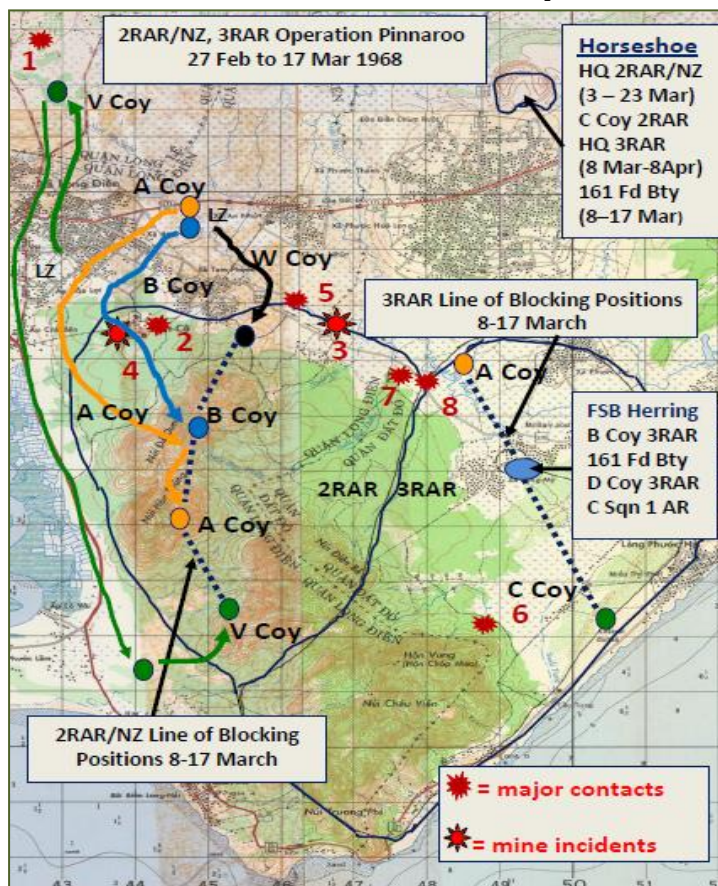
- **Military Cross:** Maj BW Howard, OC A Coy 3RAR (see 1Feb); Maj PR Phillips, OC D Coy 3RAR (see 3 Feb); Lt MR John, OC 11 PI 3RAR (see 4 Feb); 2Lt RLM Tingley, OC 3 Tp A Sqn 3 Cav (see 1 Feb).
- **Distinguished Flying Cross:** Capt JL Coggan, 161 Recce Flt (see 1 Feb).
- **Military Medal:** Cpl JJ Davis, Coy Medic, A Coy 3RAR (see 1 Feb).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Maj HW Irwin, OC B Coy 3RAR; 2Lt PH Fraser, OC 2 PI 3RAR (see 1 Feb); WO2 A Parrello, AATTV (Posthumous) (see 1 Feb); Cpl BJ Joyce, Sect Comd B Coy 3RAR (see 8 Feb); Capt RJ Martin RNZA, FO A Coy; Sgt JP Murphy 3 Tp A Sqn (see 1 Feb); Cpl PK Williams, 2 PI 3RAR (see 1 Feb).

Chapter VI: Operations in the Long Hais



2RAR becomes the first ANZAC Battalion

Following agreement between the Australian and New Zealand Governments in late February 1968, 2RAR, V Company RNZIR and W Company RNZIR were amalgamated into 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion (2RAR/NZ). D Company 2RAR was disbanded and the Battalion 2IC was filled by a RNZIR Officer (*Maj RIG Thorpe*). 4RAR, which was to relieve 2RAR in May 1968, was to be reorganized on similar lines. And in due course the RNZIR component of the 'Anzac Battalions' would also include Mortar and Assault Pioneer Sections as well as Administrative personnel.



Operation Pinnaroo: 27 February – 15 April 1968

The first operation that the newly designated Battalion would conduct was with 3RAR in the Long Hai Hills on a Reconnaissance In Force operation, a year after 5RAR's tragic experience on Operation Renmark. It would be the first time the Centurion Main Battle Tanks (MBT) of C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment (*Maj PR Badman*) were used in support of the infantry and the operation also had extensive support from USAF B52 airstrikes four before the operation and four during it. The operation commenced on 27 February with a preliminary operation by 2RAR/NZ to secure the village of Long Dien with V Company (*Maj BTA Worsnop*) contacting a VC Squad on 29 February (1). On 1 March the 2RAR/NZ companies began patrolling toward the northern slopes of the Long Hais with 4 Platoon (*Lt JM Connolly*) and 3 Troop A Squadron, contacting 20 VC resulting in one APC being completely destroyed by an anti tank weapon (2).

The same day W Company (*Maj PG Hotop*) had two separate mine incidents (3) resulting in 10 NZ soldiers being wounded. On 2 March, 5 Platoon (*2Lt GW Hurford*) was involved in a mine incident at the Dinh Co Monastery (4) resulting in one man killed (*Pte PJ Lyons*) and 12 soldiers wounded, most of whom required to be repatriated to Australia. Tragically this incident would be repeated twice more, in May 1969 with B Company 9RAR and in July 1969 with V Company 6RAR/NZ.

By 8 March 2RAR/NZ had deployed four companies in blocking positions in the west of the hills and 3RAR had deployed 3 companies in blocking positions to the east. At 3 am on 9 March W Company ambushed 5 VC from the *Long Dien Guerilla Unit* killing 3 and capturing 2 (5).

Over the next week a heavy concentration of airstrikes (including by B 52s), field and medium artillery and Naval Gunfire Support (NGFS) occurred, designed to destroy enemy installations and to breakup minefields and booby traps. Given the enemy's use of deep caves as shelters and mines and booby traps more in reaction to our own movements than permanent fields, the overall impact of the firepower was generally ineffective. In fact the majority of the 60 camps and bunker systems located during the

operation were destroyed by 3RAR with support from Combat Engineers – some 30 tonnes of explosives were used, all of it flown in by Chinook and Iroquois helicopters.

3RAR had a number of contacts in this period including: On 13 March, 6 Section (*Cpl BA Rosenthal*), 8 Platoon ambushed an enemy squad (6) killing four; on 14 March 2 Platoon (*2Lt PH Fraser*) was moving to an ambush site when the forward scout (*Pte KA Duthie*) sighted 15 VC moving from the hills towards Dat Do (7). As the platoon went into a contact drill it was spotted by the enemy who scarpered into the village; the following day 2 Platoon was patrolling (8) when a scout was wounded by an M26 Grenade booby trap. As Combat Engineers were clearing the area they were fired upon by an enemy squad wounding one sapper; the platoon then engaged the enemy killing one.

On 18 March, 3RAR companies began to move into the high ground led by D Company (*Maj PR Phillips*) in APCs with a Troop of Tanks. The remainder of C Squadron moved to a flank to provide close and heavy fire support for C Company (*Maj IG Hands*) to move through D Company to the crest on 19 March; there it secured a LZ for the fly-in of A Company (*Maj BW Howard*) on 20 March.

A and C Companies then began the dangerous task of clearing the area of mines and booby traps before locating and destroying enemy camps and installations. Meanwhile D Company moved back to the lower ground on 21 March and together with B Company (*Maj HW Irwin*) patrolled the eastern approaches to the hills, with immediate contacts

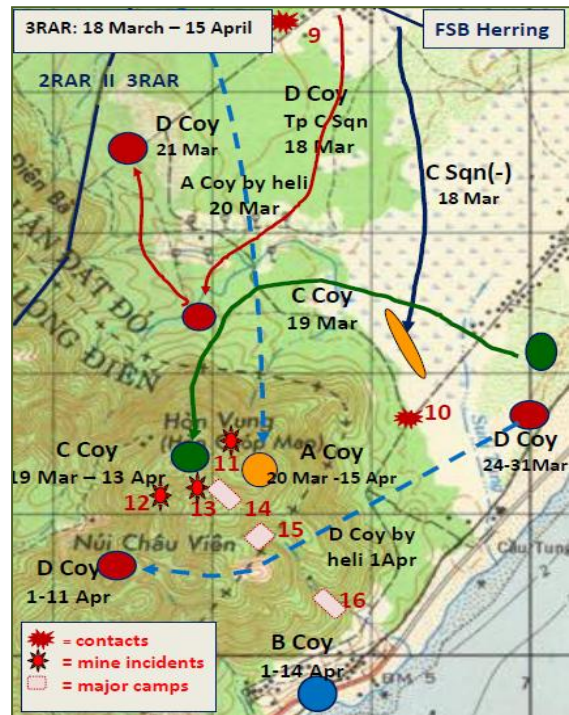
On 20 March 6 Platoon (*2Lt DO Morgan*) entered an enemy camp (9) and received MG fire killing the Forward Scout (*Pte JR Rapp*) and wounding two others. A troop of tanks deployed from FSB Herring to cover the platoon's withdrawal; the following day, 5 Platoon (*2Lt DH Ward*) returned to the scene with tanks and discovered a substantial tunnel system.

On 21 March, 12 Platoon (*2Lt NB Peatling*) ambushed a VC squad killing four (10) who were most likely from D445 VC Battalion.

On 20 March the first of three M16 mine incidents involving A and C Companies occurred. Two 3RAR Assault Pioneers (*Pte DW McKenzie and Pte RJ Eastwood*) were severely wounded when one of them detonated a mine while clearing around A Company Headquarters (11). The mine had been buried deep with a piece of wood over the striker (shrapnel was then placed on the wood to confuse the Mine Detector Operator and of course after the airstrikes there was plenty of it available).

On 22 March, 7 Platoon (*2Lt LEJ Appleby*) with Combat Engineer Teams had begun the task of clearing enemy tracks that might lead to possible installations. The tactic used was for the Infantry to 'rock hop' in front of and to the flanks of the engineers at a pace of less than 50 metres per hour. At about midday a soldier stepped over a log and detonated a mine (12) which didn't jump but still wounded a number of men. As an Engineer (*Spr MC Walker*) and the Platoon Commander were prodding a path to the wounded another soldier (*Pte KG Coles*) inexplicably left his 'rock' and detonated another mine killing him. The 3RAR RMO (*Capt R Lippet*) was lowered in from a helicopter by rope and was tending the wounded when a third mine was detonated; two Engineers and two 9 Platoon soldiers sent to aid 7 Platoon deviated from the cleared path – both engineers (*Spr GJ Coombs and Spr VJ Tobin*) were killed and the escort soldiers (*Pte RJ Carroll and Pte RN Neville*) seriously wounded.

On 24 March, 9 Platoon had just commenced a similar patrolling task when the Platoon Commander (*2Lt J Fraser*) detonated a mine killing him and wounding three others (13). The Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt RL Ewell*) took command and despite the danger of further mines moved to organise the evacuation of the wounded.



On 23 March 2RAR/NZ had returned to Nui Dat however, on 1 April it assumed command of FSB Herring, thus allowing B Company 3RAR to deploy to the southern fringes of the hills while D Company was airlifted in to join A and C Companies. As the companies completed destruction of the cave complexes in their areas they returned to Nui Dat. This was no easy task because the complexes were both large and sophisticated; for example the caves at (14) contained some 20 rooms sufficient to accommodate 100 people, whilst the complex at (15) was a multi level system connected by ladders and with running water, a kitchen, an armoury of various small arms and mortars and accommodation areas probably for a VC headquarters. The system at (16) was a series of caves extending over some 250 metres in a re-entrant and was probably a worksite. A Company and the Field Engineers used a massive amount of explosives but didn't destroy the whole complex which at the time was thought to be part of a larger system.



Left CO 3RAR Lt Col JJ Shelton (right) and OC C Coy Maj IG Hands, on top of the Long Hais; 20 Mar 68.
Right: Soldiers of A Coy 3RAR preparing a large cave complex for demolition
AWM CRO/68/0317/VN



Operation Pinnaroo was long, arduous and extremely dangerous and it was a credit to the men that they stuck to their tasks. Although the operation destroyed one of the enemy's primary bases this was to be only temporary because although requested to occupy the area won by 3RAR, 18 ARVN Division chose not to do so and inevitably the enemy would and did return. The Long Hai Hills would continue to provide a sanctuary for the enemy (*Minh Dam Secret Zone*) until 8RAR destroyed it in early 1970 – see *Operation Hammersley*.

The following awards were made for *Operation Pinnaroo* and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross:** Lt BJ Barley (RNZIR), OC 5 PI V Coy 2RAR/NZ;
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Sgt RL Ewell, PI Sgt 9 PI 3RAR (see 24 March)
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Maj IG Hands, OC C Coy 3RAR, 2Lt GW Hurford, OC 5 PI 2RAR/NZ (see 2 March), Cpl BA Rosenthal, Sect Comd 6 Sect C Coy 3RAR (see 13 March), Spr MC Walker, Combat Engineer attached to 7 PI 3RAR (see 22 March)

The Minefield: Operation Cooktown Orchid

One of the outcomes from *Operation Pinnaroo* was that 1ATF believed, albeit somewhat mistakenly, that because the Long Hais had been penetrated, the Barrier Minefield between Dat Do and Lang Phuoc Hai was no longer needed. Given that by early 1968 it was obvious the enemy were lifting mines at will, Commander 1ATF (*Brig RL Hughes*) resolved to either lift the minefield or destroy it in situ. In April 1968, 2RAR/NZ was committed to *Operation Cooktown Orchid* which was the first attempt at destroying the minefield commencing just north of Lang Phuoc Hai. However, the procedure, using two Main Battle Tanks towing heavy chain mats was not successful. It would not be until May 1970 that 1 Field Squadron (*Maj R Rowe*) would be able to claim that as a result of "*Frangimus*" operations (with some clever engineering design using an APC and a mine-killing roller), mine clearance was complete. By then it was recognised that thousands of mines had been lifted by the enemy and in one of the great tragedies of the war this had led directly to hundreds of Australian and New Zealand soldiers being killed, maimed or made insane by mine incidents. But more about that later.

Chapter VII: Into Tiger Country

In April 1968, 1RAR (*Lt Col PH Bennett, CO and WO1 DC Dalton, RSM*) replaced 7RAR and in the following month 2RAR/NZ was replaced by 4RAR/NZ (*Lt Col LR Greville, CO and WO1 C Toghill, RSM*). Thus for a brief period of time (on 1 May 1968) all four of the Regiment's senior battalions were, for the first time, present together on operational duty. Unlike during the Korean War however, when 1, 2 and 3RAR paraded together on 21 March 1953, there was to be no such ceremonies in Vietnam because 1RAR and 3RAR were committed to a massive US and ARVN operation in III Corps. With the pretentious name of *Toan Thang (Complete Victory)*, the operation which occurred between April and June 1968, had commenced as a Reconnaissance In Force operation but its mission quickly became that of the defence of Saigon and the Bien Hoa/Long Binh complexes as the enemy launched a general offensive to coincide with the Paris Peace Talks. Shades of Korea in December 1950 when the Chinese counter attacked General MacArthur's so called 'end-of-war offensive' and again in July 1953 when they launched attacks, regardless of cost on the eve of the Cease-Fire.

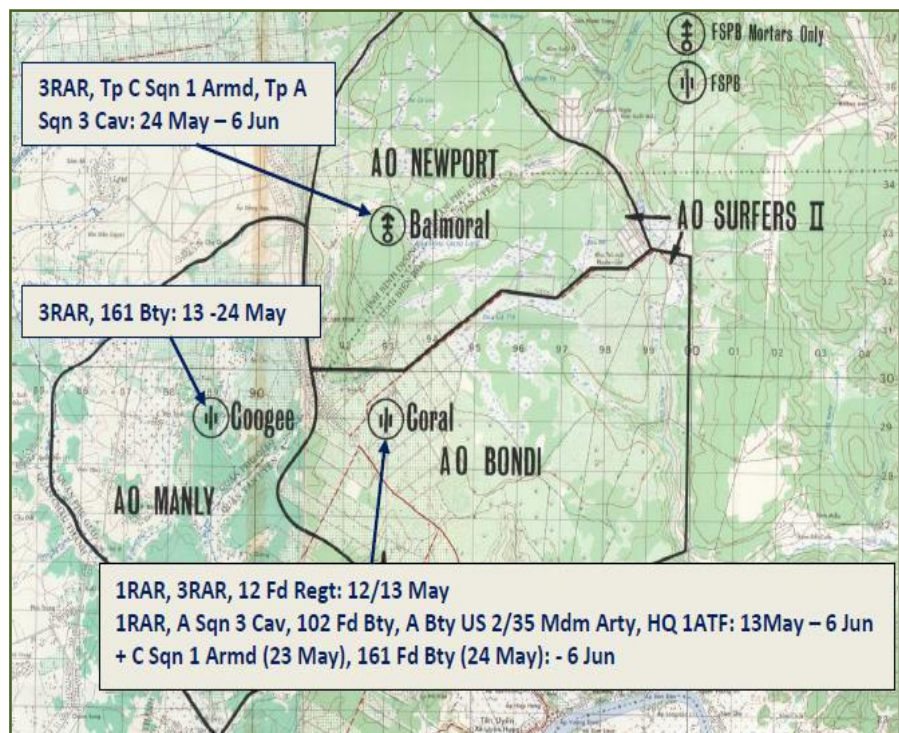
Operation Toan Thang I: 12 May – 6 June 1968

After multi battalion operations in Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa Provinces and following the enemy's large-scale withdrawal from Saigon, 1ATF with 1RAR and 3RAR were committed on 12 May to interdict enemy withdrawal routes some 20 kilometres north of Bien Hoa in *Area of Operations Surfes*. Thus began one of the more intense periods of contact with the enemy that the Regiment had in the war.

Like *Operation Bribie* some 12 months earlier, the beginning of this operation had all the indications that things would not go well: **(i)** the mission

from IIFV was vague and the concept of operations disjointed, eg both 3RAR and 1RAR were to deploy by air whereas the battle procedure in other 1ATF multi battalion operations had at least part of one of the battalions deploy by APC, usually to secure the LZ; **(ii)** the seriousness of the enemy threat posed by several NVA regular regiments on the loose in the AO was not properly appreciated – the 'Enemy Situation' issued with the Operation Order on 10 May stated inter alia: "*substantial enemy mainforce units have either passed through AO Surfes, or can be expected to do so in the near future*" and 141 and 165 NVA Regiments were identified in that category; **(iii)** the deployment of the force by air was badly disrupted through a lack of supervision by HQ 1ATF; and **(iv)** there was no time to properly coordinate the defences of the FSB; in addition, HQ 1ATF was some 40 kilometres away at the US 'Bearcat' Base and wasn't due to deploy to Coral until 14 May and the Commander was in Nui Dat.

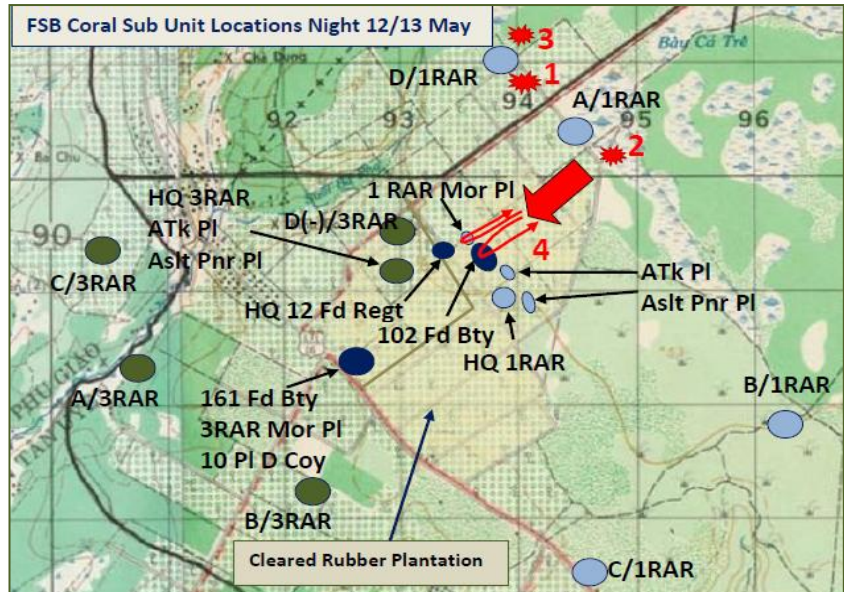
This toxic mix would lead to one of the most costly battles fought by the Regiment in the war at FSB Coral in the early hours of 13 May 1968.



The Battle of Fire Support Base Coral: First Attack 12/13 May

By the end of a chaotic day of air movements, inserting some units in the wrong location and seriously delaying the deployment of others, the situation at FSB Coral on the evening of 12 May was **as shown on the map**.

The casual observer will note two issues that would be of tactical concern, ie bearing in mind the potent threat from NVA Regiments: (i), the 1RAR rifle



companies are deployed too far forward and spaced too far apart; and (ii), as a result, two subunits not capable of defending themselves, ie 102 Field Battery and the 1RAR Mortar Platoon were placed on the defensive perimeter. At least 3RAR had deployed a rifle platoon to its fire support group.

Unknown to the Australians the HQ of 7 NVA Division was located only 9 kilometres east of Coral and included 141 NVA Regiment and a reinforcement unit, 275 Infiltration Group, which had only left the Ho Chi Minh Trail 48 hours earlier. These forces had observed the fly-in of 102 Field Battery which was seen as a good target and reconnaissance for a battalion size attack commenced immediately.

The first indications that the enemy was about was at 6pm when 11 Platoon (2Lt RM Utting) engaged an enemy squad killing one (1). A little later A Company (Maj CJ Adamson) engaged an enemy platoon killing several (2). About midnight the 1RAR Mortar Platoon (Lt AH Jensen) engaged a three man enemy reconnaissance patrol killing two and a couple of hours later D Company (Maj AW Hammett) engaged a group of enemy who were most likely on their approach to attack the guns of 102 Battery. 10 Platoon (2Lt JP Salter) had fired at the enemy who responded with RPG fire most of which burst above 11 Platoon killing two men (Ptes RL McNab and LR Sheppard) and wounding eleven, several seriously (3). At about 3.30am, the Mortar Platoon heard the attack commencing by some 400 enemy on their position; soon after, the Platoon was surrounded and it and 102 Field Battery were taking intense ground, mortar and rocket fire (4). Fortunately, three of the Battery's guns that had fired in support of D Company's earlier contact were now laid directly on the enemy's axis of attack. The Gunners fired high explosive and anti-personnel splintex rounds as did the 1RAR Anti Tank Platoon's (Lt LJ Tranter) 90mm RCLs which were able to direct enfilade fire at the waves of enemy storming into 102 Field Battery's position.

161 Field Battery and the 3RAR mortars were also directed by Lt Jensen onto the Mortar Platoon position and at a crucial stage, he managed to convince HQ 1RAR to approve the left forward gun of 102 Field Battery to fire splintex over the Mortar Platoon's position. Once he had got his men below ground he called on the battery's GPO (Lt IF Ahearn) to fire; 5 rounds of splintex were fired and all enemy movement ceased with no casualties to the Mortar Platoon. The steadfastness of the Gunners and the survivors of the Mortar Platoon, together with lethal air support from a US Army Light Fire Team gradually saw the enemy waver and withdraw at about 5.30am leaving over 50 dead on the battlefield.

The cost to 1RAR was severe losing another five men killed from the Mortar Platoon (Cpls RB Hickey and JH Whitton; Ptes EJ Bailey, JA O'Brien and RCA Watson), one from B Company (Pte BM Trimble) and 20 wounded (8 from the Mortar Platoon); 12 Field Regiment Headquarters lost two killed (Gnrs CJ Sawtell and IJ Scott) and two wounded while 102 Field Battery had 4 wounded.

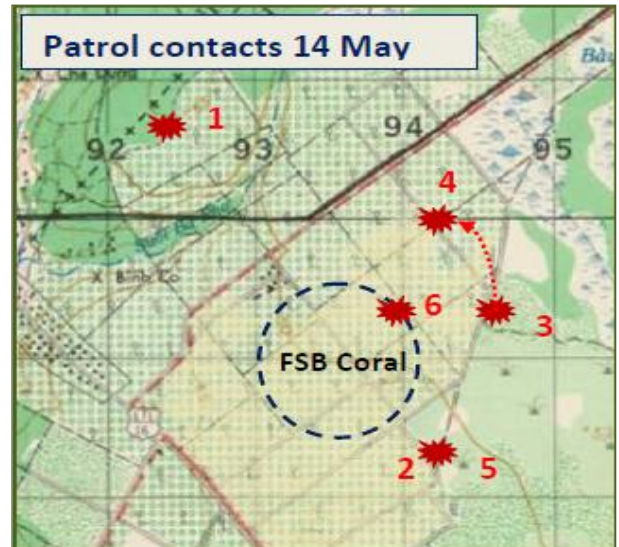
Aftermath

On 13 May, the Task Force began to prepare the defences of FSB Coral as a base from which Reconnaissance In Force operations could be conducted; HQ 1ATF (Forward) and A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment (*Maj JD Keldie*) arrived from Bearcat plus a battery of US Medium Artillery. Simultaneously, 3RAR moved west to FSB Coogee with 161 Battery RNZA (see map on page 52).

On 14 May, patrolling by 1RAR from FSB Coral commenced in earnest with a number of contacts that indicated the enemy was still around and very much interested in Coral. The contacts included: (1) at about midday, 12 Platoon (*2Lt GW Bowcott*) was ambushed by a NVA squad with a Section Commander (*Cpl JGS Pearce*) killed and four others wounded. An hour later (2), 5 Platoon (*2Lt CH Forde*) contacted a NVA squad with the forward Section Commander and Scout both wounded; *Pte GS Barrett*, the Machine Gunner, took charge of the section and rescued the wounded.

At 4.15 pm, 2 Platoon (*2Lt RJ Sutton*) contacted a 13 man enemy reconnaissance group (3) which split into two groups, the one moving north then running into 7 Platoon (*2Lt A Molnar*) at about 5 pm (4); the Section Commander (*Cpl IK Dawson*) was killed and two others wounded including *LCpl DJ Griffiths* who despite his wounds took charge of the section before he was again seriously wounded. Seven enemy were killed and two captured. About half an hour later, 5 Platoon was ambushed by an enemy squad killing the Forward Scout (*Pte CR Nisbet*) and wounding the Section Commander (5). A rifleman, *Pte RL Norden* ran forward and rescued the Section Commander and then returned under heavy fire to recover *Pte Nisbet's* body.

At about 7pm and in a portent of what was to follow, 3 Platoon (*2Lt NH Weekes*) received 2 RPG rounds from a small reconnaissance group (6), no doubt with the purpose of locating the defence positions, especially the machine guns. A Section Commander and Section 2ic were wounded in this attack. Sadly it had not been a good day for Section Commanders.



FSB Coral PM 13 May

1. 102 Fd Bty to the north and north east of the purple smoke at the Bty's LZ.
2. HQ 1RAR bottom right south of east west track
3. Gaggle of APC's around the intersection, presumably waiting for the Indians to return!
4. Tracks lower left lead to US 155mm SP Guns.

AWM PO3022.008



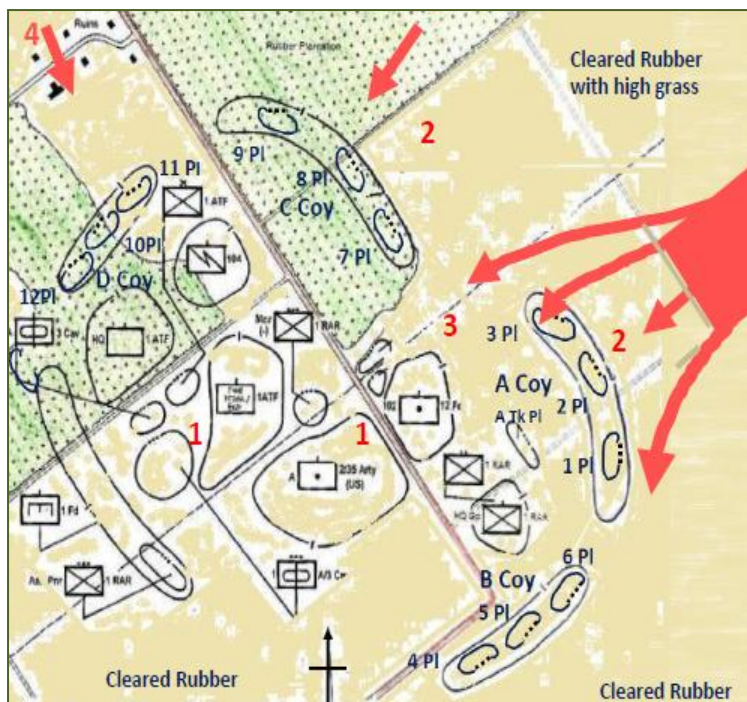
Fire Support Base Coral: Second Attack 15/16 May 1968

By the evening of 15 May 1968, 1RAR had consolidated the company defensive locations, however, defences were still fairly rudimentary. A substantial gap of about 200 metres was left between A and C Companies however, it was covered by some serious firepower; besides the MGs of the rifle companies and the guns of 102 Field Battery, the Battery also had two MGs and two HMGs (.50cal) sited on the gap and the US Artillery Battery had sited the guns of a 'Duster' AFV (a twin 40mm Bofors mounted on an M41 Light Tank Chassis) on the gap.

The enemy attack commenced about 2 am with a barrage of mortar and RPGs in the area of HQ 1ATF and HQ A Squadron 3 Cavalry (most likely using the many radio aerials as aiming points) **(1)**. About half an hour later the barrage switched to A and C companies and the Field and Medium Batteries **(1)**; this was quickly followed by a one (possibly two) battalion ground attack mainly onto A Company's position but with company strength flanking probes against B and C Companies **(2)**. The enemy penetrated the left forward section of 3 Platoon (2Lt NH Weekes) and set up a HMG which the Platoon Commander neutralised with mortar fire adjusted to within 50 metres of his position. The Acting Platoon Sergeant (Cpl B Flematti) though exposed to heavy fire, moved through the Platoon distributing ammunition and directing section fire.

A massive volume of artillery fire from the Coral batteries, FSB Coogee (161 Battery RNZA) and US medium and heavy batteries elsewhere was directed at the enemy attacks, some of it danger close, perhaps sometimes unintentionally! US Army Helicopter Light Fire Teams, AC-47 'Spooky' gunships and USAF fighter ground attack aircraft also supported the defence.

The defence, especially by the A Company Platoons was resolute and when at about 5 am the enemy attempted to exploit the gap, 3 Platoon called on the 1RAR mortars (Lt AH Jensen) and flanking MG fire from 7 Platoon (2Lt A Molnar) to stop them **(3)**. At about 6am an enemy force moved against D Company (Maj AW Hammett) with a barrage of RPGs to divert attention as it withdrew from the battlefield **(4)**. Four 1RAR soldiers were killed (LCpl WH Martin, Ptes AJ Wallis, HW White and BT Young) and nineteen wounded in the battle while the enemy left over 30 dead behind and evidence of hundreds of more casualties.



Duster AFV (left) arriving at Coral on 13 May and (right) an AC-47 with three 7.62 mm miniguns on the port side of the aircraft.

AWM PO 1635.005 and courtesy of Peter Geelen 12 Fd Regt.



The Task Force readjusts and 3RAR moves to FSB Balmoral

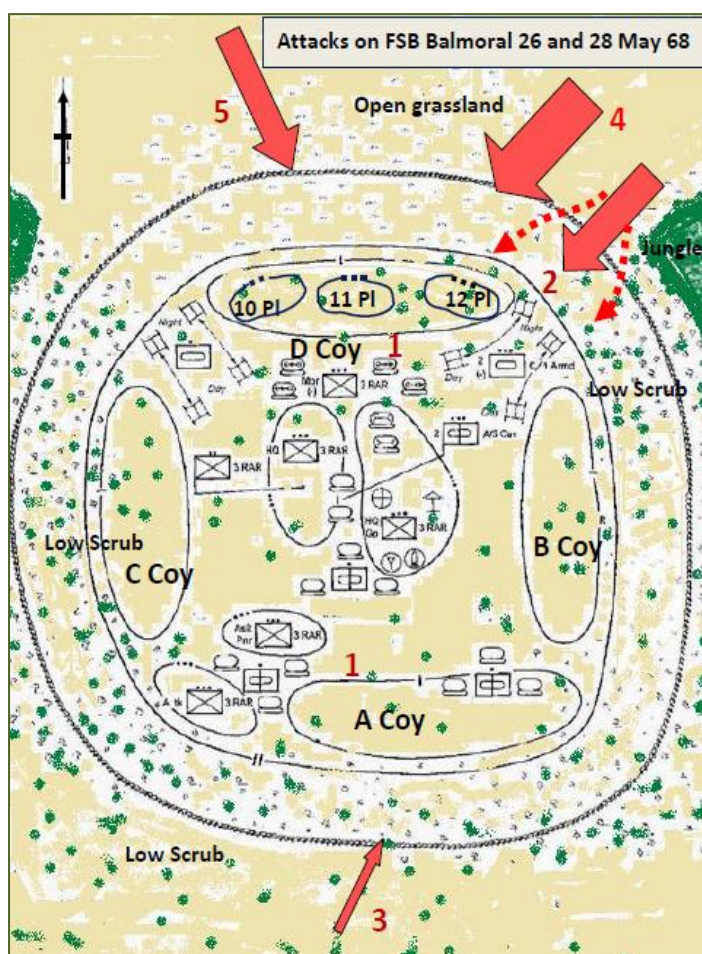
On 18 May, the Deputy Commander 1 ATF (*Col DB Dunstan*) assumed command at FSB Coral and made two important changes by ordering C Squadron 1 Armoured Regiment (*Maj PR Badman*) to the AO and moving 3RAR from FSB Coogee to a battalion defensive position at Balmoral (see map on page 52). He recognised the capability of Main Battle Tanks to provide the most potent direct fire support weapon for the Infantry in dealing with enemy bunkers and as suppressive fire against regimental size attacks against the Task Force. He also reasoned FSB Balmoral was of more strategic importance to the enemy than FSB Coogee and was therefore more likely to cause a greater reaction. All of which was to be proven correct over the next few days. On 24 May, 3RAR moved to FSB Balmoral with the lead companies (D and B) approaching by foot and Bn HQ by APC. Having secured the position the remainder flew in by helicopter. The following day 2 Troop C Squadron 1 Armoured, (*2Lt MJ Butler*) arrived at Balmoral escorted by B Company 1RAR (*Capt R Hennessy*).

Attacks on FSB Balmoral

At 3.30am on 26 May the enemy began a heavy mortar and rocket attack on Balmoral (1) causing casualties in 10 Platoon (*2Lt RP O'Leary*), 12 Platoon (*2Lt NB Peatling*), 2 Platoon (*2Lt PH Fraser*) and the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt TJ Properjohn*). At the same time a gap in the wire defences at A Company was made by Bangalore torpedoes. A short time later the main attack of an enemy battalion was made against D Company, especially 12 Platoon and into the teeth of the two Centurion Tanks positioned on D Company's right flank (2). A combination of good Section weapon skills, artillery (from FSB Coral), mortar (3RAR) support and tank main and secondary armaments saw off the enemy attack; by first light it had left the field of battle leaving a number of dead. Three 3RAR soldiers were killed (*Ptes LN Brown, AJ Cooper and JW Desnoy*) and fourteen wounded at Balmoral while another was killed (*Pte WM Thomas*) and one wounded at FSB Coral which had been subjected to a barrage of mortars and RPGs during the ground attack at Balmoral.

On 27 May 3RAR platoon patrols and aerial reconnaissance began to close in on what was probably the *Headquarters of 7NVA Division*; in any event the enemy's response to this intrusion into his bailiwick was quick and substantial.

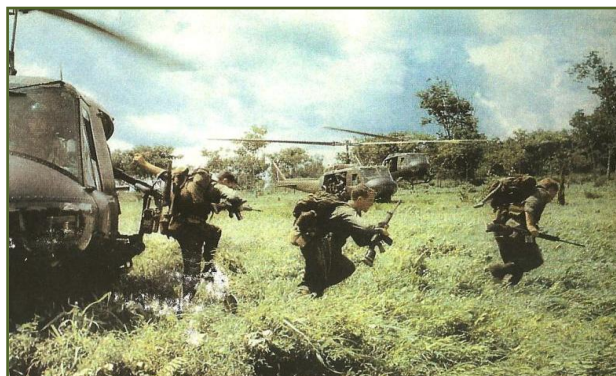
At 2.30 am on 28 May, a regimental size force attacked FSB Balmoral preceded by 60mm and 82mm mortar fire. The ground assault commenced with a small diversionary attack against A Company (*Maj BW Howard*) (3) which the Company stopped. A few minutes later the main assault came from the north east (4) with a secondary attack from the northwest (5). The whole of D Company (*Maj PR Phillips*) together with the Troop of Tanks (*2Lt MJ Butler*) repelled the attack with Mortars, Artillery and Gunships adding to the rout of the enemy who left over forty dead and evidence of many more on the battlefield. 11 Platoon (*Lt MR Johns*) and especially the right forward section (*Cpl DJ Mancer*) were heavily involved in the successful defence of the FSB. One A Company soldier was killed (*Pte JT Worle*) and six wounded during the attack.





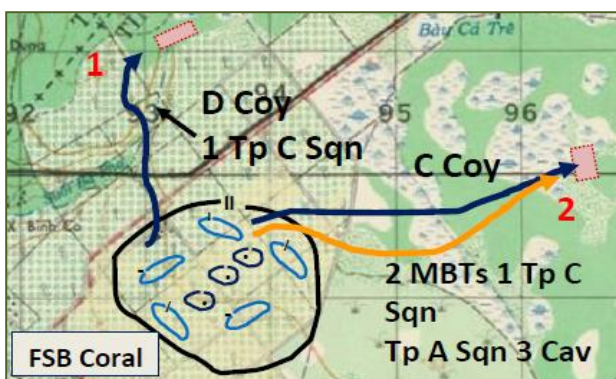
(Front to rear) Pte JE Bryant, Pte I Robertshaw and Pte P Donnelly (MG No 1) from 11 Platoon 3 RAR on the morning after the 28 May attack on FSB Balmoral. The M-60 fired some 5000 rounds over three hours and was a complete write-off.

AWM PO 4691.001



A Coy 3RAR arriving at FSB Balmoral on 24 May 1968. Left to right: Pte NC Clarkson, L Cpl KD Duthie and Pte WH Broekhof.

Photograph courtesy of Ken Duthie



Infantry/Tank Actions Around FSB Coral

On its way to FSB Balmoral on 25 May, B Company 1RAR had contacted enemy in a well defended position about 2 kilometres north of Coral, ie about half way between the FSBs. On 26 May D Company 1RAR (*Maj AW Hammett*) and 1 Troop C Squadron (*Lt GM McCormack*) conducted an 'Infantry/Tank' operation to locate and destroy the enemy position encountered by B Company the previous day.

The company advanced with two platoons and the tanks centrally behind Company Headquarters. At about midday, 10 Platoon (*2Lt JP Salter*) contacted enemy in bunkers (1) and with tank support moved into the bunkers destroying many with canister (to clear the foliage and camouflage), armour piercing and machine gun (to destroy the bunkers) and occasionally high explosive rounds. This action was repeated two hours later and after three hours of fighting, with rain falling and aerial reconnaissance revealing a much larger enemy position, the force withdrew under cover of artillery from Coral. An enemy company position had been destroyed together with its occupants at no cost to the Australians.

On 30 May, C Company 1RAR (*Maj ILG Campbell*) was on a Reconnaissance In Force operation when at about 8.30am, the lead platoon, 9 Platoon (*2Lt TR Stegman*) was pinned down by an enemy force in bunkers firing RPG and LMGs (2). 7 Platoon (*2Lt A Molnar*) was ordered to assist 9 Platoon but it also was pinned down by another force losing most of one section including the Machine Gun. To establish a company position, 8 Platoon (*Lt JJ Smith*) was also brought forward.

Clearly C Company was in deep trouble however, unlike B Company 6RAR on *Operation Bribie* (February 1967), substantial support was made available by the Task Force Commander (*Col DB Dunstan*) in the form of two Main Battle Tanks from 1 Troop C Squadron (*Lt GM McCormack*) and a troop of APCs from A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment (*Capt GF Auhl*). On arriving at C Company's position the APC's began to extricate the rear troops while the tanks smashed through the jungle with main armament clearing a path to locate 7 Platoon which was then able to withdraw.

After a three hour battle C Company was able to break contact and target the enemy position with artillery, mortars and air strikes. The company returned three days later to recover the lost M60 MG and discovered that the position was just as it been left with enemy dead and equipment strewn among the bunkers destroyed by the tanks. C Company had lost one dead (*Pte DE Abbott*) and seven wounded while the enemy lost some fifty killed.

Toan Thang I concluded on 6 June when all forces returned to the Task Force Base at Nui Dat. During the latter stages of the operation, 1RAR and 3RAR had the Regiment's first encounters with the NVA in multi-battalion (regimental) strength. The battles that were fought in and around FSB's Coral and Balmoral were some of most brutal and sustained battles of the war. For the outstanding achievements of the two battalions, The Regiment was awarded *The Battle Honour of 'Coral/Balmoral'*. The cost however, had been high with twenty-two soldiers killed (1RAR 17; 3RAR 5) and about a hundred wounded, many seriously.

The following individual awards were made for this operation and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross:** Maj ILG Campbell, OC C Coy 1RAR (see 30 May); Lt MR John, OC 11 PI 3RAR (see 26/28 May); Maj PR Phillips, OC D Coy 3RAR (see 26/28 May); 2Lt JP Salter, OC 10 PI 1RAR (see 26 May); 2Lt NH Weekes, OC 3 PI 1RAR (see 15/16 May);
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Cpl B Flematti, A/PI Sgt 3 PI 1RAR (see 15/16 May); LCpl DJ Griffiths, Sect 2ic 7 PI 1RAR (see 14 May); Pte RL Norden, 5 PI 1RAR (see 14 May)
- **Military Medal:** Cpl DJ Mancer, A/PI Sgt 11 Platoon 3RAR, (see 26/28 May); Sgt LJ Stephens, Gun Sgt 102 Fd Bty (see 13/14 May).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Pte GS Barrett, MG No 1 , 5 PI 1RAR (see 14 May); 2Lt GW Bowcock, OC 12 PI 1RAR (see 26 May); Sgt LA Elgar, Gun Sgt 102 Fd Bty (see 13/14 and 15/16 May); Maj AW Hammett OC D Coy 1RAR (see 26 May); 2Lt A Molnar , OC 7 Platoon 1RAR (see 14 May); Capt MJ Steeds , RNZAC, FO D Coy (see 26/28 May); 2Lt RJ Sutton OC 2 Platoon 1RAR (see 15/16 May); Cpl G Terronova, Medic A Coy 1RAR (see 15/16 May); L Cpl JE Smith Sect 2ic 7 PI 1RAR (see 30 May).

Inexplicably, none of the junior leaders of the 1RAR Mortar Platoon, 102 Field Battery and C Squadron 1 Armd Regt were recognised for their outstanding efforts which in some cases were performed on several occasions.

Shortly after returning to Nui Dat, 1ATF was requested by IIFFV to send two Battalions to defend the approaches to Bien Hoa against a potential threat of enemy rockets. Accordingly, 1RAR followed by 4RAR/NZ were deployed to an AO east of the previous operation (*FSB Coral/Balmoral*) and south of the Dong Nai River. By late June however, the enemy forces in the area had dissipated and contact was very light. By 18 July the battalions were back in Nui Dat.

Chapter VIII: Clearing the Province of Main Force

1ATF Looks at its Backyard

In the next few months the Battalions conducted a number of operations in the 1ATF TAOR including in support of Land Clearing Operations, commencing around the Nui Thi Vai and Nui Dinh Hills (*see Operations Vaocluse and Queanbeyan*). This involved bulldozing wide blazes through primary jungle to facilitate aerial observation of enemy movement and for the ease of movement of our own vehicles. Like barrier minefields, these "obstacles" would only be effective if constantly under 'observation and fire' which of course was not going to happen and thus the enemy was also able to use these trails, so-called, as lines of communication. In July/August 1968, 1RAR and 3RAR had been on an operation in the enemy's *Hat Dich Base* area (*Operation Platypus*) when on 6 August 1RAR was redeployed to the area around the Province Capitol, Baria. HQ 1 ATF Intelligence had assessed that a ground attack by a major enemy force on Baria and/or Long Dien was likely to occur in the next few weeks. It was thought the enemy would come from the general area of the Long Hai Hills, a major base area for *D445 VC Battalion*.

Operation Nowra: 8 August – 6 September 1968

In the early hours of 12 August, there was an enemy attack on a Regional Force Post near the Market Place in Long Dien (1). At the time 1RAR was on Ready Reaction duties with A and C Companies deployed forward north of Baria and west of Long Dien. A platoon from C Company in APCs with a troop of tanks reacted to the attack; however, the enemy had withdrawn to an assembly area just north of the Long Hai Hills (2).

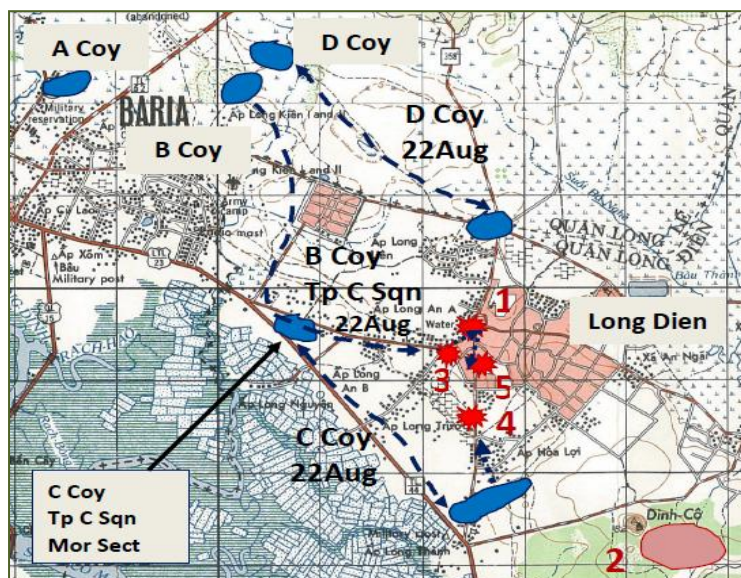
By 16 August, HQ 1RAR and B and D Companies had also deployed forward to north east of the ARVN Van Kiep Training Centre. At about 3am on 22 August, the enemy again attacked the Long Dien Market Place (1) and by first light, was attacking other parts of the village. B Company 1RAR (*Maj RI George*) then moved from the defensive position north of the Van Kiep Training Camp to C Company's defensive position and prepared to move astride Route 23 into Long Dien. At the same time D Company (*Maj AW Hammett*) redeployed to a blocking position north of Long Dien and C Company (*Maj ILG Campbell*) to the south of the village.

4 Platoon (*Lt PJ Michelson*) was soon in contact with snipers and shortly after with a platoon size force on the western edge of the town (3). B Company had three men wounded who were evacuated by APC to C Company's original position. Villagers were then evacuated to a check point manned by National Police delaying the movement of B Company

By early afternoon B Company and a Troop of Tanks had reached the Market Place and engaged enemy in an adjacent theatre with one Section Commander (*Cpl JAE Williams*) successfully directing tank fire to suppress enemy fire. At about that time C Company saw an enemy company about a kilometre north of its position (4) at which time the company was mortared, wounding seven men; C Company then directed a US Army Light Fire Team to engage the enemy to its north.

By mid afternoon B Company was ordered to advance to the area where C Company had seen the enemy company and almost immediately was in contact with an enemy platoon (5). The company with support from tanks and a Light Fire Team forced the enemy to withdraw at about last light back to the Long Hais. B Company then occupied a defensive position in the western part of the village while C and D Companies returned to their original locations.

The following day B and D Companies searched the contact area finding weapons and equipment and further evidence of enemy casualties including eleven bodies in graves near the B Company contact. After about two more weeks of patrolling the Battalion returned to Nui Dat. Eleven 1RAR soldiers had been wounded during the day of fighting. Enemy losses from two companies of *D445 Battalion* were about thirty killed and many more wounded.



Lieutenant MW Barrett, OC 11 Platoon 1RAR (centre on the radio) and left Sgt RG Curtis, Pte IW Holmes (background) and Cpl JP Daly during the clearing search of Long Dien on 23 August 1968
AWM ERR/68/0790/VN

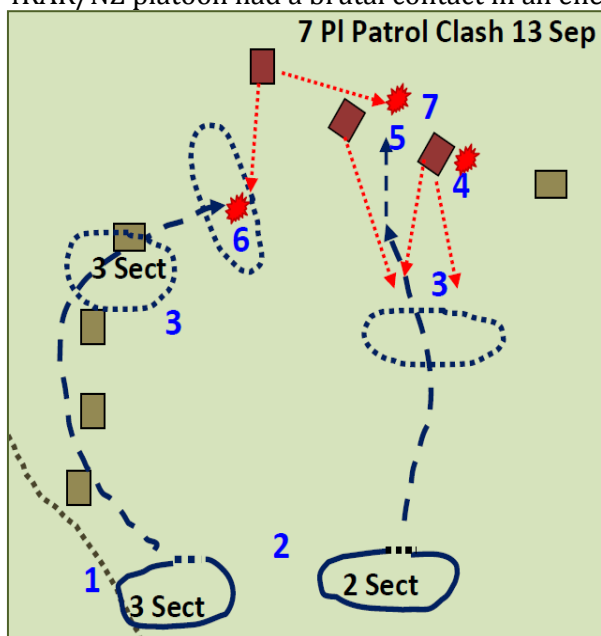
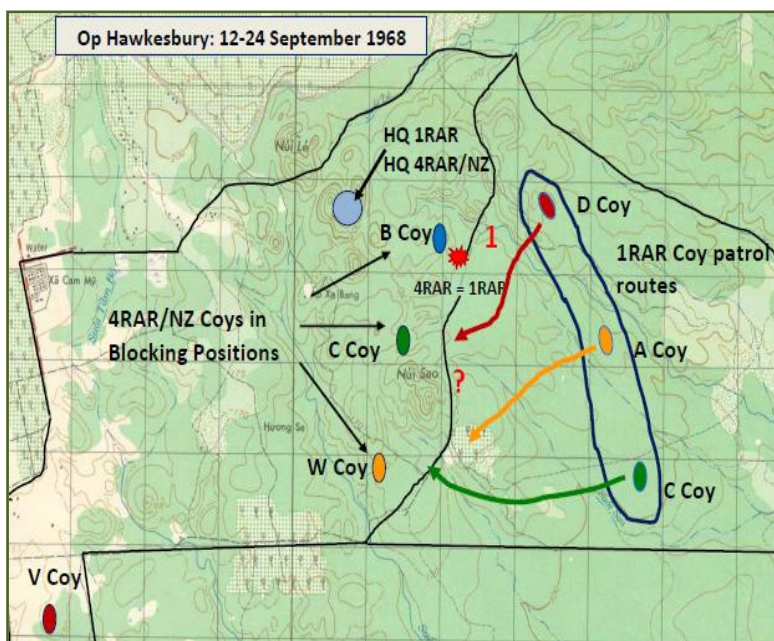
For their efforts in the 22 August battle, Lt PJ Michelson and Cpl JAE Williams were awarded a Mention In Despatches.



Operation Hawkesbury: 12 – 24 September 1968

In early September 1968 HQ 1ATF assessed that major elements of 274 VC Regiment were located in an area some 5 kilometres south east of the Courtenay Rubber Plantation and issued orders for a Reconnaissance in Force operation to deal with the threat. While 3RAR remained in the south to fend off enemy attacks against Baria, 1RAR was tasked to conduct company patrols from east to west with the idea of forcing the enemy to withdraw into blocking positions established by 4RAR/NZ. B Company 1RAR provided security for a FSB and D Company 4RAR/NZ remained at the Horseshoe while HQ 1ATF commanded the operation from Nui Dat.

There was only minor contact in the first two days except for one on the 13 September when a 4RAR/NZ platoon had a brutal contact in an enemy bunker system (1).



About 5 pm on 13 September, a 7 Platoon Patrol (2Lt TG Reidy) had been following a fresh track for a few hundred metres when the forward scout saw bunkers (1). The Platoon Commander deployed his two sections in extended line (2) and cautiously moved through the camp that appeared to have been vacated in a hurry. 3 Section (Cpl JA Wicks) had cleared through 4 bunkers on the left flank when 2 Section (LCpl R Burns) and Platoon HQ were engaged by automatic weapons (3). Three bunkers were occupied and the right flank group moved by fire and movement to neutralise one bunker with a grenade that a NVA soldier caught and threw back, wounding a machine gunner (Pte HJ Van Dieman) while the 'grenadier' (Pte BJ Pedrazzoli) was then shot and badly wounded (4).

Meanwhile, the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt MR Carroll) had gone forward and was now pinned down between two bunkers (5) and the Platoon medic (Pte RA Holmes) was badly wounded trying to get to Pte Van Dieman. The Platoon Commander attempted to join Sgt Carroll but both he and one other (Pte M Muc) were seriously wounded, Pte Muc fatally.

As 3 Section moved forward on the left the machine gun group was targeted killing the Number 1 (Pte MJ Noonan) and wounding the number two (Pte WJ Fountain) (6). The 2 Section Commander (LCpl R Burns) then moved forward to attend to Pte Holmes and then as he moved to Pte Muc he was shot and killed (7). As 2Lt Reidy reached Sgt Carroll he was hit again and shortly after Sgt Carroll was also wounded.

At this stage 5 Platoon (2Lt PB Sheedy) arrived (having moved 600 metres through thick jungle in 30 minutes), moved through 7 Platoon and cleared the enemy from the bunkers. The enemy had been of squad strength, were dressed in green and wearing NVA pith helmets.

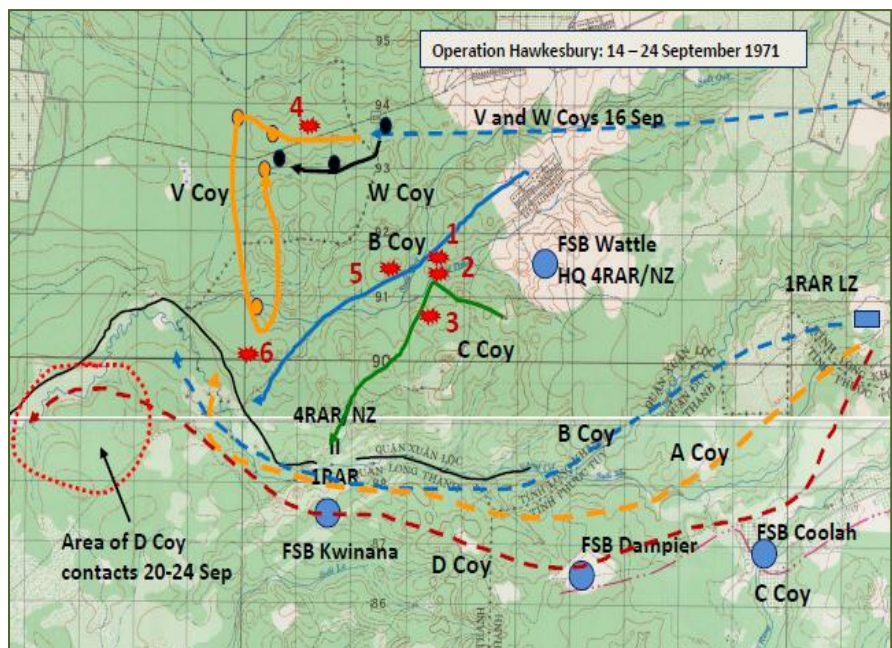
On 15 September 3 Platoon W Company (Lt BC Barley) was searching for enemy caches in small groups when a soldier was shot and killed (Pte BJ Petersen) possibly by an enemy soldier in a 'spider hole'.

On 14 September, as a result of further intelligence on the location of 274 Regt, HQ 1ATF issued orders for both battalions to redeploy some 20 kilometres west to the north of the Hat Dich.

1RAR deployed by air and occupied FSB Coolah for the subsequent fly-in of 4RAR/NZ to FSB Wattle. With one company remaining at FSB Coolah, 1 RAR then searched to the west with three companies abreast but with little or no contact until late in the operation.

4RAR/NZ however, made early contact with the enemy with the first being by 6 Platoon (2Lt PJ Vial) about 2pm on 16 September (1). The Platoon had been following a well used track when the Forward Scout heard voices about 80 metres to his front. The forward section commander and one other did a

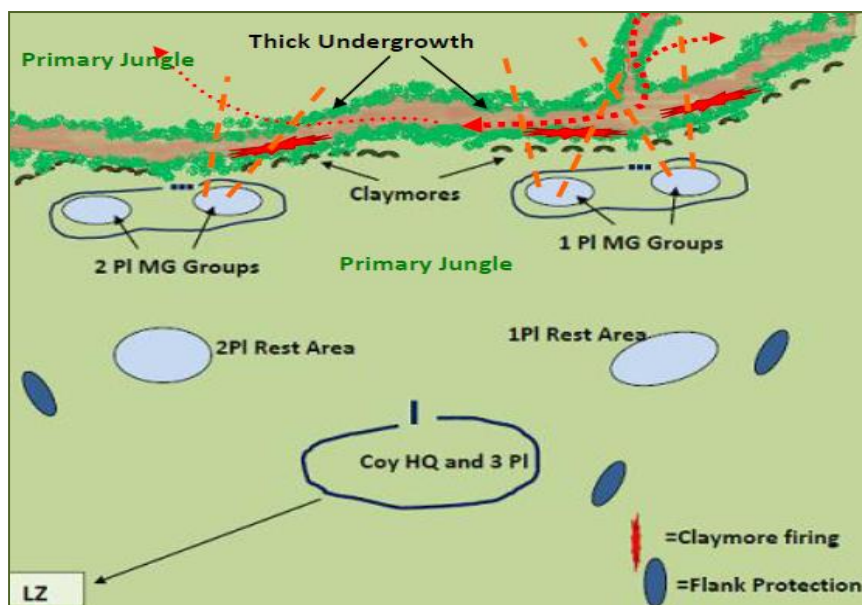
recce forward and saw two enemy sitting on the edge of a weapon pit and another in a hammock which they engaged with the enemy responding immediately with MG fire. The recce patrol withdrew and reported several bunkers so the Platoon Commander decided to withdraw and engage the enemy position with artillery. Initially this was not effective and the enemy were still there when the platoon returned; it withdrew again and called for more artillery and because of the time of day returned to the rest of B Company (Maj WJ Reynolds). Following an aborted



airstrike, the company was led by 6 Platoon to the enemy position and conducted another recce which confirmed the enemy had gone with three killed and wounded.

C Company (Maj BDV Lindsay) was close to the B Company contact and deployed on possible withdrawal routes with section and platoon immediate ambushes. 9 Section (Cpl M Farrell) immediately contacted and killed one VC (2). About half an hour later 7 Platoon (Sgt BJ Morris), a 100 metres south of 9 Platoon, contacted four enemy crossing a creek killing three (2). On 18 September 4 Section (Cpl GJ Lipscombe) was the C Company point section moving to a suspected enemy position when bunkers were sighted (3); as the Platoon began to leap-frog through the bunkers 4 Section was engaged by automatic weapons from an enemy rear guard group. The Section deployed by fire and movement to force the enemy to withdraw leaving one dead behind. The Company then occupied the system (comprising over 150 bunkers) when as could be expected, an enemy soldier attempted to enter the system and was shot and killed by an alert sentry.

On 18 September, V Company (Maj MJ Hall) established a company ambush on a 'Fire Trail' (4) - see next page.



V Company had established the company ambush with two platoons forward and one in reserve (see sketch). The ambush was set to cover the junction the 'Fire Trail' and a track which had fresh sign. The platoons deployed with two MG Groups each and claymores spread along the track inside thick undergrowth growing on the verges of the fire trail.

At mid morning on 19 September both 1 Platoon (*Lt JR Webb*) and 2 Platoon (*Lt RS Miller*) commanders were in their respective rest areas when 1 Platoon sentries (*Ptes A*

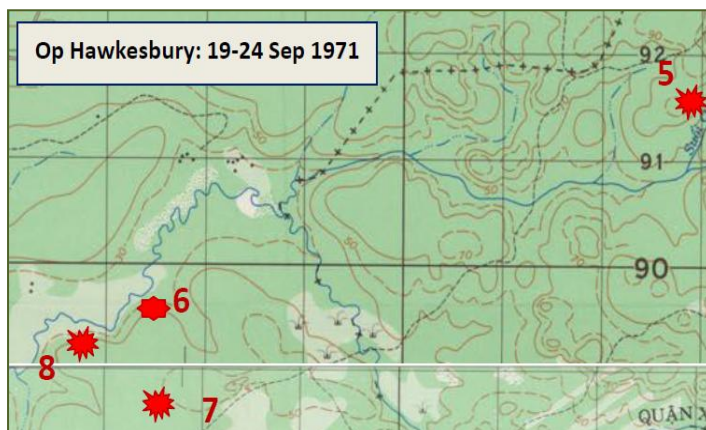
Manning and JF Orr) in the right MG Group heard the early warning twigs snapping. They waited until six of about twelve enemy had passed before initiating the ambush with claymores and MG fire. Simultaneously, the sentries in the left MG Group (*LCpl EB Harrison and Pte BG Grant*) engaged the enemy point with claymores and rifle fire. Shortly after 2 Platoon right hand sentries (*Ptes VJ Lowry and NL Martin*) saw four enemy running down the fire trail and engaged them with claymores and MG Fire. All of the enemy group were killed or wounded either in the initial contacts or by 3 Platoon (*Lt RSV Kellett*) when it cleared the ambush site.

B Company 4RAR/NZ continued to have minor contacts with 5 Platoon (*2Lt PB Sheedy*) contacting three enemy about mid afternoon on 19 September (5). The Section Commander who spotted the enemy (*Cpl JW Burns*) ordered his gun group to open fire at a range of about 15 metres hitting all three one of whom withdrew but who then ran into the remainder of B Company and became a prisoner.

On 20 September D Company 1RAR (*Maj AW Hammett*) was patrolling in the area that would later, on Operation Goodwood, prove to be one of the most active areas in the enemy's *Hat Dich Base Area*. In the early afternoon 10 Platoon (*2Lt JP Salter*) struck an occupied bunker system (6) and was engaged with RPGs; while the platoon withdrew to allow air strikes and artillery the remainder of the Company closed up to assault the position and had dropped its packs which were to be secured by a five man section from 12 Platoon (*LCpl LP McDougall*).

As it appeared the airstrike had not been effective and a second rejected because of bad weather artillery was employed before the Company moved on the enemy position; as it was reorganising it received heavy fire from three previously undetected bunkers. A Section Commander (*LCpl DG Lewis*) was severely wounded and pinned down by intense crossfire however, one of the Section's rifleman (*Pte IA Norris*) ran forward and retrieved the wounded man; four other men received minor frag wounds while six enemy bodies were found and evidence of more wounded.

Meanwhile the under strength Section some 1000 metres from the Company (7) was having its own problems. About 6.30 pm it was approached by about ten enemy who were driven off leaving one dead. With an unserviceable radio the Section Commander nevertheless kept further enemy probes at bay during the night. The following morning another enemy squad approached the section and was driven



off leaving three dead however, a rifleman (*Pte AS Williams*) was fatally wounded. That afternoon as the Company was regrouping the Section successfully engaged another group killing one. On 23 September D Company was about to leave its night harbour position when a small enemy group fired RPGs and small arms slightly wounding LCpl McDougall (8).

The following day both battalions returned to Nui Dat.

The following awards were made for Op Hawkesbury:

- **Military Cross:** 2Lt TG Reidy, OC 7 PI 4RAR/NZ (see 13 Sep).
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Sgt MR Carroll, PI Sgt 7 PI 4RAR/NZ (see 13 Sep).
- **Mentioned in Despatches:** 2Lt PB Sheedy, OC 5 PI 4RAR/NZ (see 13 Sep); L Cpl LP McDougall, Sect Comd 12 PI 1RAR (see 20 Sep); Pte IA Norris, D Coy 1RAR (see 20 Sep).



WO2 R Richardson, CSM B Company 4RAR/NZ emerging from an enemy bunker with a bag of captured grenades. Note also the 'ridge poles' above the bunker for makeshift tentage.

WO2 Richardson was awarded a Military Medal when serving with 2RAR in Korea (1952-53) and a Mentioned in Despatches for the action on 16 February 1969 (see Operation Goodwood) when he was also badly wounded.

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In October 1968 HQ 1ATF (*Brig CMI Pearson*) decided to attack enemy logistics operations by the principal group responsible, ie *84 Rear Service Group*, operating between the *Hat Dich* in the north west and the *May Tao Base* in the far north east of Phuoc Tuy Province. Accordingly, an operation involving 3RAR and 4RAR/NZ was mounted along the northern border region of the Province.

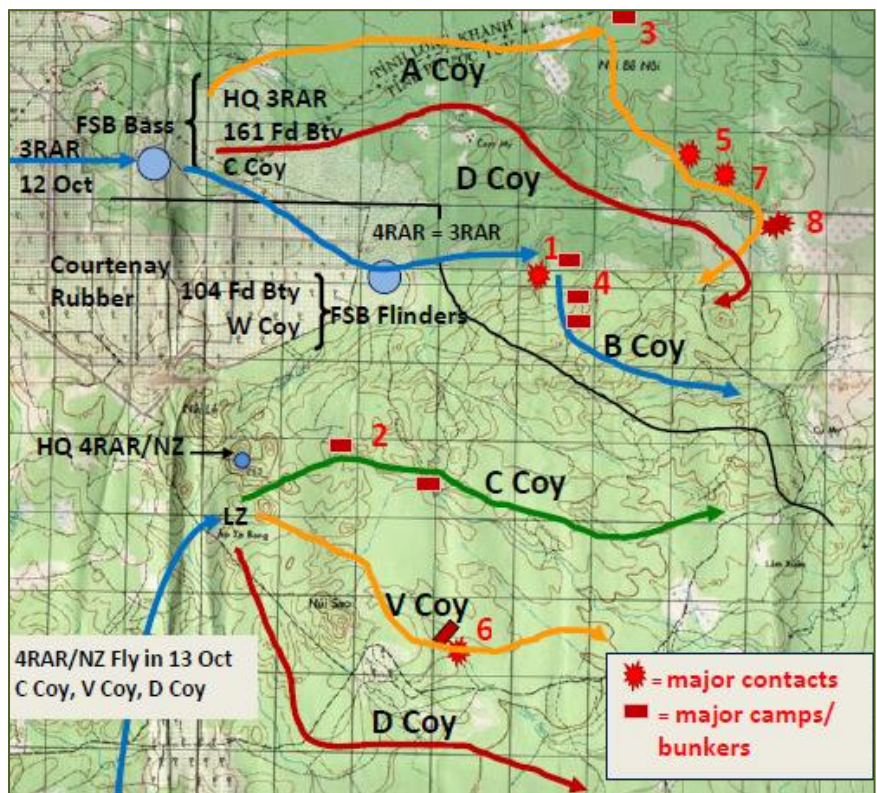
Operation Capital: 12 –20 October 1968

On 12 October 1968, 3RAR which had been on operations in the enemy's *Hat Dich Base* area since 28 September (*Operation Windsor*), deployed with an air assault on FSB Bass. On 13 October B Company (*Maj HW Irwin*) secured FSB Flinders for the fly-in of W Company 4RAR/NZ (*Maj PG Hotop*) and then 104 Field Battery. C Company 4RAR/NZ (*Maj BVD Lindsay*) then air assaulted to an LZ for the subsequent fly-in of V Company (*Maj MJ Hall*) and D Company (*Maj JPA Deighton*). Concurrently, Battalion Headquarters with the Mortar, Tracker and Assault Pioneer Platoons flew into a base position a kilometre north. That afternoon B Company 3RAR had two contacts (1); the first was by 4 Platoon (*Lt DT Barclay*) when an alert soldier in the rear section (*Pte MJ Evans*) heard voices and alerted others including another rifleman (*Pte B Rickaby*) who shot and fatally wounded an enemy scout. The second occurred as the company was occupying a night harbour, a 6 Platoon (*2Lt DO Morgan*) sentry (*Pte LJ Downes*) shot and killed an enemy soldier doing a recon of the position.

On 14 October, both battalions commenced patrolling in earnest in hot and humid conditions in country that was mainly thick jungle. At about 2pm, C Company 4RAR/NZ located a recently occupied bunker system of at least company size (26 bunkers) (2). On the same day A Company 3RAR (*Maj BW Howard*) found a battalion size bunker system (3) and B Company 3RAR discovered a series of bunker systems (4) some which were well sited defensive positions while others were logistic facilities, mainly medical

On the 15 October, 1 Platoon 3RAR (*2Lt NM Bell*) had two contacts a couple of hours apart (5). At about 3pm, 3 Section (*Cpl AR Evans*) was covering a track leading into a company harbour position when an enemy patrol approached and was engaged by the MG sentry (*Pte J Trueman*) killing two. At about 5pm, 2 Section (*LCpl RA Dare*) sentries (*Ptes PA Wells and AJ Hales*) saw an enemy patrol approaching; both fired a SLR magazine of 20 rounds and as they withdrew directed MG fire. A later search found three dead enemy soldiers.

On 16 October V Company 4RAR/NZ located an occupied enemy camp (6) and after preliminary artillery bombardment entered it contacting two enemy, killing one. The camp was some 300 metres long and 100 metres wide and typical of those established by the NVA in this area, as 4RAR/NZ was to discover in 1971 (see [Operation Ivanhoe](#)). The camps were considered to be relatively safe and in this case it was constructed either side of a 5 metre wide creek with several weapon caches and huts



containing duplicating equipment, a PA sound system and propaganda material on the northern side. On the southern side there was a First Aid Post, two kitchens (with underground chimneys), eleven huts with bunkers underneath including a headquarters area, female living quarters and 19 fighting bunkers connected by communication trenches. V Company with Engineer support spent two days demolishing the camp.

At 8.45 am on 17 October, 2 Platoon 3RAR (2Lt PH Fraser) was deploying into an ambush position when three NVA approached and were engaged (7), initially by a sentry (Pte BJ Donovan), and then by the Platoon as it moved forward by fire and movement. All three enemy soldiers were killed and subsequently identified as being from 274 VC Regiment.

On 19 October A Company 3RAR was in a firm base with 2 Platoon deployed to an ambush position some 500 metres west. At about 8 am the platoon engaged a single enemy soldier and as the ambush position was now compromised Platoon began to redeploy; it was then engaged (8) by an estimated enemy company using RPGs, HMGs and automatic weapons. The Platoon suffered several casualties from RPG shrapnel including a Section Commander who was replaced by the Section 2IC (LCpl KJ Booth) who took control of the MG Group which was immediately engaged by RPGs, fatally wounding two soldiers (LCpl PRP Van Rijsewijk and Pte IJ Thomson). Artillery fire and a US Army Light Fire Team supported the Platoon in breaking contact with 1 Platoon (2Lt NM Bell) providing covering fire for 2 Platoon to withdraw to the Company position. Some twenty enemy were killed in the contact which lasted about four hours.

Operation Capital finished on 22 October with 3RAR returning to Nui Dat however, 4RAR/NZ remained in the area in an expanded AO to the south and east until 30 October. A new FSB (Wilton) was established with security being provided by a company from 1RAR. 3RAR was involved in one last major operation (Operation Harvest) before beginning procedures for its return to Australia and its relief by 9RAR.

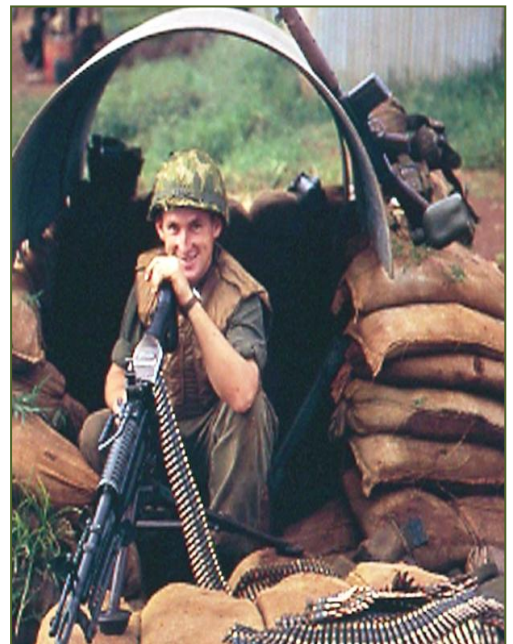
Award: For his courageous efforts during the 2 Platoon 3RAR contact on 19 October, L Cpl KJ Booth was awarded a Military Medal.



Right: Pte GA Loveridge, 11Pl 4RAR/NZ, manning the Checkpoint at the Horseshoe Defensive Position.

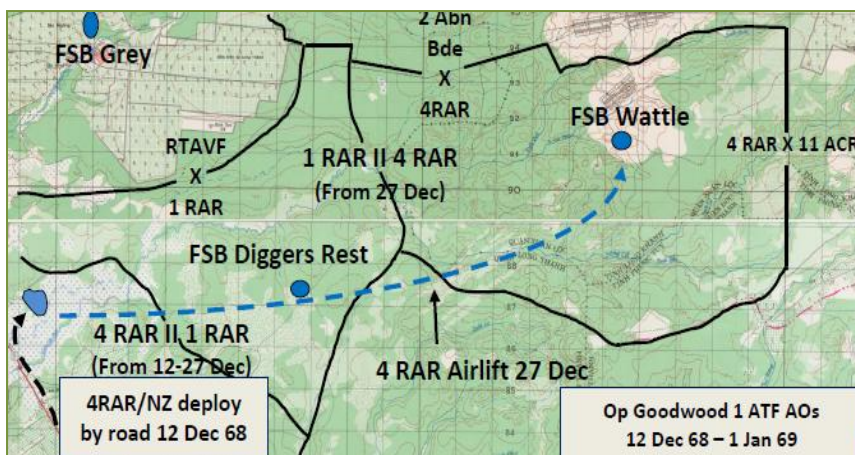
Photograph courtesy of Gerry

Left: Pte EV Dixon, 2 Pl 3RAR during Op Capital
Photograph courtesy of Ned Dixon



Having a Bash at the Hat Dich

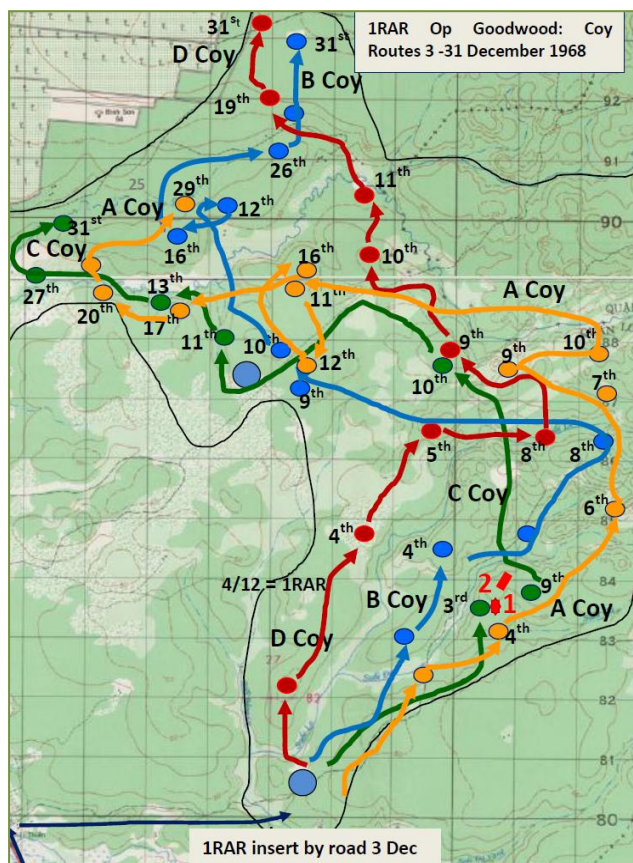
In December 1968, combined Australian, US, Royal Thai Army and ARVN operations commenced in the east and south east of Bien Hoa Province as a precautionary against enemy attacks on allied bases closer to Saigon, eg Bearcat (US 199 Light Infantry Brigade) and FSB Grey (Royal Thai Army Brigade). Initially, the Australian area of operations involved only 1RAR however, when it deployed further north



on 11 December it was joined by 4RAR/NZ which replaced the 199 Brigade's 4/12 Battalion. On 27 December, 4RAR/NZ redeployed to the east sharing a boundary with 2nd Airborne Brigade (ARVN) to the north and 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment (11 ACR) to the east. On 1 January 1969, 9RAR replaced 1RAR; however, 1RAR was to return for a second phase of the operation in the general area where 4RAR/NZ had been operating until 27 December. In turn, 4RAR/NZ relieved 1RAR in the western sector of the AO in February 1969.

Operation Goodwood: December 1968 – February 1969

The concept of operations for the early phases of *Operation Goodwood* was Reconnaissance In Force specifically against 3rd Battalion 274 VC Regiment, elements of 74 NVA Artillery Regiment and logistic support units which were responsible for the passage of supplies from coastal areas known as the *Rung Sat* to the *Hat Dich* base area.



Sat to the *Hat Dich* base area.

The map opposite shows the routes and timelines of company patrolling, illustrating the complexity involved in the efficient command and control of such operations, ie separation by both time and space; success for this was based on extensive training and in the case of 1RAR, considerable experience as it headed toward the end of its second and final tour of duty in Vietnam.

The operation commenced on 3 December when 1RAR deployed from Nui Dat to the AO (FSB Dyke) by road (trucks and APCs). Initially, B and C Companies were to patrol to the north east with A and D Companies as follow up, each with a troop of tanks. After the discovery by C Company (*Maj BR Honner*) of a battalion size staging camp containing 196 bunkers, protected by a squad size caretaker group contacted on 4th December (1) and (2), all companies commenced patrolling north and northwest. To cover this change, the FSB moved to 'Diggers Rest' on 11 December after it had been secured by B Company (*Maj RI George*) with a troop of tanks.

1RAR Operation Goodwood: 11 December 1968– 1 January 1969

It was not long before the companies located enemy camps, mostly bunker systems and frequently occupied. On 11 December, B Company found a large bunker complex including a tunnel system (3) which had been occupied by a NVA artillery unit. Late in the morning of 12 December, B Company had a number of fleeting contacts and then about 2pm, 4 Platoon (*Lt PJ Michelson*) came under sustained MG fire (.30 cal) from a bunker system (4); it took sometime before it and the rest of the company were able to break contact to allow artillery fire onto the position.

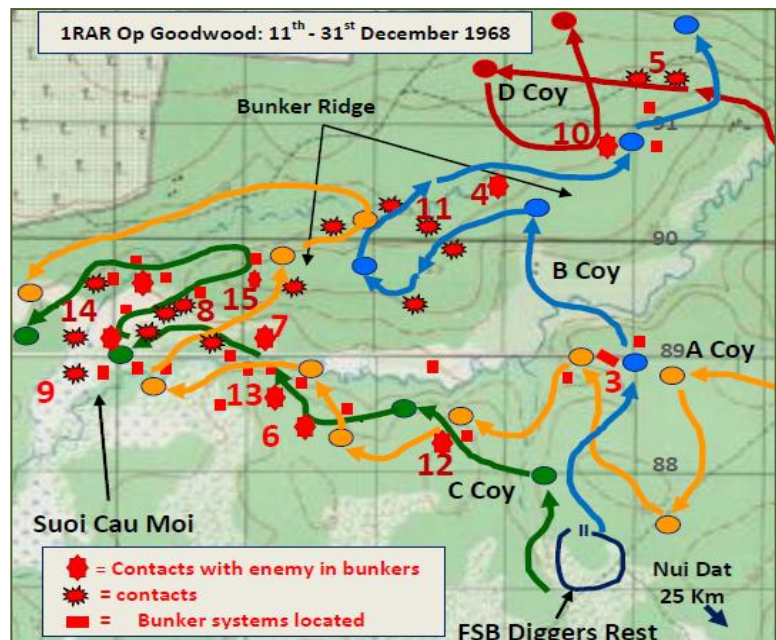
Later that day 10 Platoon contacted a group of VC that bumped the rear of the Platoon and who appeared to be couriers (5) and an hour later 12 Platoon (*2Lt GW Bowcock*) when setting up an ambush position was engaged by RPG and automatic weapons from enemy occupying bomb craters (5). One Australian was killed in the contact (*LCpl JM Rands*).

Mid morning on the 13 December, 7 Platoon (*2Lt TE Stannus*) was engaged by a small group enemy in bunkers (6) and while conducting a flank assault had four men wounded when an enemy claymore was fired. C Company (*Maj BR Honner*) reinforced the platoon and cleared the position killing two enemy soldiers. Later that day and on the next day, C Company had a number of contacts on the southern flank of what was to become known as 'Bunker Ridge', a name that 9RAR would later attest to. Most contacts were with enemy either in or near bunker systems (7), (8) and (9); as in most patrol contacts forward scouts and the enemy fired simultaneously, on most occasions the Australians more effectively.

On 15 December an under strength 11 Platoon (*Lt MB Barrett*), contacted enemy in a platoon size bunker system (10) that took the whole of D Company (*Maj AW Hammett*) several hours to secure (See also End Notes paragraph 9). On the same day B Company (*Maj RI George*) had a number of contacts, some from ambush positions which accounted for several enemy dead (11).

Frequent contacts with the enemy continued, especially on the course of the *Suoi Cau Moi* where a number of bunker systems were found by A Company (*Maj KA Patterson*). On 17 December 1 Platoon contacted a group of Rear Services VC (12) and on 19 December 2 Platoon was patrolling past a suspected enemy camp when the enemy fired two claymores at the rear section killing one man (*LCpl JH Kalma*) and wounding ten others, three seriously (13). In a camp nearby a medical supplies dispensary was located. On the same day 9 Platoon (*Lt RT Convery*) engaged a squad of VC across a creek killing two and the following day the same platoon ambushed a VC resupply party killing three (14). On 28 December after a number of fleeting contacts 7 Platoon contacted two VC and when sweeping through the area were engaged by a platoon size enemy group in bunkers causing the death of one Australian (*Pte RJ Cox*) and wounding five others (15). 7 Platoon withdrew and called in artillery which caused the enemy to scarper.

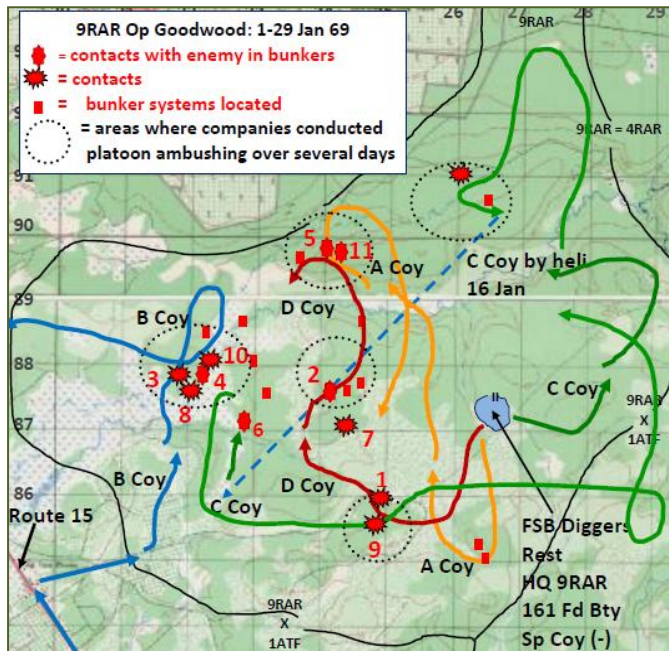
Shortly after, 1RAR concentrated and returned to Nui Dat. It was clear it had been operating in a major base area of a VC operational sub region comprising logistic units with protective elements from both VC and NVA units. Whereas the Battalion had caused considerable disruption to enemy operations, this would be only temporary for as soon as it left the area the enemy would resume normal activities as 9RAR was about to discover.



9RAR is Raised and Rapidly sent to War

The raising of 9RAR on 13 November 1967 at Keswick Barracks in Adelaide was unique in two ways: firstly it wasn't based on the usual practice of drawing on a cadre of trained officers and men from an established battalion but instead was constituted by the posting of individual Officers and NCOs and by drafts directly from Recruit Training Battalions; secondly the Battalion had to be raised, trained and tested within a single year before deploying to Vietnam. In line with the often practice of muddled thinking, the planners at AHQ in Canberra in acknowledging that the Vietnam War was set in a tropical environment, then proceeded to have 9RAR train in one of the most arid and in winter, coldest areas of Australia, to wit the Cultana Training Area and the north Flinders Ranges. Training however, did occur at JTC Canungra and a test exercise at Shoalwater Bay and after a farewell march through Adelaide in early October, the Battalion (*Lt Col AL Morrison, CO; WO1 D Cassidy, RSM*) departed Port Adelaide on HMAS Sydney on 9 November 1968.

After a couple of work-up operations involving: a Cordon and Search of An Nhut Village (*King Hit One*); and a short Reconnaissance In Force operation about 20 kilometres north of Nui Dat (*King Hit Two*), the Battalion replaced 1RAR on *Operation Goodwood*.



9RAR Operation Goodwood: 1 -29 January 1969

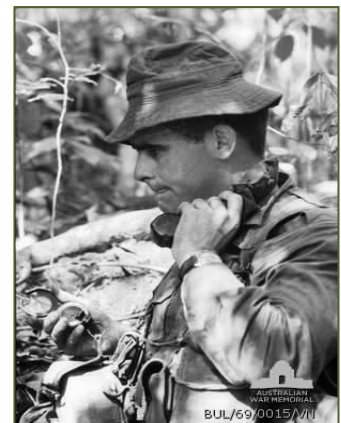
The operation began with A Company (*Maj WL Smith*) joining HQ 1RAR at FSB Diggers Rest to supervise the fly-in of the remainder of the Battalion less B Company (*Maj EA Chitham*) which deployed by APC along Route 15. As usual the area of operations was divided into company AOs and patrolling commenced in the southern parts immediately.

As the companies moved north contact with the enemy increased, mainly with small groups and the pattern of operations varied with company movement dictated by enemy reactions. In one case for example, C Company (*Maj LJ Lewis*) was airlifted from the north east of the AO to the south west in response to a sighting of a large enemy group by aerial reconnaissance.

On 1 and 2 January 10 Platoon (*Lt PJ McAuley*) had successful contacts with small enemy groups (1) and on 5 January the Platoon was engaged from a large enemy bunker system with RPGs and small arms (2). The Forward Scout (*Pte DJ Cromb*) continued to engage the enemy with rifle fire and M79 grenades allowing six wounded men, including the 10 Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt GV Rashleigh*) to be evacuated and then to cover the deployment of 11 Platoon to a flank which distracted the enemy thus allowing 10 Platoon to withdraw.

On the same day, 4 Platoon (*2Lt MJ Bell*) contacted five enemy (3) killing two but losing its Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt JM Duroux*) who died from wounds. On 6 January, 5 Platoon (*Lt IM Clark*) was investigating a track running from an enemy water point (4) when it was engaged with a claymore mine killing one man (*Pte G Nagle*) and wounding five including a Section Commander (*Cpl AW Graham*), who died from his wounds the next day.

A pensive Lt PJ McAuley as 10 Platoon arrives on bunker ridge on 15 Jan 69
AWM BUL/69/0015/VN



On 10 January 3 Platoon (*Lt AGH Craig*) was investigating a bunker system (5) when it was engaged by a claymore, grenades, RPGs and small arms wounding five including the Platoon Commander and the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt FW Crawford*); the Company Medic (*Cpl APP Rae*) moved forward under fire to treat the wounded however, one subsequently died (*Pte TF Meredith*). Ten enemy dead were later found in the position.

Just before midnight on 16 January, C Company had redeployed by helicopter and was moving to the vicinity of an enemy camp which had been shelled that afternoon and engaged a number of enemy using torches as they made preparations to withdraw (6). Five enemy dead were found at first light including an NVA officer.

On 18 and 19 January, A and B Companies had a series of contacts with tragic outcomes. On 18 January 2 Platoon (*2Lt AJ Daniels*) was the point platoon moving into a company harbour when it was engaged by a VC squad (7) fatally wounding the Forward Scout (*Pte RA Phillips*) who was retrieved by the Company Medic (*Cpl APP Rae*). Early the next morning as the Platoon was retrieving Claymore Mines, an enemy group fired three RPG rounds into the Company position one of which landed in 2 Platoon's area; three men were killed including the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt JR Cock*) and (*Pte RM Key and Pte A Sykes*) and five wounded including a Section Commander and a Section 2ic.

At first light on 19 January a B Company ambush patrol commanded by the CSM (*WO2 KS Grills*) engaged a five man security group moving some distance in front of the main body, killing and wounding several and capturing one (8). Later that day, when B Company Headquarters was deploying into the contact area, an undetected wounded enemy officer with a pistol shot and killed the OC's Batman (*Pte PC Smith*) and wounded the Company 2ics batman; he then grabbed the dead soldier's SLR firing at the FO's Party wounding one New Zealand gunner, before he was shot and killed.

At about midday on 19 January, 9 Platoon (*2Lt I Jones*) was ambushing a well used track when it engaged some ten enemy with claymores and small arms killing and wounding most of them (9) without loss to the platoon.

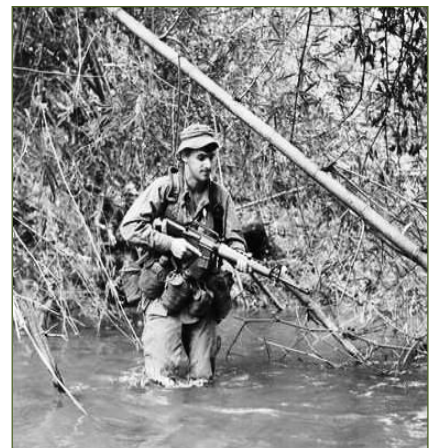
Early on 21 January 6 Platoon (*2Lt GR Locke*) was in an ambush set in two groups when the first group detected movement of what turned out to be another security group and alerted the main body of the Platoon which subsequently killed and wounded most (10). A prisoner subsequently revealed that the main enemy group was travelling from the Bien Hoa area to Route 2 in the centre of Phuoc Tuy Province and had simply by passed the contact area and kept moving without retrieving any of the wounded.

On 24 January 12 Platoon (*2Lt DJ Daley*) was patrolling from a company position in thick bamboo and scrub when the forward scout of the lead section, 9 Section (*LCpl TR Whitton*), was hit several times (11); as the Platoon deployed to give covering fire, LCpl Whitton moved forward under heavy fire to rescue the Scout. The rest of the Platoon Headquarters then came under fire from claymores, RPGs and small arms from an enemy platoon strength position. Eventually the Platoon was able break contact; however, as it entered the D Company perimeter an enemy soldier fired an M79 grenade at the Platoon seriously wounding a Section Commander (*LCpl G Davidson*). Five men, including the Platoon Commander, had been wounded during the 90 minute battle.

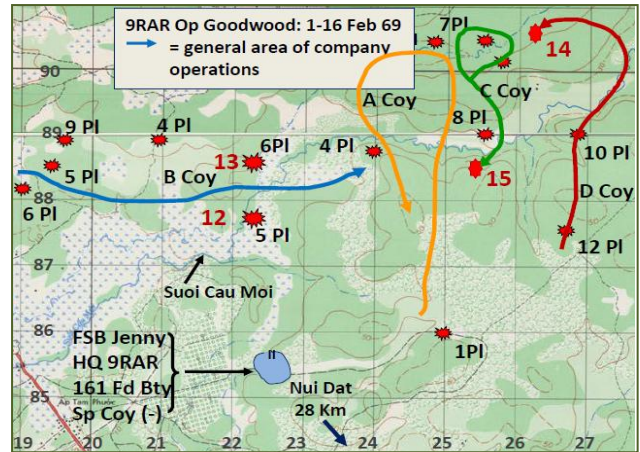
By late January as fatigue began to show, the rifle companies began to rotate for rest at Nui Dat commencing with A Company on 27 January.



Left Pte DN Appleford, D Coy Signaler and Right, Pte GB Perks Support Section HQ D Coy both crossing a tributary of the Suoi Cau Moi on 22 Jan 69
AWM BUL/69/0032/VN and 0028/VN

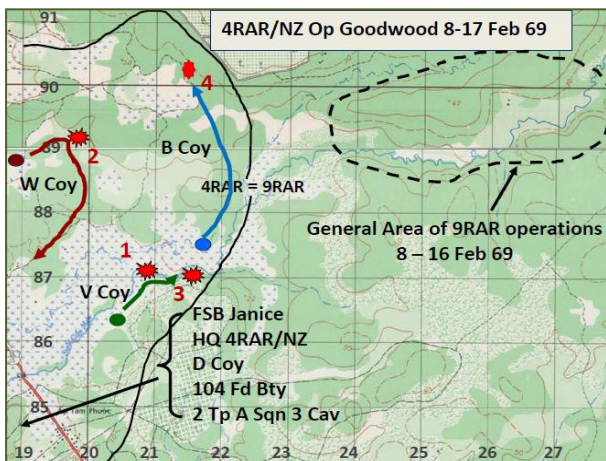


On 4 February, 5 Platoon (*Lt IM Clark*) was ambushing a well used track (12) at a creek crossing when at first light eight enemy travelling quietly and well spread out entered the ambush site and were hit with considerable firepower: 10 claymores, 1000 rounds MG ammunition, 1200 rounds of rifle ammunition, 8 hand grenades and 30 M79 grenades. Not surprisingly all were killed or wounded with two subsequently killed by artillery fire laid on the withdrawal route. That evening 6 Platoon (*2Lt GR Locke*) was setting an ambush on a track running through a bunker system (13) when an enemy group arrived and were engaged with claymores and small arms. Included in the enemy casualties was a prisoner who revealed his unit was training in the area prior to deploying to the Bien Hoa area.



At about midday on 8 February, D Company (*Maj W McDonald*) made contact with an enemy platoon in bunkers (14) which lasted for 5 hours with one soldier who died from wounds (*LCpl MR McConachy*) and five others wounded. The action provided a good insight into the way the enemy fought in bunker systems; it was noted at the time that because of the enemy's excellent fire discipline, subunits should not maneuver against bunker systems without thorough reconnaissance; furthermore, the best reaction to the discovery of an occupied system was to withdraw and engage it with artillery unless tanks were available to hook in (as occurred around FSB Coral in May 1968). It was also noted the enemy's use of RPGs was very good because the bunkers were sited with back blast clearance and fire lanes had been skillfully prepared. (See also page 93)

The final major contact on the operation occurred on 14 February when 8 Platoon (*Lt GM Bagot*) engaged an enemy a sentry and as the forward section swept through the area it was pinned down by heavy RPG and automatic weapon fire from both flanks (15). A reserve section commander (*LCpl AGS Ochiltree*) moved forward to engage the enemy neutralizing a MG and allowing the forward section to withdraw without casualties. The enemy, of platoon strength, was in bunkers which were then targeted by a Light Fire Team and artillery before 9 Platoon (*2Lt I Jones*) moved around the flank of 8 Platoon where it too was engaged from bunkers with a Section Commander killed (*LCpl PA Chant*). Further artillery and mortar fire was used as darkness fell and the following morning 7 Platoon (*2Lt BV Osborn*) entered the camp and cleared the bunkers with grenades.



Meanwhile, 4RAR/NZ had returned to the operation on 8 February with three rifle companies patrolling to the west of 9RAR, ie B Company (*Maj WJ Reynolds*), V Company (*Maj MJ Hall*) and W Company (*Maj LG Williams*). On 8, 9 and 10 February the New Zealand companies had a series of contacts (1), (2) and (3), resulting in a dozen enemy killed and wounded.

On 15 February, B Company moved with 1 Troop B Squadron (*2Lt BJ Sullivan*) to search for a large cache of rice reported to be in the north of the AO. At 1.30 pm on 16 February, B Company was engaged by enemy in a bunker system firing machine guns, RPGs and claymore mines (4). The forward Section Commander (*Cpl M Gibson*) was hit by an RPG round which didn't explode but knocked him unconscious; when he came to he found his MG Group dead (*Pte RA McGuire and Pte VN Petersen*) and he then crawled forward under heavy fire to man the MG. Meanwhile as the tanks maneuvered to provide fire support one was engaged by RPGs with at least four hitting, wounding the crew; they were

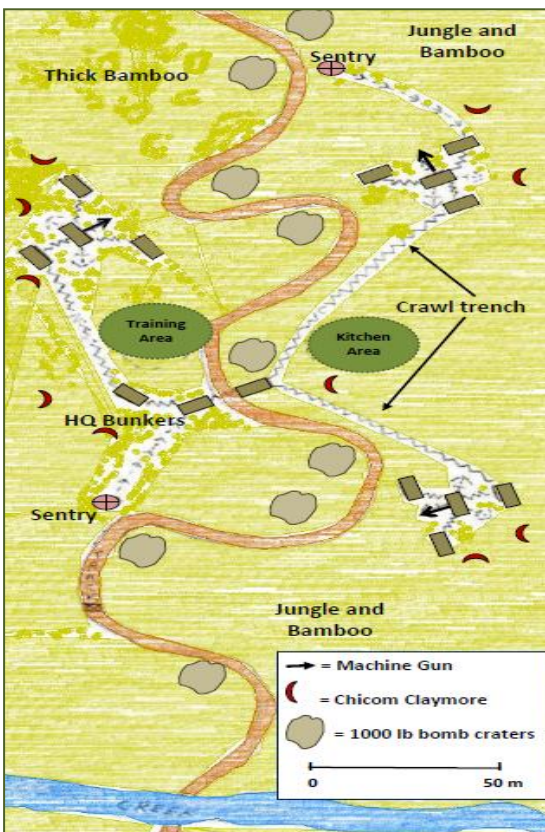
rescued when the Troop Commander dismounted from his own tank, extricated the wounded driver and drove the burning tank from the fire zone. The Company Medic (*Cpl WL Brown*) had also moved forward under heavy fire to treat the casualties. Medium artillery, Light Fire Teams and close air support helped the Company to break contact some two hours later. Two B Company soldiers were killed and three wounded including the CSM (*WO2 R Richardson*). Who had also helped to retrieve the wounded from the enemy fire lanes. Five tank crewmen were also wounded.

During Operation Goodwood, 9RAR in its first full scale operation, accounted for hundreds of enemy casualties, hundreds of bunkers destroyed and tonnes of supplies and weapons captured. The cost to the Battalion however, was severe with a total of 53 dead and wounded, of which: two were Platoon Commanders, four were Platoon Sergeants and eight were Section Commanders/2ics. The role of the junior leaders continued to be a dangerous one.

Because of the outstanding success of Operation Goodwood as a sustained attack on one of the enemy's most important base areas, the Regiment was awarded the *Battle Honour of 'Hat Dich'*.

The following individual awards were made for Operation Goodwood and in some cases were combined with other operations:

- Military Cross: Maj EA Chitham, OC B Coy 9RAR; Maj WJ Reynolds OC B Coy 4RAR/NZ (see 16 Feb); Maj LG Williams (RNZIR), OC W Coy 4RAR/NZ.
- Medal of Gallantry: 2Lt BJ Sullivan, Tp Comd, B Sqn 1 Armd Regt (see 16 Feb).
- Distinguished Conduct Medal: Cpl M Gibson, Section Commander B Coy 4RAR/NZ (see 16 Feb).
- Military Medal: Cpl WL Brown, Medical Assistant B Coy 4RAR/NZ (see 16 Feb); Pte DJ Cromb, Forward Scout, 10 Platoon 9RAR (see 5 Jan); L Cpl AGS Ochiltree, Section Commander 8 Platoon 9RAR (see 14 Feb); Cpl ABP Rae, Medical Assistant A Coy 9RAR (see 10 and 18 Jan); L Cpl TR Whitton, Section Commander 12 Platoon 9RAR (see 24 Jan).
- Mentioned In Despatches: 2Lt I Jones, OC 9 Platoon 9RAR (see 19 Jan); WO2 R Richardson, CSM B Coy 4RAR/NZ (see 16 Feb); Maj WLH Smith, OC A Coy 9RAR (see 10 Jan).
- Commendation for Distinguished Service: 2Lt GR Locke, OC 6 PI 9RAR (see 21 Jan and 4 Feb).



Anatomy of a Bunker System

The sketch is adapted from one prepared by Cpl JH McKay of a bunker system located by C Company 9RAR in January 1969. The two man bunkers, sited in depth and all round defence were mainly for protection against aerial bombardment with fighting done from behind or alongside the bunker. This allowed the extensive use of RPGs with back blast areas provided and fire lanes cleared on all approaches.

Each cluster of bunkers could be mutually supported by fire and reinforced through crawl trenches.

They were a formidable obstacle to overcome.

By courtesy of the 9RAR Association

5 RAR Returns

On 15 February 1969, 5RAR (*Lt Col CN Khan, CO and WO1 CR Vagg, RSM*) disembarked from *HMAS Sydney* and travelled by road to Nui Dat while 1RAR moved in the opposite direction and back to Australia. With the return of the first Battalion to serve in 1ATF, ie 5RAR, the circumstances for preparing battalions for operations was vastly different to those in 1966. The training programs were lengthy, carefully structured and incorporated experience and lessons learnt; there were a number of mandatory operational activities including Sub Unit training at JTC Canungra and Unit evaluation exercises at Shoalwater Bay. There was also more operational experience inherent in battalions especially the NCOs who in the main were on their second tour. The time was approaching when Officers of Field Rank would also be on their second tour.

The Task Force continues to focus on the far North West: Operation Federal: February – April 1969

On 16 February 1969, HQ 1ATF issued the operation order for *Operation Federal* which had 9RAR and 4RAR/NZ deploying on 17 and 18 February to an AO astride Route 1 on the eastern approaches to the massive US Base at Long Binh. The operation was mounted primarily to defend Long Binh against attacks by *5VC Division* including by *274 VC Regt and 33 NVA Regt*. The latter was a relative newcomer to this theatre of the war as it was originally assigned to *1 NVA Division* in the central highlands some 450 Km to the northeast. After the *1968 TET Offensive* and the massive counter offensive by the allied forces, *33 NVA* was redeployed into the enemy Military Region (*MR-7*) responsible for an area that included Bien Hoa, Long Thanh and Phuoc Tuy Provinces. The Regiment's primary mission was to reclaim population to the enemy side from those areas lost to 'Government control' in 1968. 6RAR/NZ and 5 RAR were to have serious engagement with *33 NVA* in June 1969 and 4RAR/NZ in October 1971.

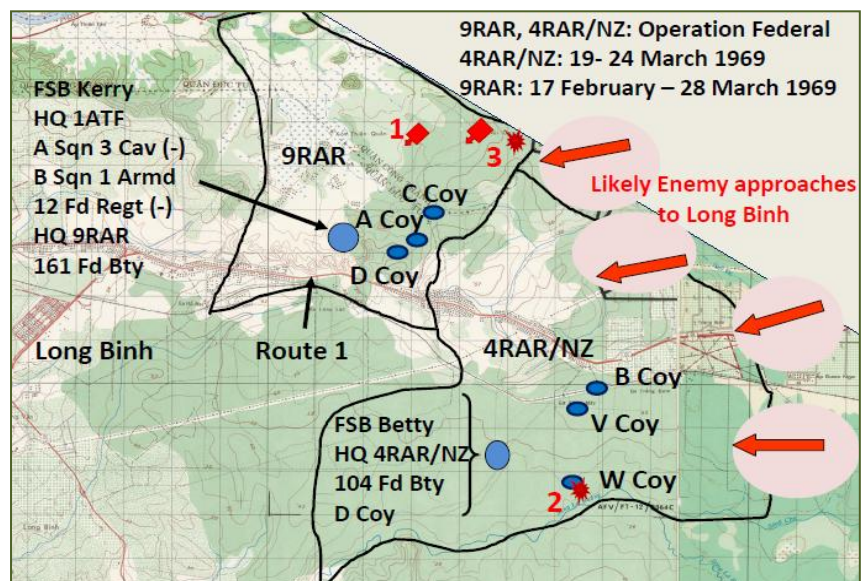
9RAR and 4RAR/NZ Operation Federal

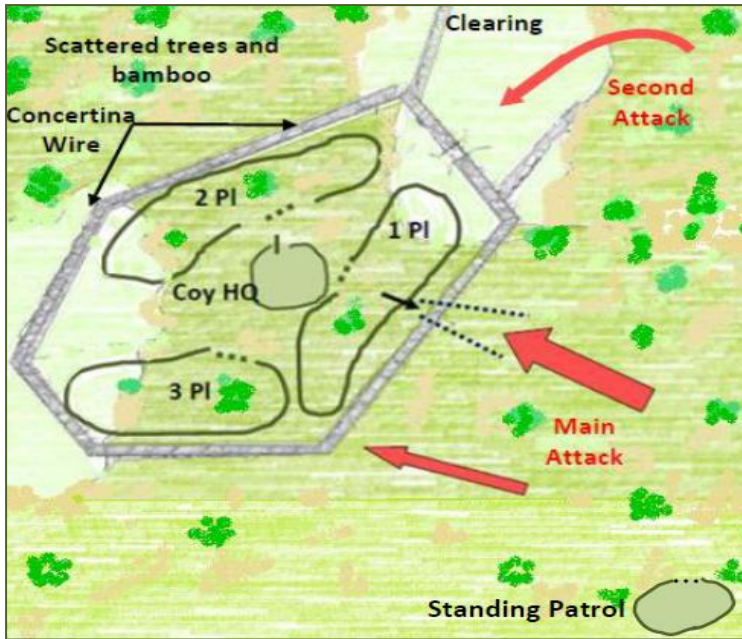
9RAR deployed direct from *Operation Goodwood* to the new AO in the north and established a line of Company defensive positions north of Route 1 except for B Company which remained at Nui Dat as part of the Task Force Ready Reaction Force to counter probable enemy action during TET.

4RAR/NZ deployed by road and air the following day and established company defensive positions south of Route 1. C Company remained at the Horseshoe Defensive position near Dat Do.

Nothing much occurred until the early hours of 23 February when heavy rocket attacks commenced against Long Binh. By this time D Company 9RAR had moved to the north of the AO and at about 2.30 am, 10 Platoon (*Lt PJ McAuley*) while searching for rocket sites, observed rocket firing and engaged the site (1) with mortar and artillery at which time the rocket firing ceased. The following morning the Platoon searched the site and found seven enemy dead and nine 107mm rockets.

Nothing much occurred until the early hours of 23 February when heavy rocket attacks commenced against Long Binh. By this time D Company 9RAR had moved to the north of the AO and at about 2.30 am, 10 Platoon (*Lt PJ McAuley*) while searching for rocket sites, observed rocket firing and engaged the site (1) with mortar and artillery at which time the rocket firing ceased. The following morning the Platoon searched the site and found seven enemy dead and nine 107mm rockets.





At about 8pm on the 23 February, W Company (*Maj LG Williams*), which had established a defensive position with Over Head Protection and wire defences, was attacked by a company size enemy force (2).

The battle started when the Machine Gunner in 1 Platoon (*Pte GD Dalziel*) detected enemy movement and engaged them and continued to do so despite seven RPG rounds landing in the Section area. A number of men were wounded in the Section and the Section Commander (*Cpl RTeR Kingi*) during a lull in the firing went forward to the wire and replaced the Claymore Mines. Later the enemy attempted to attack the company's flanks unaware of course that W Company had depth and mutual support between

platoons and a comprehensive defensive fire plan which together saw the enemy off.

A 2 Platoon Standing Patrol forward of the company position (*Sgt TN Flutey*) was unable to withdraw because of the defensive artillery and mortar fire and remained among the enemy moving around it. One enemy soldier ran into the Patrol's position thinking he was among friends, the MG Group shot him. He was later identified as the Commanding Officer of the *NVA D525 Engineer Reconnaissance Battalion* which was subordinate to the senior enemy headquarters in the southern theatre of operations, ie the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) located at the time at the southern end of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia (see map on page 17). The following morning seven enemy dead were found in the cone of fire of *Pte Dalziel's* GPMG M60 and evidence that artillery and mortar fire had most likely killed another twenty.

On 24 February, C Company 9RAR (*Maj LJ Lewis*) patrolling in the north of the AO contacted enemy in bunkers and after driving the enemy off discovered 82 mm mortars rounds and 107 mm rockets with plotting boards and firing tables (3). Several more contacts occurred over the next few days which clearly disrupted the enemy's plans to attack Long Binh with indirect fire weapons.

Both Battalions remained in the area with only a few minor contacts until 9RAR was relieved by 5RAR and returned to Nui Dat on 10 March for a well deserved rest. However, it returned to the operation on 24 March to relieve 4RAR/NZ. The mission of denying enemy movement towards Long Binh thus reducing his ability to fire rockets at the base had been achieved and it left 5RAR little to do until it redeployed on Operation Overlander on 27 March to an AO further south.

Maj LJ Lewis issuing orders during Op Federal



The following awards were made for Operation Federal:

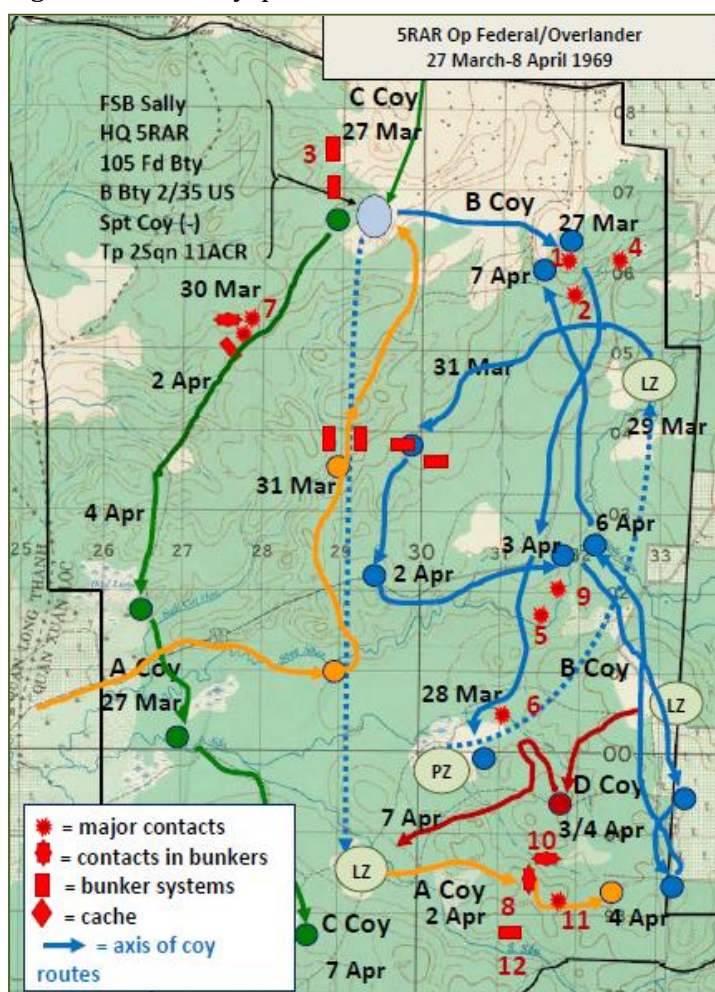
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Pte GD Dalziel (RNZIR) Machine Gunner 1 PI W Coy, Sgt TN Flutey (RNZIR), PI Sgt 2 PI W Coy, Cpl RTeR Kingi (RNZIR), Sect Comd 1 PI W Coy – all for the 23 February contact.**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Maj LJ Lewis, OC C Coy 9RAR (see 24 -28 February).**

5RAR Operation Federal/ Overlander: 27 March – 8 April 1969

On 27 March, 5RAR redeployed from north of Route 1 south east to AO Manuka to deny the enemy the use of extensive bunker systems known to be in the area and to disrupt the functioning of HQ Military Region 7 (MR-7) which controlled VC operations in the provinces of Long Binh, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy and Bin Tuy.

The operation commenced with C Company (Maj DD Graham) securing FSB Sally, B Company (Maj RE Haring) flying in and moving to the east of the AO and A Company (Maj RF Sutton) deploying by road into the south west of the AO. On the way two US Army trucks struck a landmine wounding ten A Company soldiers that required evacuation. D Company (Maj MP Blake) remained at FSB Kerry under the operational control of HQ 1ATF.

Sign of the enemy presence was immediate with both B and C Companies locating camps. At mid



afternoon 6 Platoon (2Lt RA Hutchison) was the right flank platoon as the company prepared to harbour in thick jungle with steady rain reducing visibility to about 5 metres. The lead section contacted an enemy squad (1) in a transit camp which it hastily withdrew from and a few hours later, bumped into 5 Platoon (2Lt BJ Ryan) which was occupying a night ambush position (2); one VC was killed and several wounded. Earlier that day 9 Platoon (2Lt RA Lambert) discovered a large unoccupied bunker system either side of a stream (3) with assorted ammunition supplies and personal items.

On 28 March, the Battalion responded to information on a large enemy base in the south of the AO. B Company moved by APCs provided by 11 ACR and then by foot to the search area while A Company searched from the west. Before B Company moved, 4 Platoon (Lt GJ Dunlop) was redeploying from a night ambush when a sentry saw and engaged a number of enemy (4) hitting at least one who was retrieved by another and whisked away. Later in the day 5 Platoon contacted a single VC who was killed (5).

On 29 March, as B Company was moving to a PZ to be flown back to its original AO, 4

Platoon discovered a well used track and propped to observe it where it crossed a creek (6). About 10 minutes later a group of enemy dressed in camouflaged suits casually wandered down the track however, a machine gunner opened fire prematurely allowing the enemy to escape but with several casualties.

On 30 March, C Company in the northwest of the AO had a series of contacts (7) commencing when the forward scout of 9 Platoon (Pte RW Smith) spotted five enemy grouped around a bunker. The Platoon deployed and engaged the enemy, now about 12 in strength, who reacted by withdrawing by fire and movement between bunkers and taking at least three dead with them. A short time later 4 Section (Cpl E Evans) was moving to guide 7 Platoon into the Company position, when the Forward Scout spotted an enemy and shot him; the enemy responded by firing 6 RPGs before withdrawing. Two hours later 7 Platoon (2Lt DJ Mead), was clearing around the Company night position when the Forward Scout of the

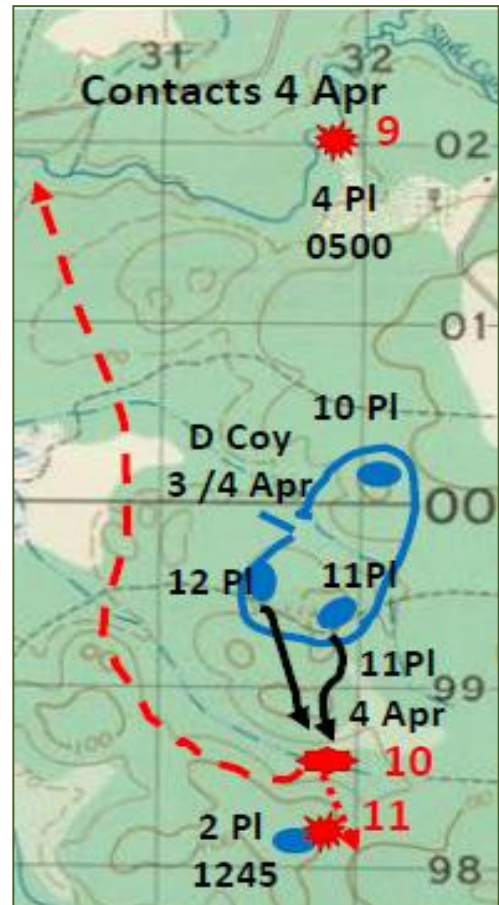
lead Section engaged a VC in a bunker who responded with accurate AK 47 fire seriously wounding the Section Commander (*Cpl JD Loader*); the wounded man was retrieved and the rear Section moved to clear the bunkers with the Section Commander (*Cpl WB Maltby*) moving forward to disarm an enemy Claymore Mine and to grenade the bunker; the enemy responded with LMG fire and as it was now about 6pm and fading light the Platoon sensibly withdrew back into the Company position.

There was growing evidence, including from Signals Intelligence that the enemy headquarters which 5RAR was searching for (*HQ MR-7*) was most probably in the southeast of the AO and on 2 April, A Company was redeployed there by air from FSB Sally and was joined by D Company the following day.

Early next day, 1 Platoon (*Lt EJ Lee*) was the lead platoon in the search for *HQ MR-7* when the point section located an animal trap which was usually set about 50 metres in front of the sentry post for a bunker system (8). This was confirmed when three recently occupied bunkers were found and the lead section engaged a single VC in one of them who returned the favour with a burst from an AK 47. After adjusting artillery in depth and bringing forward two MGs for covering fire, the Platoon began a sweep finding more bunkers and equipment that had been left in a hurry. As on many occasions when firing in thick jungle, the covering MG fire had been several feet too high allowing the enemy to escape relatively unscathed. As it turned out, the bunker system was very similar in layout to that described earlier in *Operation Goodwood* (see page 71) and had been a base camp occupied by elements of *HQ MR-7*.

At 5am on 4 April (Good Friday), 4 Platoon (*Lt GJ Dunlop*) in a night ambush position observed some 30 enemy moving quickly with about 5 metres between men (9). The Platoon engaged the enemy with a bank of (4) Claymore Mines. (See also End Notes paragraph 10) and when they went into a counter ambush drill, were suppressed by a GPMG M60. There were at least ten casualties including four killed one who was an Officer; both he and one other were probably Chinese. The enemy had also been carrying a VHF Radio of the AN-PRC 25 type because the sentry could hear the squelch going on and off. (See also End Notes paragraph 11)

Also on 4 April, D Company which had harboured near a bunker system sent 11 Platoon (*Sgt AE Jackson*) to patrol to an enemy track running alongside a creek (10). At about 8 am the Platoon located the track, deployed around it and sent a Section forward to the creek; in doing so the Forward Scout (*Pte GA Pike*) saw a bunker and heard voices and after being joined by the Section Commander (*Cpl GN Dunne*) threw a grenade. The Section also fired at two more enemy and was then itself engaged by heavy MG and automatic weapon fire fatally wounding *Pte Pike* and wounding several others including the Section Commander. The Section Machine Gunner (*Pte JDC Burrige*) moved forward and despite his wounds maintained accurate fire to prevent the enemy from moving into bunkers on the Platoon's flanks. By this time the Platoon's other sections had closed up and were laying heavy fire on the enemy position however, they also were subject to RPG and small arms fire with further casualties. A US Army Light Fire Team was called to assist in the extraction of 11 Platoon as did 12 Platoon (*WO2 JW Sizeland*) which also came under heavy fire. During this time efforts were made to extract the casualties including by the Platoon's Stretcher Bearer (*Pte FT Fitch*). Some four hours later both Platoons were able to break contact and return to the Company base which then withdrew to allow airstrikes and medium artillery to pound the enemy position. Two men had been killed (*Pte GA Pike and Pte JMT White*) and eleven wounded in the action with what was subsequently established as the protective elements (about 100 men) of *HQ MR-7* which stood and fought to allow the bulk of the



Headquarters to escape. A short time later however, 2 Platoon (*2Lt RA Brett*) which had ambushed a track junction correctly judged as coming from the 11 Platoon contact, engaged an enemy squad killing at least half of them **(11)**.

The following day D Company, reinforced with a Platoon from B Company and a Troop of Tanks, assaulted the bunker system while other companies went into blocking positions. The enemy of course had long gone and indeed was on the way to War Zone D. The bunker system had some 40 bunkers including Command Posts, Medical facilities many with false bottoms for storing ammunition, explosives and medical supplies. It had been occupied for some time and as with all the other systems found by 5RAR during the operation it was seeded with CS Crystals making it uninhabitable for a long time.

Operation Overland continued for another few days with the companies locating further bunkers and caches including one by A Company on the 7 April **(12)** which had been used as a hospital with a large quantity of medical and food supplies, clothing and documents recovered.

The operation had been important in forcing a major enemy headquarters to leave its primary area of command. The fact that *HQ MR-7* was now unable to give the necessary direction to such formations as *274 and 33 Regiments* was severely exploited by 6RAR/NZ Battalion a few months later on *Operation Lavarack*.

The following individual awards were made for Operation Federal/Overland and in some cases were combined with other operations:

- **Medal of Gallantry: Pte JDC Burrige 5 Section MG, 11 PI (see 4 April).**
- **Military Medal: Pte FT Fitch, Stretcher Bearer 11 PI (see 4 April).**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Maj MP Blake OC D Coy (see 4 April), 2Lt BJ Ryan OC 5 Platoon**



Left: Pte JDC Burrige returning from patrol during Op Federal and below: D Coy 5RAR boarding APCs near FSB Kerry.

Photos by courtesy of Blue Burrige

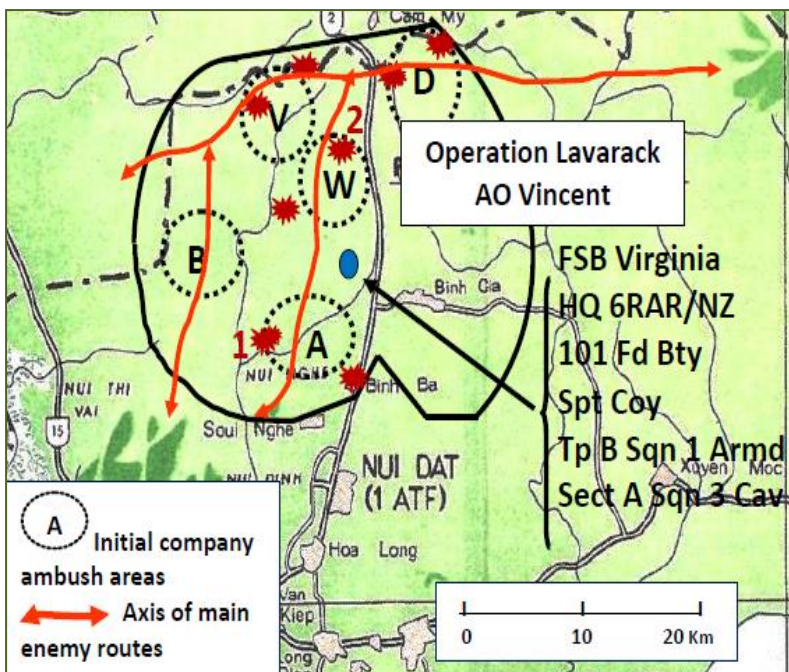


6RAR Resumes Hostilities as an ANZAC Battalion

Following its first tour, 6RAR had left its traditional home at Enoggera Barracks to be the first battalion to occupy the new and incomplete Lavarack Barracks in Townsville. The Battalion created company training areas and built battle inoculation ranges in the High Range Training Area west of Townsville and established Mt Spec to the northwest as a battalion exercise area. In May 1969, the Battalion (*Lt Col DM Butler, CO and WO1 JA Cruickshank, RSM*) arrived in Vietnam on HMAS Sydney to relieve 4RAR/NZ. V Company RNZIR (*Maj LJ Lynch*) replaced C Company and W Company (*Maj LG Williams*) became the fifth rifle company, transferring from 4RAR/NZ. Two NZ Mortar and Assault Pioneer Sections also joined the Battalion.

After the mandatory in country orientation training, the Battalion was committed to an operation the Task Force Commander (*Brig CMI Pearson*) referred to at the time as a 'work-up operation'. It wasn't to turn out quite like that!

Operation Lavarack: 31 May – 30 June 1969



By mid May 1969 the Task Force had returned to Phuoc Tuy Province from operations in the north west around Long Binh; 5RAR was about to commence operations in the Nui Dinh and Nui Thi Vai and 9RAR was committed to Pacification Operations in the south (see *Operation Reynella*). This left the central and north of the Province for 6RAR/NZ to conduct its first operation. Planning for *Operation Lavarack* was based around intelligence provided by a captured enemy map which showed the main enemy lines of communication through the Province (see map).

Accordingly, the five rifle companies were initially tasked to ambush in specific areas astride those routes. The aim was to establish enemy

movement patterns, especially by supply groups which could lead to the location of main force (NVA) units, ie rather than the usual practice of advancing to contact (or to use the term in vogue at the time 'Reconnaissance In Force'), the strategy was to remain static with the enemy coming to us.

A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) was deployed in the south, B Company (*Maj TH Holland*) in the west, V Company in the north west, D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) in the northeast and W Company in the centre north of FSB Virginia. This tactic had immediate success with contacts by all companies on the first few days providing evidence of 274 VC Regt's future intentions and importantly the presence of 33 NVA Regt in the AO which had not been predicted.

The first major contact was by A Company on 4 June with an enemy local force company in a camp (1). The company had harboured for the night and 2 Platoon (*Lt WA Wallace*) was in the process of establishing an ambush some 200 metres from the Company when it detected a small enemy group. 1 Platoon (*2Lt JT Mellington*) was ordered to assault the suspected position and as it started to do so came under heavy fire from the left flank, including from WP grenades and rifle grenades. As light was fading the platoons were ordered to withdraw back to the company position which, using section fire and

movement they did successfully. Six enemy were killed and one Australian wounded, the 1 Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt N Lindsay*).

The following day, 3 Platoon W Company (*Lt MJ Knight-Willis*) was on a reconnaissance patrol searching for a suspected enemy camp when the lead section (*Cpl JR Gatenby*) heard voices and found a track which it proceeded to ambush. As the section was deploying, two enemy scouts appeared who were killed and as the Platoon closed up it received heavy small arms fire from its front and right flank (2). The MFC with the Platoon (*Cpl ER Blackedge*) called down artillery and mortar fire and a RAAF LFT was then called which engaged the enemy position to within 50 metres of the Platoon. One helicopter was hit by enemy HMG fire which forced it to crash land some 1500 metres north of FSB Virginia but was immediately secured by a patrol from 1Platoon W Coy (*Lt JA Moller*). As the area was now quiet 3 Platoon prepared to advance but was engaged by MGs which had not fired in the initial contact and were now firing from bunkers; one fired at the voice of *Cpl Gatenby* killing him. The enemy was now probing the Platoon's flanks to launch a counter attack, but was beaten back by mortar, artillery and LFT fire.

In the meantime 2 Platoon W Company (*Lt RG Milne*) was sent to assist 3 Platoon and an attempt was made to have a troop of tanks (*2Lt CJ Sweeney*) and the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt K Leadbetter*) mounted in APCs to relieve the encircled 3 Platoon however, deep gorges prevented this. After some four hours of fighting, 3 Platoon's rear was secured by 2 Platoon and both withdrew to allow artillery and close air support to pound the enemy position.

Simultaneously, well to the west, 6 Platoon (*2Lt BP Gillespie*) was involved in a short sharp contact with one Australian being killed (*Pte B James*).

Late on 5 June, the D Company Headquarters Support Section (*Cpl GJ Black*) ambushed a 20 plus group of enemy killing six and capturing two -see map on page 80, contact (2). Captured documents and interrogation of the PWs revealed that a battalion of 274 VC Regt was moving to 84 Rear Services Group to receive a large resupply of ammunition and weapons and it was presumed for a forthcoming operation.

6 June would be a big day for 1ATF, starting just after midnight when HQ 9RAR was mortared at FSB Thrust (see *Operation Reynella*) and later in the day when Nui Dat was subjected to a rocket and mortar attack.



The major action of the day however commenced at about 7am, when a Centurion tank in company with an Armoured Recovery Vehicle, was travelling north on Route 2 inbound for FSB Virginia when it was hit at close range by an RPG 7 fired from the south east corner of Binh Ba Village; the round penetrated the turret seriously wounding one of the crew- see [Battle of Binh Ba page 82](#).

Following the action at Binh Ba on 6 June, 6RAR/NZ had a series of successful contacts over the next 4 days, especially by A Company with 8 contacts due west of FSB Virginia (see [map opposite](#)); a number of those contacts identified elements of 33 NVA. The thinking at the time by Intelligence Staff was that after Binh Ba, the enemy involved in that action from 1/33 NVA withdrew mainly to the east of Route 2 while the Regimental HQ (HQ 33NVA) and the Heavy Weapons Company withdrew north coming into contact with A Company before reaching a base camp which had most

likely been used earlier on the way south to Binh Ba

On 11 June B Company was to have a fierce exchange with the enemy in that base camp. At about 4pm on 11 June, 6 Platoon (2Lt BP Gillespie) as the point platoon discovered a sentry position which was not occupied; after sweeping through the position the platoon saw another, this time occupied and in front of what appeared to be a small camp. The Platoon was ordered to assault the camp and soon came under heavy fire as heavy rain started. 5 Platoon (Lt AS D'Hage) was moved to the left flank of 6 Platoon and both Platoons received heavy fire on their flanks and from about ten snipers in trees, causing several casualties. Despite the heavy enemy fire, Lt D'Hage continued to manoeuvre his platoon to allow 6 Platoon to withdraw and the casualties evacuated.

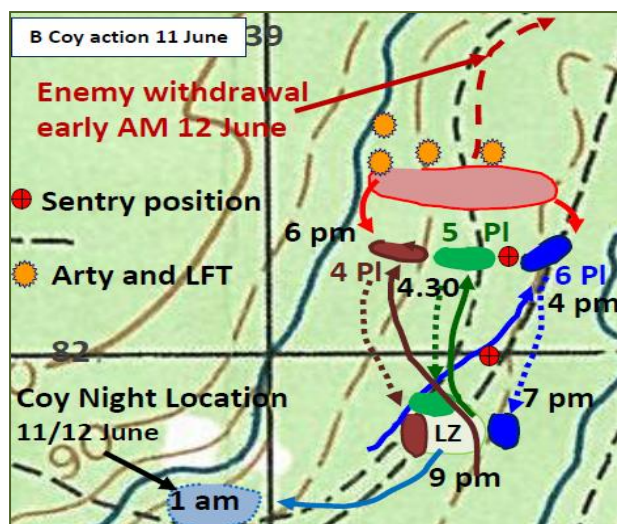
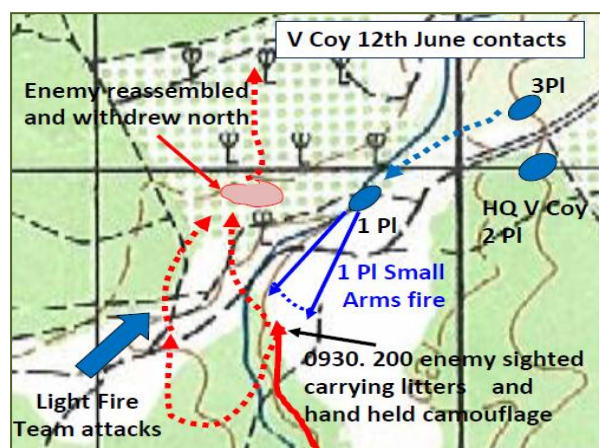
A heavy volume of very accurate artillery was controlled by the company Forward Observer (Capt BFE Wilson, 101 Fd Bty) and directed at the left flank and rear of the enemy position; much of the artillery fire was 'danger close' to counter the enemy's tactic of closing with the attacking forces to avoid casualties from artillery. Given the height of the tree canopy in the contact area this was a very skilful exercise by the Gunners.

The Company Commander (Maj TH Holland) then moved to the forward Platoons and 4 Platoon (Lt SA Sainsbury) deployed to the left flank of 5 Platoon and prepared to assault the enemy position.

At about 6pm, because of failing light the Company was ordered to break contact and in doing so suffered more casualties from snipers including the Company Commander. The Company 2IC (Capt DR Byers) assumed command and by about 7pm with support from artillery, a Light Fire Team and a Spooky Gunship, had consolidated the Company around a LZ for the evacuation of seven wounded; this was completed using Strobe Lights by about 8.45 pm and at 9 pm the Company moved to a new night location which took until after midnight to complete.

The following day the Company (Capt MJ Harris) searched the enemy camp and recovered weapons lost during the contact and about half of 6 Platoon's packs which had been dropped in the initial contact. Some 200 hundred enemy from 33 NVA had been involved including HQ 33NVA the Heavy Weapons Company and possibly elements of the Regiment's 2nd Battalion. There was evidence of heavy casualties and although the battle was relatively successful, it was another example of where reconnaissance to establish the enemy's flanks is essential before attempting to assault an enemy defended position and particularly given the time of day when the action commenced.

By 12 June V Company (Maj LJ Lynch) had concentrated astride a well known enemy route and at 9.30, a sentry from 1 Platoon (Lt MR Farland) observed about 200 enemy emerging from the bush into the open carrying some 50 wounded on litters. This tactical indiscretion by the enemy was no doubt due to



an imperative to escape from the constant artillery fire that occurred when ever they made contact.

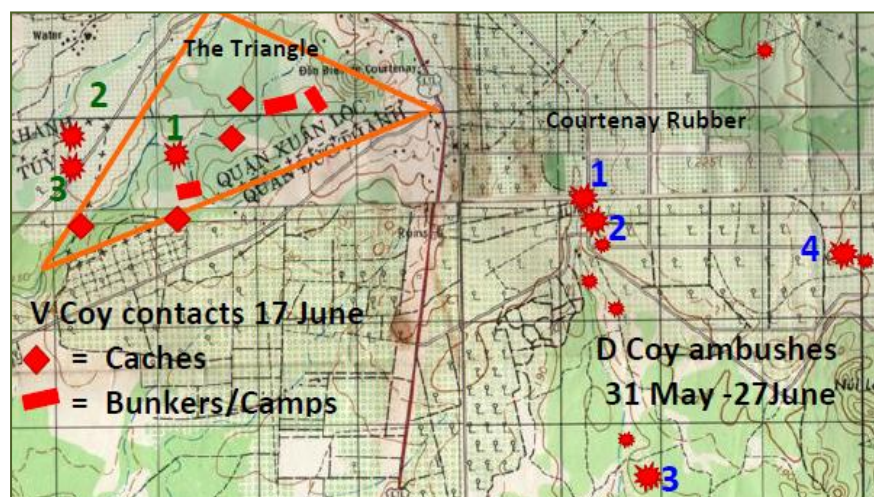
The Platoon was told to observe and report while Light Fire Teams were bought on station. Unfortunately a short while later the Battalion's Direct Support 'Possum Helicopter' appeared on the scene causing the enemy to scatter, some going forward on the axis of their advance and some to the rear. 1 Platoon engaged the enemy with all available weapons including GPMG M60, M79 Grenades and M72 Anti Tank rockets; the range to the enemy and areas of dead ground meant however, that little damage was inflicted on the enemy.

Three Light Fire Teams, two RAAF and one US Army targeted the fleeing enemy causing a considerable amount of mayhem as did accurate fire from 101 Field Battery. The enemy reassembled just to the west of the 1 Platoon position, fired a few rounds at the platoon and then withdrew northwards to relative safety. 3 Platoon (*Lt HK Pope*) joined 1 Platoon and together they cleared the contact area discovering signs of many casualties to the enemy including a number of dead.

A sequel to this action was contained in a Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Intelligence Summary issued some weeks later wherein Signals Intelligence reported that the NVA Commanding Officer had been severely disciplined for the error in moving his force in the open in daylight. Who knows what his penalty was!

By now it was clear that there was a focal point for enemy movement for the storage and distribution of supplies near the Provincial boundary and adjacent to Route 2 (referred to as the 'Triangle') and on 16 June, A and V Companies were tasked to search the area.

On 17 June, V Company having discovered a number of large food caches located a large enemy camp with bunkers and caches and what appeared to be a transit camp. A 1 Platoon sentry (*Pte BH Gibberd*) spotted and killed a sentry and the Platoon was then engaged by heavy small arms and RPGs from the opposite bank (1). 3 Platoon moved up in support and it too was subjected to heavy fire with one NZ being killed (*Pte JS Williams*). A Light Fire Team was called to engage the enemy bunkers while artillery was used in depth on likely withdrawal routes. Contact was broken at last light.



Meanwhile 2 Platoon (*2Lt BE Hall*) was occupying an ambush position to the west and at the same time as the 1 Platoon contact, spotted four VC who were killed (2). The ambush position was relocated and at about 8pm it was sprung using a bank of claymores (3). The enemy reacted vigorously to probe the Platoon's flanks and with artillery illumination it became clear the enemy was large and well organised. The Platoon Commander skillfully directed platoon weapons and

artillery to keep the enemy at bay. A 'Spooky Gunship' was also called for support and the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt SV Smith*) placed a Strobe Light outside the perimeter to guide it however, the weather turned nasty and the aircraft left. 'Danger Close' Artillery Defensive Fire targets were adjusted and about midnight the enemy withdrew. Among the enemy dead found next morning was evidence that the enemy were from *1st Battalion 274 Regiment* which was about to get another hammering, this time from D Company.

From the start of the operation D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) had been vigorously ambushing the enemy's main east-west routes through the Courtenay Rubber Plantation, a strategic area for the enemy in which the Regiment had regularly conducted operations, commencing with 1RAR in 1966 and finally, with 4RAR/NZ in 1971. D Company had many successful ambushes and one on 5 June (2) was discussed earlier. Prior to that on 3 June an 11 Platoon (*2Lt MJ Edwards*) night ambush commanded by *Cpl RC Hogan* contacted four VC (1) killing three and capturing one; the enemy were from Main Force logistic units. The relentless attacks by D Company caused the enemy to bypass traditional routes and the company responded by ambushing in depth; such as by 12 Platoon (*2Lt AG Valentine*) on 11 June (3) when an 8 Section (*Cpl RB Bunting*) ambush contacted four enemy killing three and capturing one; the enemy were from *74 NVA Artillery (Rocket) Regiment* which was no doubt withdrawing after the rocket attacks on Nui Dat on 6 and 7 June.

The enemy operation by 274 VC Regiment identified from the D Company contact on 5 June turned out to be an attack on a RTAVF Base near Bearcat on 16 June. As a consequence 10 Platoon (2Lt RM Chandler) was tasked to ambush one of the likely west-east routes to the enemy's main logistic base in the Núi Mây Tào where the main 84 Rear Services Group medical facility (K76A Hospital) was located.

On 17 June, 10 Platoon established a well sited ambush position in thick bamboo covering a track running alongside a rubber plantation and prepared itself for a long wait (4). Three nights and three days later and on the early morning of the fourth day, 20 June, some 60 enemy consisting of a portage party, a party carrying litters and a protection party were detected by the flank section commander (Cpl RD Brown). The Platoon Commander waited until the main group entered and then initiated the ambush killing over twenty and wounding many more. The enemy group was later confirmed as elements of 1st Battalion 274 VC Regiment and that they were travelling to the K76A Hospital which was later found by 6RAR/NZ in December 1969 – see Operation Marsden.

Operation Lavarack concluded on 30 June and was considered an outstanding success. Several hundred enemy had been killed or wounded, mostly from Main Force units and several captured. Major elements of both 33 NVA and 274 VC Regiments had deployed into AO Vincent early in the operation and after the battering they received, including at Binh Ba, were forced out of the Province; a testament to the battle skills and tenacity of the 6RAR/NZ Rifle Companies. The Battalion had suffered three men killed (1 Australian and 2 New Zealand) and thirty wounded.

Why a battalion of 33 NVA was operating so close to Nui Dat is a matter for speculation. The more plausible reason being to cause 6RAR/NZ operations and importantly its lethal artillery support, to be moved further south to allow other elements of 33 NVA Regiment to deploy undetected to base areas in the northeast of the Province (see also 4RAR/NZ Operation Ivanhoe); this would then have provided a springboard to disrupt 1 ATF 'pacification operations' which had just commenced in the strategic politico/economic part of the Province.

The following awards were made for Operation Lavarack and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross:** 2Lt RM Chandler, OC 10 PI (see 20 June); Lt AS D'Hage, OC 5 PI (see 11 June); 2Lt BE Hall, RNZIR, OC 2 PI V Coy (see 17 June).; Lt MJ Knight-Willis, RNZIR, OC 3 PI W Coy (see 5 June).
- **Military Medal:** Cpl RD Brown, Sect Comd 10 PI (see 20 June)
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Maj PL Belt, OC A Coy; Cpl DM Douglas, RNZIR, Sect Comd 1 PI W Coy; 2Lt JT Mellington, OC 1 PI (see 4 June); Maj IT Stewart, OC D Coy; Capt BFE Wilson, RAA, FO B Coy (see 11 June).



Left: Cpl RD Brown with a prisoner captured by D Company in the contact on 5 June.
Right: Cpl KR Fox, Pte P Zisis and (rear) Pte GR Massie, on an A Coy patrol.



Action at Binh Ba 6/7 June 1969

Early on 6 June, HQ 1ATF was informed by the Duc Thanh District Chief of an enemy presence in the village of Bing Ba. He had reacted two Regional Force platoons and after coming under heavy fire from Binh Ba had deployed as a blocking force north of the village. 6RAR/NZ was directed to deal with the matter however, because two companies were in contact and the other three had contacts imminent, Commander 1 ATF was requested to deploy the Task Force Ready Reaction Force (RRF).

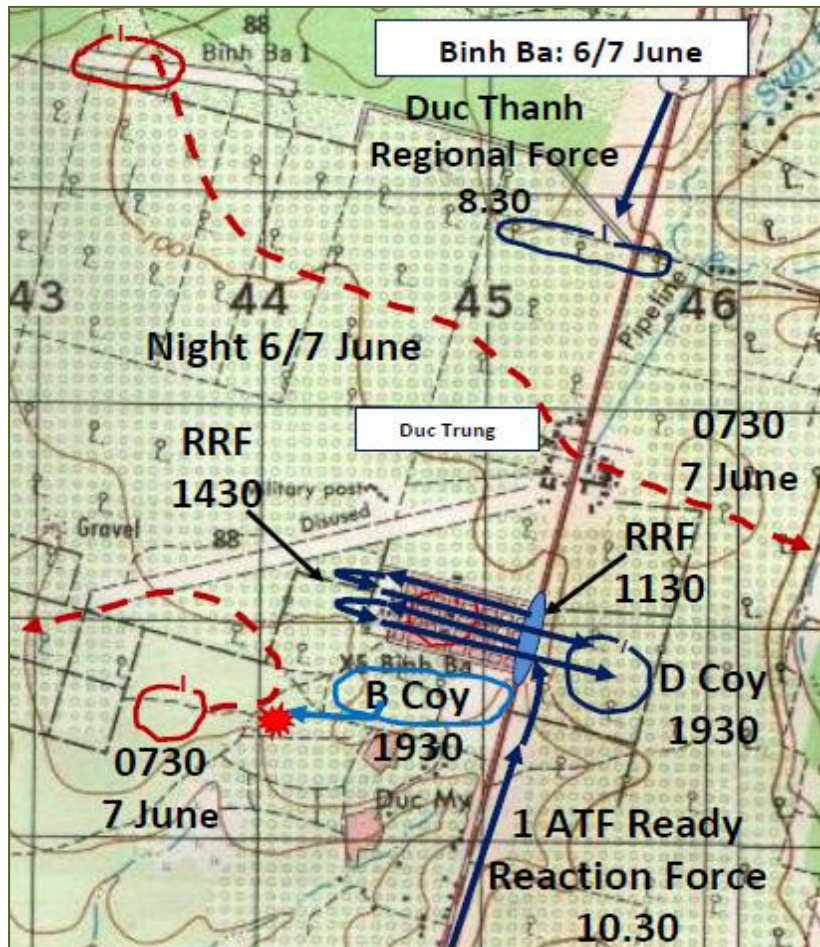
The force, comprising D Company 5RAR (*Maj MP Blake*), 1 Troop B Squadron 1 Armoured Regiment (*2Lt BJ Sullivan*) and 3 Troop B Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment (*Capt R De Vere* who commanded the armoured group) began to deploy at about at 10 am and was placed under operational control of CO 6RAR/NZ (*Lt Col DM Butler*) who relocated from FSB Virginia to the Duc Thanh Post.

The District Chief was requested to evacuate the villagers before the Ready Reaction Force would be

released to clear the enemy from the village. This occurred by about 11 am and some 30 minutes later the force led by the troop of tanks advanced from the east into the village meeting stiff opposition from what turned out to be a reinforced company from 33 NVA's 1st Battalion (1/33NVA).

Though 5RAR had completed some Infantry Tank Cooperation training, this was the first time it had been attempted in actual combat; furthermore, D Company was in an unfamiliar tactical situation, ie Urban (Close Quarter) Warfare. Like A Company 3RAR before it during TET 1968, D Company, which at best was at half strength, was quick to adapt and fought a skilful and disciplined action with the Tank Troop.

During the house to house fighting the enemy used RPGs, HMGs and small arms with the tanks taking many hits causing moderate damage to two and wounding a number of crew including the Troop Commander.



At one stage a tank came under heavy RPG fire which was neutralised by an APC (*Cpl PF Strudwick*) that had moved to a flank. This allowed the tank to move forward to destroy an enemy MG which had pinned down a platoon.

By about 2.30pm the force had cleared to the west of and then reversed to clear back to the east over Route 2. The platoons were subjected to heavy fire and 10 Platoon's (*Sgt BK London*) advance was held up on several occasions by RPG and MG fire with the Platoon Commander leading the assault with rifle and grenades into the houses.

Earlier, at about 1pm, it became apparent there were further enemy forces in the area (most likely the other companies of 1/33NVA) and command of the RRF was passed to 5RAR with CO 5RAR (*Lt Col CN Khan*) moving to the Duc Thanh Post.

B Company 5RAR (*Maj RE Harring*) was deployed in APCs from Nui Dat to reinforce D Company and 4 Troop B Squadron (*2Lt CJ Sweeney*) moved from FSB Virginia to support the operation. A part of the Operation Lavarack AO (Vincent) was then passed to 5RAR (around the village) and the new operation called Hammer. Thus in effect the clearing of the village of enemy involved two separate operations, ie Lavarack (6RAR/NZ) until 1 pm and then Hammer from that time on.

The 5RAR companies remained in blocking positions overnight and early on 7 June a company size group of enemy was seen approaching the village from the south west. The closest platoon was 4 Platoon (*Lt GJ Dunlop*) which moved with tanks to engage the enemy forcing them to withdraw. Simultaneously D Company engaged an enemy group moving on the eastern side of Route 2. The remainder of the day was spent clearing the village and the hamlet of Duc Trung (by B Company). By early on 8 June the unpleasant task of battle field clearance had been completed and the two 5RAR companies returned to Nui Dat with the knowledge of a job well done.

Enemy casualties were severe, well over a hundred, with many carried from the field of battle and at least 50 left behind. The Australians lost one killed from D Company (*Pte WE Teeling*) and ten wounded (two from 5RAR, six from the Tank troop and two from the APC Troop).

For the action at Binh Ba, The Regiment, 1st Armoured Regiment and 3rd Cavalry Regiment were awarded ***The Battle Honour of 'Binh Ba'***.



A D Coy 5RAR Rifle Section with a Centurion MBT clearing through Binh Ba

AWM PO 8528.001

The following individual awards were made for the action at Binh Ba on 6 June and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross: Capt R De Vere OC 3 Tp B Sqn 3 Cav; 2Lt BJ Sullivan OC 1 Tp B Sqn 1 Armd.**
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal: Sgt BK London, PI Comd 10 PI 5RAR.**
- **Military Medal: Cpl PF Strudwick, APC Comd, 3 Tp B Sqn 3 Cav.**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Maj MP Blake OC D Coy 5RAR**

Chapter IX: Minewarfare on Route 44

The flawed thinking behind the decision to lay a Barrier Minefield from the Horseshoe Defensive Position to the sea near Lang Phuoc Hai to prevent enemy access to the villages on Route 44 is well documented and is without doubt the single most costly mistake made in the war.

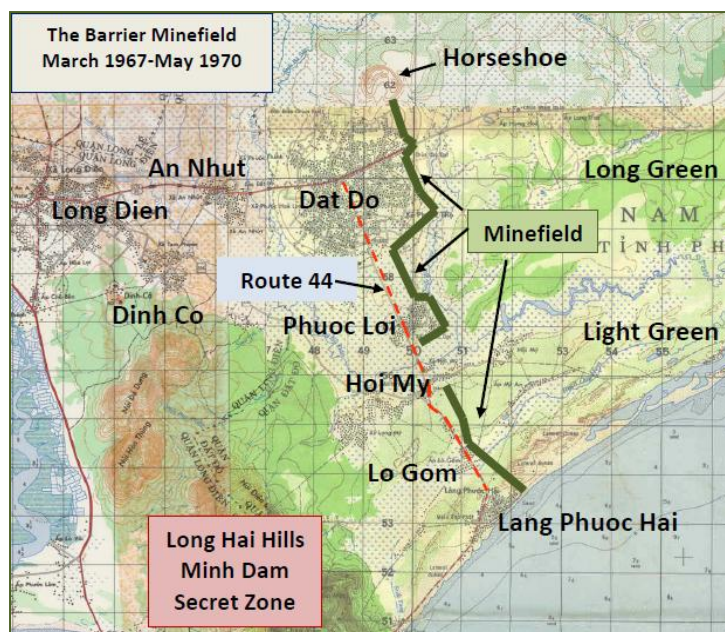
In March 1967, 5RAR secured and prepared the defences at the 'Horseshoe' and despite its profound opposition to the proposal, 1 Field Squadron (*Maj BG Florence*) then commenced laying some 23,000 M16 Anti-Personnel Mines with about half being fitted with anti-lift devices. As anyone with only a modicum of mine warfare training

knows, a mine is a weapon that does not differentiate between friend and foe; and, when laid in large numbers, eg a Barrier Minefield, should be covered by observation and direct fire.

There were two serious errors in the planning for the project: **Firstly**, the minefield was never going to deny access because the enemy was already on the inside of it (including in the Long Hais). The District of Dat Do (or Long Dat as it was called by the VC) was the population and food centre of Phuoc Tuy Province and the villages along Route 44 had a long history of being anti government, especially in Dat Do and Phuoc Loi. The District had its own Local VC Company (*C25*) and each Village had a VC Guerrilla Squad. The physical link between these enemy units and the civilian population was made by the *VC Infrastructure (VCI)* who lived in the villages and had been very active along Route 44 to the extent that it was considered by the enemy to be a "liberated area". Early in the war, the 1ATF Divisional Intelligence Unit's '*Acorn Operations*' were successful in keeping a lid on VCI operations however, by 1969 they had been discontinued and replaced by the less efficient and infamous US (CIA) sponsored '*Phoenix Programme*'. **Secondly**, the notion that the local ARVN/Regional Force would ensure the security and thus the integrity of the minefield was never going to happen. Soon after its completion the enemy, whose capabilities were grossly underestimated, developed techniques to lift the mines and the anti-lift devices (a M26 Grenade variant). This allowed a continuous process of lifting mines for storage and creating gaps in the minefield for the enemy to cross. Some of the mines were even stored in bunkers built in the middle of the minefield! (See End Notes, paragraph 12).

In mid 1969 HQ 1ATF (*Brig CMI Pearson*), under pressure from the Corps Commander (*Lt Gen JJ Ewell*) to progress the US change in direction of 'Pacification' leading to 'Vietnamisation' (sic), ordered three operations in succession to regain control of the population in Dat Do District. This was given emphasis by the apparent unfettered ability of *D445 VC Battalion* and local VC Companies to enter and occupy villages along Route 44. Thus the scene was set for one of the most difficult periods the Regiment was to encounter in Vietnam, ie 8 May to 15 August 1969 during *Operations Reynella* (9RAR), *Esso* (5RAR) and *Mundingburra* (6RAR/NZ). The operations were aimed essentially at securing the population in the Dat Do District against enemy interference. The response by the enemy was to attempt to retain control, including by the extensive use of mines in two distinct ways: (i) in a defensive mode to protect camps and supply dumps; and (ii), as an offensive weapon to counter our patrolling and ambushing, especially close to villages where 'civilians' provided information on our movements and on occasions most likely helped to lay the mines.

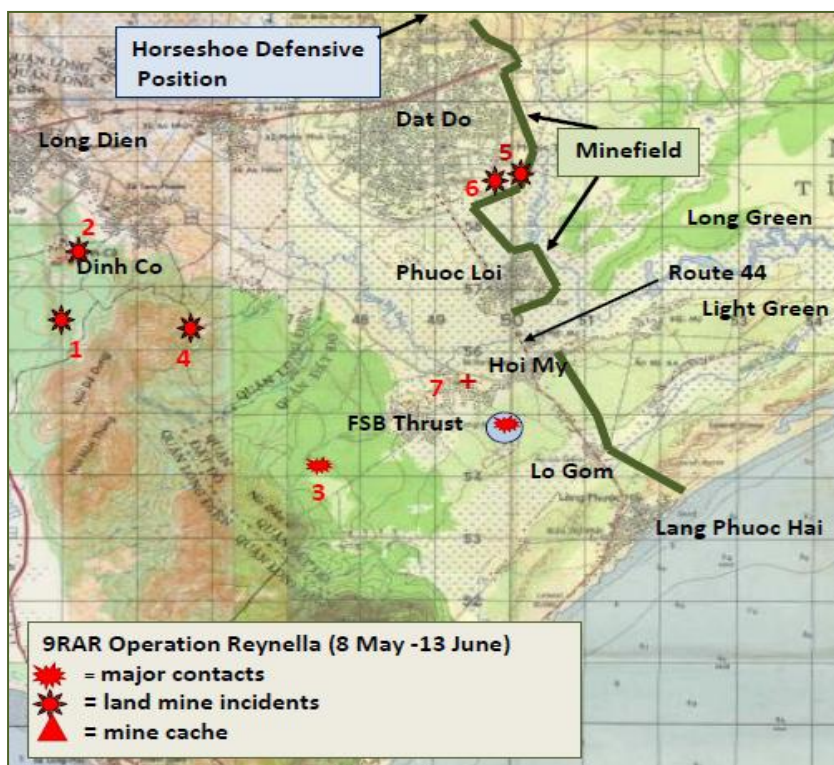
The following pages are a summary of the three operations from the 'Route 44' AO only, as 5RAR in particular conducted separate operations during the period, including near the Nui Thi Vai.



9RAR Operation Reynella: 8 May – 13 June 1969

9RAR less one company at the Horseshoe deployed into an AO south east of Dat Do between Route 44 and the Long Hai Hills with the three rifle companies in blocking/ambushing positions in a line between FSB Thrust and north of the Dinh Co Monastery. Almost immediately the enemy reacted by laying mines with B Company (*Maj EA Chitham*) having one laid outside its night defensive location but which didn't detonate when a soldier trod on it (1) and one which was laid under paving in the Dinh Co Monastery (2) which killed one soldier (*Pte RJ Yule*) and wounded another. On 15 May a company of D445 VC Battalion occupied Dat Do and 9RAR was redeployed to cordon the village together with W Company 4RAR/NZ. Despite several sweeps by ARVN units nothing eventuated and 9RAR returned to its tasks on 19 May, by which time enemy based in the Long Hais had drifted out and back for resupply! On the evening of 20 May 2 Platoon (2Lt AJ Daniels) ambushed 10 VC killing three and wounding several others (3).

As part of the pacification programme 1 Field Squadron was tasked to build a ring of bunkers (38 in total) around Dat Do for District forces to defend the village. On 24 May, D Company (*Maj IJC Hearn*)



was redeployed to protect the engineer works and to reinforce the Assault Pioneer Platoon (2Lt RA Lunny). On 25 May, 4 Platoon (2Lt MJ Bell) detonated an M16 mine (4) which was one of a cluster of three; two men were wounded one fatally (*Pte PF Reidy*). On 30 and 31 May there were two mine incidents near engineer works in the south east of Dat Do. The first (5), involved a D Company Section (*Cpl DK O'Reilly*) protecting an engineer work party; the section was moving on the tracks made by a bulldozer when a District HQ jeep drove between the tracks and detonated a mine wounding four men, two seriously including the Section Commander. On 31 May a Section of the Assault Pioneer Platoon was travelling in the back

of an engineer dump truck on a track that had been swept the day before, when it detonated two mines (6) from a cluster of four wounding seven soldiers. Although this was the last mine incident for 9RAR it wasn't the end of the pain because just after midnight on 6 June FSB Thrust was mortared with some thirty 82mm rounds from a base plate (located next day in ruins) a kilometre or so to the north west (7). One member of the Signals Platoon was killed (*Cpl DJ Brennan*) and seven other soldiers in the FSB were wounded.

FSB Thrust in July 1969 after a prefabricated observation tower had been constructed for the Gunners.

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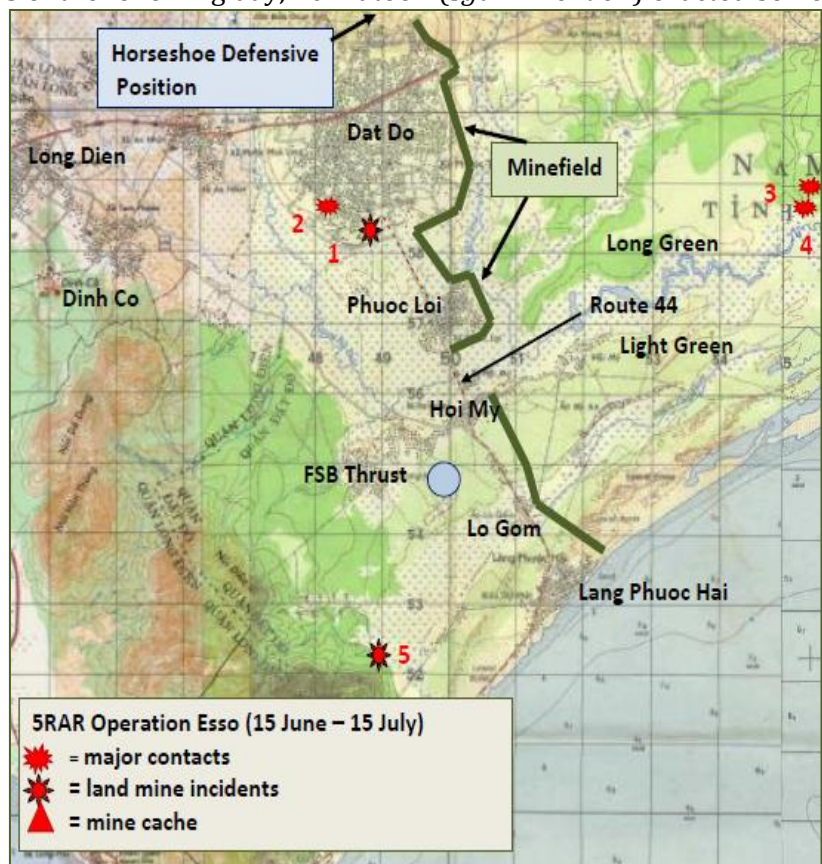
5RAR Operation Esso: 15 June – 15 July 1969

On 15 June 5RAR replaced 9RAR with initial company deployment as: A Company (*Maj RF Sutton*) north of Xuyen Moc to conduct rice denial operations; B Company (*Maj RE Haring*) to the Dinh Co area; C Company (*Maj CH Ducker*) west of Phuoc Loi to protect Land Clearing operations; and, D Company (*Maj MP Blake*) to Dat Do to protect engineer construction tasks. The latter company was the first to suffer from mines during its deployment into Dat Do on 15 June when 12 Platoon (*Sgt RL Lees*) detonated a mine **(1)** killing two soldiers (*Cpl JJ Kennedy* and *Pte PJ Jackson*) and wounding twenty five, one of whom died from his wounds that night (*Pte TC Turner*) with about half being so seriously injured they required repatriation back to Australia. In effect the platoon had been decimated by a single mine which sprayed shrapnel from some 2 metres high over a radius of 35 metres. It had most likely been laid by locals who were given information on D Company's deployment plans by an informant at District Headquarters. Operations for 5RAR had suddenly become very murky!

That night and again in the early hours of the following day, 10 Platoon (*Sgt BK London*) exacted some revenge when it had two contacts in an ambush near a hamlet in Dat Do **(2)**. The first was about 10pm when a ten man VC porter party was allowed into the ambush to set off a flare; four enemy were killed. About 5 hours later some six enemy returned to the ambush site and engaged the Platoon with small arms and grenades. One Australian was killed (*Pte AEL Waring*) and three wounded while two VC were also killed.

On 20 June, 4 Platoon (*Lt GJ Dunlop*) was redeployed to the Long Green and the following day it had three contacts with the enemy; two in the morning and one late afternoon **(3)** resulting in six enemy killed or wounded and three Australians wounded. Meanwhile 3 Platoon (*2Lt JR James*) had moved to an ARVN base two kilometres east of Dat Do to support operations by 2/52 ARVN Battalion. On 25 June the Platoon and a company from 2/52 had two contacts in an ambush **(4)** with ten enemy killed and wounded and one ARVN killed and eight wounded.

On 4 July 7 Platoon (*2Lt DJ Mead*) was moving into a night ambush position when it detonated an M16 mine **(5)** killing one man (*Pte LJ Petit*) and wounding ten others including the Platoon Commander and the Platoon Stretcher Bearer (*Pte WR Herbert*) who still managed to treat the wounded. Sadly an hour later after the Dustoff was complete another mine was detonated killing two more (*LCpl PL Smith* and *Pte HL Muller*) and wounding another five including the attached mine clearing Sapper (*Spr RJ Earl*) who had cleared a path for the Dustoff and now had to do it again. Next morning a third mine was located in a cleared lane with snail shells covering the prongs.



For their courageous actions in the 7 Platoon mine incidents, Pte WR Herbert and Spr RJ Earl were awarded a Mentioned In Despatches.

6RAR/NZ Operation Mundingburra: 14 July- 15 August 1969

On 14/15 July 6RAR/NZ relieved 5RAR in place but with A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) air assaulting into the eastern Light Green and B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) deploying by APC to a separate AO east of Xuyen Moc. V Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*) deployed to the area of the Dinh Co Monastery, D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) to land clearing operations east of the Long Hais and W Company (*Maj LG Williams*) to security operations astride Route 44.

Contacts occurred in the first few days with 3 Platoon (*Lt PA Hines*) (1), 12 Platoon (*2Lt AG Valentine*) (2) and 2 Platoon (*Lt WA Wallace*) (3) all being successful. The first mine incident occurred on 19 July when an attempt was made to ambush the Intelligence Officer (IO) (*Capt MF Fairhead*) while he was investigating and finding VC rest and resupply facilities at the eastern edge of Phuoc Loi (see End Notes, paragraph 13). Instead, the mine killed six civilians and wounded another thirteen (4) proving the enemy didn't care too much regarding the friend and/or foe weapon characteristics of land mines!

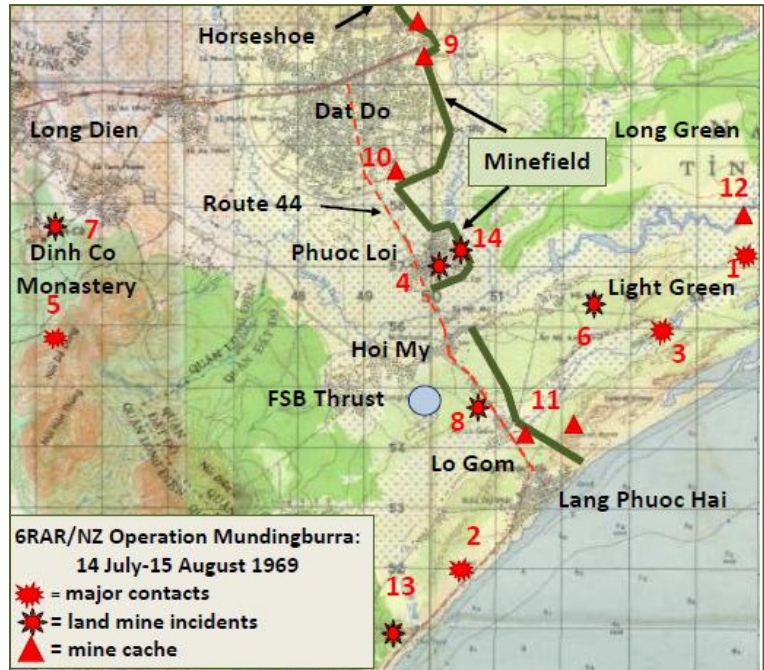
In the early hours of 21 July 2 Platoon V Company (*Lt BE Hall*) ambushed a squad of the *Long Dien Guerrilla Unit* killing four (5). At about 9.30 that day after man had just landed on the moon, 3 Platoon detonated a mine (6) mortally wounding the Platoon Commander and wounding 17 others. A Combat Engineer attached to the Platoon (*Cpl PT Baxter*) despite being badly wounded radioed for more Field Engineer support and then cleared a path around the wounded and to a helicopter landing pad. Some hours later after the wounded had been evacuated, the Battalion Doctor (*Capt RT Anderson*) detonated another mine, blinding him, wounding 5 others including the Battalion Commanding Officer (*Lt Col DM Butler*) and killing the last surviving NCO (*Cpl JD Needs*). The 2iC (*Maj NA Wallace, RNZIR*) assumed command of the Battalion. (See also End Notes, paragraph 14).

On 23 July, V Company was in the process of clearing the Dinh Co Monastery for use by the locals when a mine was discovered which the Combat Engineers were prodding around when it detonated (7) killing two sappers (*Sprs RG Smillie and J Smith*) and wounding one other.

A few hours later a W Company patrol (*Cpl JW Radford*) was moving into an ambush position when a mine was detonated (8) killing the Patrol Commander and wounding five others, two of whom died within a few hours from their dreadful injuries (*Ptes RA Hawthorne and TN Hollows*) The NZ Assault Pioneer with the patrol (*Pte GP Peat*) despite being seriously wounded worked for some two hours to clear a safe area for the other wounded to be treated and evacuated by a relief patrol.

During the operation a number of mines were located in caches, eg in the minefield where a Hoi Chanh showed the IO where a total of 24 mines and 66 grenades were stockpiled (9) (but where there had been a 100 mines stored originally). 95 grenades were also found by the IO in a tomb near Dat Do (10) and Land Clearing Operations recovered some 50 mines (11) and (12).

On 3 August a D Company patrol was investigating a possible cache in a temple (13) which had been swept however, a mine remained undetected under a concrete floor and was detonated by an Assault Pioneer (*Cpl FW Hoare*) mortally wounded him and seriously wounding two others (*Cpl ID Munro and Pte M Gavrilovic*). On 12 August a 1 Platoon W Company patrol (*Lt PO McGuire*) was searching for 6 mines laid around a School in Phuoc Loi (14). Five were found but as the patrol began to set an ambush



the sixth was detonated killing a NZ Sapper (*Spr RH Brown*) and wounding three others one of whom died three months later in an Australian Hospital (*Spr JJ Barrett*).

The following awards were made for Op Mundingburra:

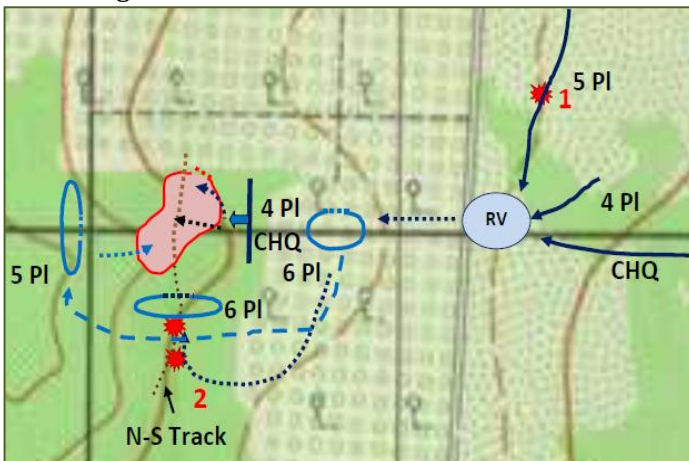
- **Military Medal:** Cpl PT Baxter, 1 Field Squadron, attached 3 Platoon A Company (see 21 July); Pte GP Peat RNZIR, Assault Pioneer attached to W Company (see 23 July).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Sgt AC McLean, 6RAR/NZ Assault Pioneer PI Sgt.

Anatomy of a Silent Company Attack: B Company 6RAR/NZ 18/19 July 1969

During Operation Mundingburra B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) gave support to the axiom “that time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted”. The Company had been deployed into a separate AO specifically to search for elements of *D445 VC Battalion* in an area west of Xuyen Moc and east of the Song Rai River known as the *Tan Ru Base*.

After a number of contacts, 6 Platoon (*2Lt BP Gillespie*) on 18 July discovered an occupied camp. The Company Commander then gave directions that the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt GL Buttery*) who had served with the SAS in Borneo, should conduct a detailed reconnaissance of the enemy position. Buttery and three others were sent forward and set up a Patrol Base from where he and one of the soldiers (*Pte J McIntyre*) then spent 4 hours circumnavigating the camp noting bunkers, numbers of enemy, weapons and exit tracks.

Acting on the detail that Buttery provided, Harris then planned an attack for 11 am the following day that would be silent, ie with no preparatory fire – [see enlargement](#). The original plan had 5 Platoon (*Lt AS D’Hage*) ambushing exit tracks to the south (guided by men from 6 Platoon) and 6 Platoon ambushing to the west.



This changed because as *Murphy’s Law* would have it, first 5 Platoon had a contact on the way to the Company RV (1) which delayed the attack; and, then 6 Platoon had two contacts when crossing the N-S track (2) with enemy who were from the defended camp and thus surprise had been lost.

Nevertheless the attack by 4 Platoon (*Lt SA Sainsbury*) and Company HQ pressed on with H Hour now 1.05 pm. Some 20 metres from the camp the right flank of 4 Platoon came under heavy small arms, LMG and RPG fire wounding five men, one seriously. The right flank of 4 Platoon was reinforced however,

during the time it took to do that, the bulk of the enemy broke contact leaving four dead, a number of weapons and documents identifying the group as a platoon from *C3 Company D445 Battalion*. A few days later a base camp was discovered about 1 km to the south east with documents showing that *HQ D445 Battalion* had evacuated that camp on the day of the attack.

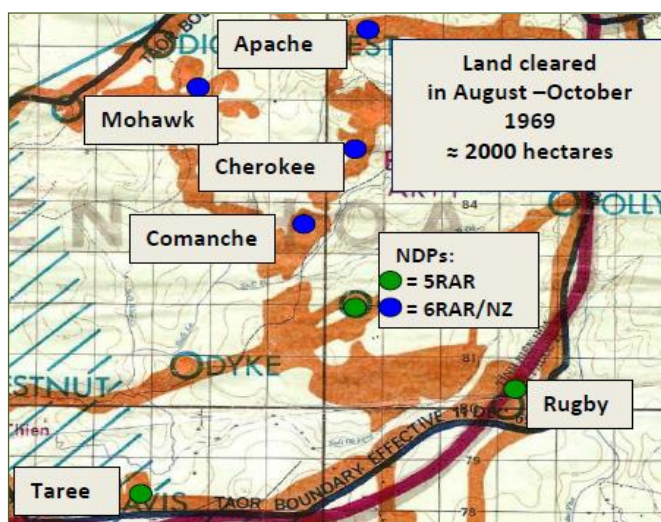
This episode showed that provided detailed reconnaissance is done, a company attack by fire and movement against a platoon size bunker system was feasible. In this case there is no doubt that if surprise had been retained the enemy would have suffered badly.

In part for his leadership in this action, Maj MJ Harris was awarded the Military Cross

Chapter X: Bunkers in the Jungle

While 6RAR/NZ was still on Pacification Operations and with 1 ATF (Brig CMI Pearson) believing that despite the casualties caused by mines these operations were beginning to bear fruit in isolating the enemy from the people, the gung-ho II FFV Corps Commander (Lt Gen JJ Ewell) decided that engaging enemy Main Force units was the way to go. Accordingly, 1 ATF conducted three successive operations in the *Hat Dich* and areas to the north west of it, ie basically where *Operation Goodwood* had occurred.

These operations also involved the protection of US Army Land Clearing operations. As early as 1965 the US High Command had developed methods of clearing land to make it unusable as enemy bases and sanctuaries after allied troops had left the area. The search for suitable engineer plant focussed on those used for preparing firebreaks in the US, ie a D7E Bulldozer with a protected cab and a special oversized shearing blade called a 'Rome Plough' (US -Plow) named after the company that made them in Rome, Georgia (see photograph). By 1969 the use of this technique was so well held that the Corps Commander was moved to say "it was the most effective



device for winning the war". Accordingly, a US Army land-clearing battalion was raised, the 62nd Engineer Battalion based at Long Binh. It had three Dozer Companies of which the 501st was deployed to 1ATF's TAOR. Each company had 35 Dozers.



Rome Plough operator with a chest of grenades!

For the uninitiated observer, a visit to a land-clearing unit was unforgettable. The operation was conducted from a night time defensive position (NDP) which, depending on the season, was rapidly churned by the dozers into either a bowl of choking dust or a sea of impassable mud. The force based at the NDP consisted of a US Engineer land-clearing company and a security force of company strength with supporting APCs and mortars. As clearing progressed the NDP was moved, usually every five to seven days, to a new location. Each day's clearing was carefully planned the previous evening by the security force commander (Company Commander), who was in over-all control of the operation, and the land-clearing commander. Planning included the exact delineation of the area to be cleared, the deployment of security forces, the routes to be followed to and from the cut, special procedures to be followed in case of enemy contact, and the use of preparatory and supporting artillery and small arms fire. Because of difficulties in navigating in heavy jungle, the operation was often controlled by an officer from the land-clearing unit in a helicopter. The lead dozer was guided by radio in cutting a trace or outline of the area to be cleared while the remaining plows followed in an echelon formation, leaving in their wake an ever-widening swath of cleared jungle. Once the trace was completed, the most difficult navigational problem was over, and the formation of ploughs continued around the decreasing perimeter until the area of jungle was eliminated. **For comments regarding subsequent (post war) land use see End Notes, paragraph 15.**

5RAR Operation Camden: 29 July – 30 August 1969

This operation was remarkable, not so much for the protection of land clearing, but because like 1RAR and 9RAR during *Operation Goodwood*, for the number of contacts 5RAR had with the enemy in bunker systems and importantly the detailed analysis provided by the Battalion in its After Action Report (see also End Notes, paragraph 16). Fighting enemy in bunkers was not new to the Regiment and is mentioned earlier, ie: 1965-1RAR on *Operation Hump* in War Zone D and *Operation Crimp* in the Ho Bo Woods; 1967-6RAR on *Operation Bribie*; 1967-7RAR at the *Battle of Suoi Chau Pha* and in 1968 with 2RAR on *Operation Coburg*; 1968-1RAR in the Infantry/Tank actions near *FSB Coral*; 1969-5RAR on *Operation Federal*; 1969-6RAR/NZ on *Operation Lavarack*. By 1969 considerable knowledge had been accumulated on bunker construction, defensive layout and tactics and a classic layout was described earlier in the section on *Operation Goodwood* (C Company 9RAR see page 71).

Operation Camden commenced in earnest on 31 July when C Company 9RAR (Maj LJ Lewis) was relieved at the NDP by D Company 5RAR (Maj MP Blake); A Company (Maj RF Sutton) was located near FSB Polly and C Company (Maj CH Ducker) in the south (B Company remained at the Horseshoe training ARVN troops).

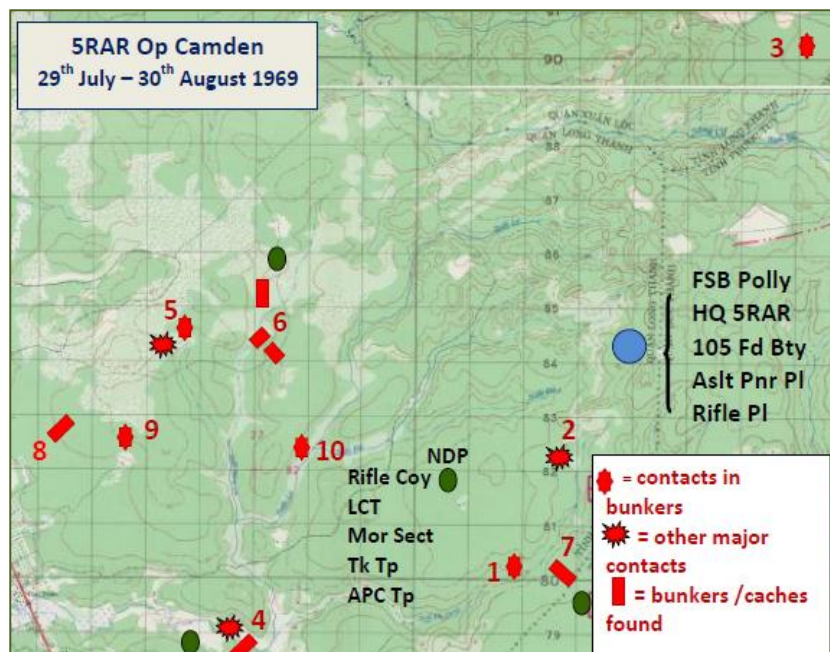
That afternoon 7 Platoon (Lt IR Hosie) had a series of contacts (1) including late in the day with an estimated enemy platoon in bunkers; when attempting to assault the position from a flank the platoon was engaged by very heavy fire forcing it to withdraw losing one man killed (Pte JC McMillan) and two wounded.

On 6 August 12 Platoon (2Lt RA Fenwick) was ambushing a track with two half platoons some 70 metres apart; at about 6am a large force of enemy (50 plus) passed through the southern group and when it had reached the northern group the ambush was sprung (2). The enemy immediately

withdrew dragging some of his dead and wounded which was about twenty but leaving seven dead. The enemy were later identified as being from a Sub Region Headquarters (SR-4).

On 8 August an A Company Patrol comprising 3 Platoon (Lt JR James) and the Tracker Platoon (2Lt JWO Paterson) were following a recently used track when a halt was made to rest the Tracker Dog at a track junction. The Tracker Platoon Sergeant (Sgt RJ Godfrey) took a rece patrol to investigate and was soon in contact with an enemy squad which was attacked by the remainder of the platoon and a section from 3 Platoon. A prisoner was captured who told of a bunker system nearby with elements of 274 Regiment in it (3). After preparatory artillery fire, 3 Platoon advanced in assault formation (two sections up but with the MGs on the flanks to make it difficult for the enemy to use his usual tactic of attempting to out flank the attacking force). The Platoon got to within 10 metres of the enemy position when it was engaged by heavy, pinning down a forward section. The Section Commander (Cpl MA Dench) deliberately drew the enemy fire to allow his section to reorganise and engage the enemy; he then covered the withdrawal of his section. A Light Fire Team was called and the Platoon was forced to withdraw calling in more artillery and air strikes. Some ten enemy had been killed or wounded with two Australians wounded. As it turned out the position had bunkers for a company size force.

Later that day 10 Platoon (2Lt P Joyce) which had harboured astride a track was approached by an enemy platoon which the sentries engaged with a MG killing two (4). The enemy then attempted to outflank the Platoon and did not withdraw until a Light Fire Team forced them to. The following day the



Platoon located a large enemy base camp just forward of the contact area and clearly the enemy had been a caretaker group for a much larger force that fortuitously wasn't there that day!

A few days later B Company (*Maj RE Harring*) had a series of contacts (5) including with enemy in bunkers. It started late in the afternoon of 14 August, when a 5 Platoon (*2Lt BJ Ryan*) recce patrol (*Cpl RJ Ross*) was investigating an electrical cable running along a track when a squad of VC emerged from bamboo. The patrol put in an immediate ambush killing three VC and wounding another. About an hour later 5 Platoon contacted five more enemy near a likely bunker system hitting all five before withdrawing to allow gunships to engage the likely bunker system (three enemy dead were found next morning). Half an hour later 5 Platoon and Company Headquarters were in a night location when enemy from the bunker system began to probe the perimeter and were sent packing especially by MG fire from a Section Commander (*Cpl LW Allen*); the enemy returned at first light firing MGs and RPGs but again withdrew with a number of casualties. At about 7pm on 14 August, 6 Platoon (*Lt RA Hutchison*) contacted a small group of enemy who probably withdrew into a bunker system.

On 15 August, 4 Platoon (*Lt GJ Dunlop*) while patrolling through the area of the previous day's contacts was inadvertently engaged by a US Light Fire Team which had been placed on stand-by. Two platoon members were hit by 40 mm shrapnel and were evacuated by Dust-Off (*Pte Urquart and Pte Bignall*) and the platoon then resumed its task. Shortly after, the forward section entered an occupied bunker system apparently undetected and the Section Commander (*Cpl AJ Hinchey*), realising the gravity of the situation threw a grenade into an occupied bunker in an attempt to gain the fire initiative. The response was immediate and accurate, suggesting at least some of the enemy were aware of its presence. Two men, the Section Commander and the Forward Scout (*Pte C Exindaris*), were seriously wounded by RPG and SA fire and subsequently the Platoon Medic (*Pte PJ Waite*) who had moved forward to tend to the wounded Section Commander whose life he saved. Meanwhile, 6 Platoon (*Lt RA Hutchison*) moved forward to assist 4 Platoon's withdrawal as a Light Fire Team engaged the enemy.

Between 17 and 19 August a number of large bunker systems were located including by D Company at (6) where some 60 bunkers were found in very good condition and recently occupied. At (7) A Company found two base camps with a total of 100 bunkers and weapon pits while at (8) B Company located an enemy company size bunker system complete with a well.

On 21 August, a combined force of 3 Platoon (*Lt JR James*) and the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt GJ Locke*) commanded by the A Company 2iC (*Capt WJ Grassick*) was involved in one of the bloodiest battles that 5RAR had against enemy in bunkers in its time in Vietnam (9). The battle was yet another example of where an assault was attempted against well defended bunkers without first establishing the flanks and depth of the enemy position and this time there were no Centurion Tanks to help out.

At about 3 pm the Assault Pioneer Platoon heard voices coming from thick bamboo and was ordered to hold position while 3 Platoon joined it. After some preparatory artillery fire a two platoon frontage assault commenced and almost immediately came under heavy MG, RPG and AK 47 fire from across the whole front and soon after from both flanks inflicting heavy casualties including the Company Commander and the 3 Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt AB McNulty*) who despite his wounds managed to cover the initial withdrawal. OC 3 Platoon took command and with help from a Section Commander (*Cpl MA Dench*) and artillery fire organised by the Forward Observer (*Bdr GC Dekker*) managed to withdraw the force to an area to the rear to commence evacuation of casualties.

While a US Army Dustoff was taking the more serious casualties the enemy counter attacked with small arms, RPGs and mortars causing more casualties and re-wounding others. A second (RAAF) Dustoff (*Flying Officer RB Treloar*) came under intense enemy fire taking about 20 hits wounding a door gunner and re-wounding one of the casualties. OC 3 Platoon then decided it was too dangerous for further evacuation and concentrated on defending his shrinking position including with Light Fire Teams and OV-10 Bronco Light Attack Aircraft; the pilot of one of the RAAF 'Bushranger' Gunships (*Flying Officer MR Tardent*) coordinated the air attacks. After ammunition was dropped from a helicopter and two hours of continuous air attack the attacks ceased and the enemy withdrew. The remainder of A Company reached the embattled force which from a total of 52 men, had suffered one killed (*Pte DJ Banfield*) and 37 wounded about half of whom were repatriated to Australia; basically two platoons had been decimated and but for astounding junior leadership and steadfastness by the soldiers the whole

force could well have been overrun. It was learnt subsequently the enemy was from *274 VC Regiment* which had lost some 40 dead and wounded in the battle.

The last major contact involved C Company (*Maj CH Ducker*) on the 28 and 29 August. 9 Platoon (*2Lt RA Lambert*) had been patrolling along the axis of the *Suoi Le River* searching for enemy camps when signs of bunkers (freshly cut timber and a latrine) were found. The Platoon halted to conduct a recce when an enemy sentry appeared and was fired at. In the follow up bunkers were sighted and artillery called down while the Platoon waited for the rest of the Company to arrive **(10)**. Late in the day, the Company concentrated and began to recce the flanks of the position and to engage enemy seen in bunkers with artillery when a stray round landed in the Company area wounding three soldiers. The casualties needed immediate evacuation and because of the close proximity to the enemy position a Light Fire Team was called to cover extraction of the wounded. During this time an enemy group followed one of the recce patrols and attempted to assault the extraction point before being driven off with a number of casualties. The following morning the Company cleared through a company plus bunker system which had been occupied by a caretaker force

A bunker in bamboo with a fire lane lower left and an empty fish can at the entrance.

AWM PO 01003



Left: Some of the men from 3 Platoon involved in the 21 August action. L-R: LCpl IW Roe (who was wounded but returned to duty); Cpl MA Dench and Pte BJ Bettens.

Photograph courtesy of the 5RAR Association.

The following awards were made for Op Camden and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Distinguished Flying Cross: Flying Officer MR Tardent, Bushranger Pilot (see 21 August).**
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal: Sgt AB McNulty, PI Sgt 3 Platoon (see 21 August).**
- **Military Medal: Bdr GC Dekker, 1 Fd Regt (see 21 August); Cpl MA Dench, Sect Comd 3 Platoon (see 8 and 21 August).**
- **Mentioned In Despatches : Cpl LW Allen , Sect Comd 5 Platoon (see 14 August); 2Lt RA Fenwick, OC 12 Platoon (see 6 August); 2Lt BJ Ryan OC 5 Platoon; Flying Officer RB Treloar Dustoff Pilot (see 21 August); Pte PJ Waite, PI Medic 4 Platoon (see 14 August).**

Attacking Bunkers: The Dilemma

As mentioned previously the question of whether to attack bunkers and the best tactics to use was it seemed, always very risky. Much of the problem was related to the ability to get enough information on the extent of a bunker system and importantly how many enemy troops and weapons were in them. The majority of bunker systems confronted by the Regiment during the war were very well laid out with mutual support and depth. Sometimes systems would be constructed in series eg, the system described in the sketch might be duplicated a few hundred metres away. This gave the enemy a readily available counter attack force, ie similar to what we would have in a depth locality within a battalion or brigade defensive position.

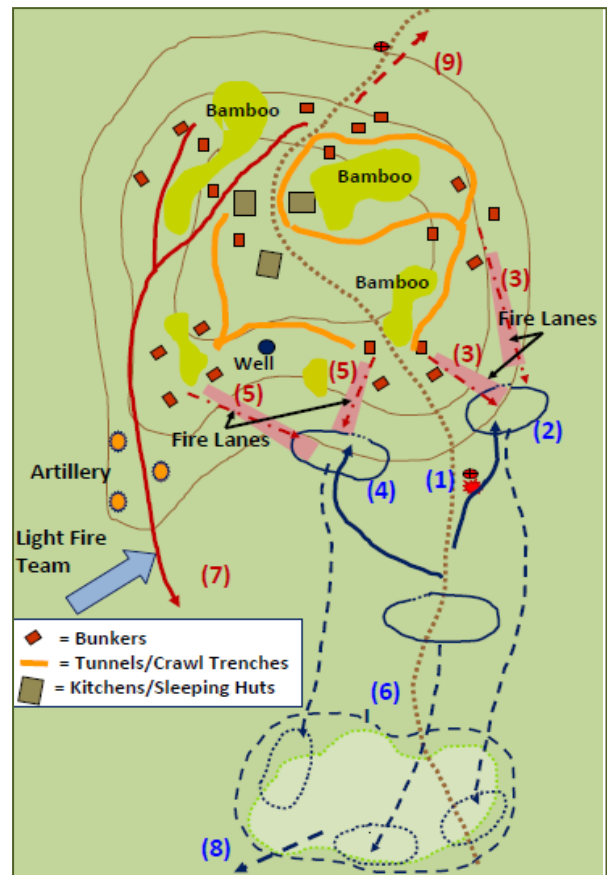
Individual bunkers were constructed mainly to provide protection against artillery and airstrikes and were often connected by tunnels. They were skilfully camouflaged, had a low silhouette (about half a metre) and were difficult to detect until close range when of course one was now in the system's preferred killing ground.

Thus a typical situation might be: (1) mid afternoon a platoon advancing on the axis of a track contacts a single enemy who withdraws and fires a claymore. The Platoon not appreciating the enemy soldier was in fact a sentry and having not detected 'bunker signs' (fresh cut timber, latrines, animal traps and most importantly fire lanes), conducts a sweep through the contact area with two sections up (2). The enemy waits until the Platoon is in the killing ground and engages with RPG, MG and small arms (3) inflicting several casualties. A reserve Platoon is moved around the left flank (4) but because the enemy's flanks have not been established, it too comes under heavy fire (5).

The company withdraws to an area to evacuate the wounded (6) and the enemy reacts from depth bunkers to harass the company and engage Dustoff Helicopters (7). With the aid of Light Fire Teams and artillery the company beats back the attackers, evacuates the wounded and in fading light retires to a defensive position 500 metres away (8). The enemy position is then engaged with field and medium artillery and air strikes however, the enemy withdraws during the night to fight another day (9).

The most useful weapons in these actions were MGs, hand grenades, M79 grenades and to a lesser extent, M72 LAWs though the weapon of choice was of course the 20 Pounder main armament of a Centurion Tank. Except on a few occasions such as the bunker battles around FSB Coral, at Binh Ba and on Operation Overlord, there was a long lead time to bring the tanks into action and there always seemed to be an operational imperative by one level of command or another which required junior leaders to reluctantly press on with the action.

In retrospect it easy to assert that bunkers should have been dealt with in the same way tactical doctrine was prescribed for deliberate attacks, ie with battle procedure involving reconnaissance, preparation of plans, rehearsals etc. The problem being however, that on most occasions this would have resulted in an attack against an empty bunker system but on the other hand casualties would have been much less. Indeed, the longer the war went, the clearer it became that unless tanks were available attacks against bunker systems should be avoided and the preferred option (as used by 8RAR on *Operation Petrie* –see page 115) being to position blocking/ambushing forces while hitting the bunkers with medium artillery (155mm), heavy artillery (8in) and airstrikes.



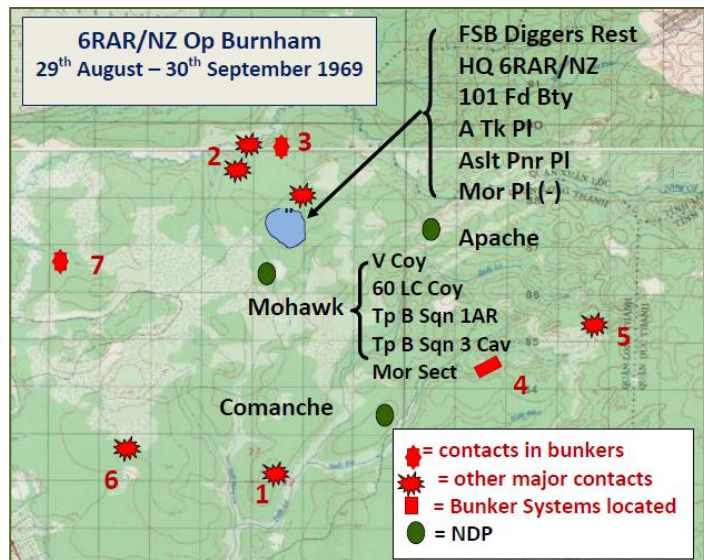
6RAR/NZ Operation Burnham: 29 August - 30 September 1969

On 29/30 August, 6RAR/NZ relieved 5RAR of land clearing operations with V Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*) first securing FSB Diggers Rest and then NDP Mohawk where the 501st Land Clearing Company had been replaced by the 60th Land Clearing Company. W Company (*Maj LG Williams*) was tasked to clear ground in front of land clearing operations and A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) and D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) conducted reconnaissance in the south and west of the AO. B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) remained at the Horseshoe attempting to train ARVN soldiers.

As well as the usual pattern of contacts with the enemy (mainly with logistics elements of *Sub Region 4*, *274 VC Regiment* and *74 NVA Artillery Regiment*), there were a number of unusual incidents and events:

(i) On 30 August, *Brig SP Weir* became Commander 1 ATF and at FSB Diggers Rest a US Army Chinook Helicopter with a slung load of mortar ammunition crashed killing all five crew members ([see also End Notes, paragraph 17](#)); **(ii)** On 2 September the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, *Hô Chí Minh* died though news of his death wasn't released until 4 September; **(iii)** on the evening of 17 September, FSB Diggers Rest was shelled by Royal Thai Army artillery from FSB Grey using air burst white phosphorous ammunition and later that night W Company had canisters from 155mm illumination ammunition falling around it, again from Thai Artillery at FSB Grey. On both occasions the US Army Liaison Officer at FSB Grey was vigorously counselled by the BC 101 Bty (*Maj JF Bertram*)!

(iv) Just before last light on 21 September enemy were seen crossing open ground just north of the FSB and earlier HQ 1ATF had advised that Signals Intelligence reported a battalion of *274 VC Regiment* was located just to the south of the FSB. The area was engaged with mortars, Thai 155mm artillery and USAF air strikes. One of the first strikes dropped napalm and a second strike reported ground fire which was also heard in the FSB and so the airstrikes continued until nearly first light including by Spooky Gunships. There was no



doubt the enemy had been there in some strength but whether they actually fired at the aircraft or whether it was exploding bamboo was never fully decided; and, **(v)** the Tracker Platoon's two dogs Milo and Trajan both had successful contacts in locating enemy.

There were some 90 contacts and incidents including: **(1)** On 3 September A Company had a series of contacts with the first by 1 Platoon (*2Lt JT Mellington*) in the early afternoon. The point section (*Cpl CT Nicol*) was following a well used track when the Forward Scout spotted four enemy which he and the Machine Gunner (moving directly behind the scout) engaged. Two dead enemy were discovered subsequently. 3 Platoon (*Lt PR Marks-Chapman*), hearing the 1 Platoon contact deployed near a track in case it was required to react. A short while later four VC walked down the track with the Platoon killing one who was identified as the Executive Officer of *Sub Region 4 Logistics*.

The Anti Tank Platoon (*2Lt JB Neervoort*) which gradually transformed into the Tracker Platoon was based at FSB Diggers Rest with two 106mm Recoilless Rifles (RCL) and three 90 mm RCLs. It did a number of patrols with a 'Tracker Section' and had two contacts **(2)**. The first on 6 September with *Dog Trajan* began with the discovery of an enemy bunker camp which had been recently occupied. The Tracker Dog was set onto the scent and after about half an hour made signs that the quarry was near. The Dog then 'pointed' and soon after the Machine Gunner with the Tracker Section sighted and fired on three enemy killing one. Two days later in the same area a patrol saw signs of a bunker system (sawn trees and cultivated bamboo shoots) which the Patrol Commander (*2Lt JB Neervoort*) began to investigate. Sign was found and the Tracker Dog, *Dog Milo* was called forward and immediately

'pointed' down the track. After securing a firm base the tracker team went further forward and after some 20 metres contacted three enemy killing one and wounding the other two.



Left: Pte BA Williams and Dog Milo, 106mm RCL and Pte RJ McDonald and Dog Trajan at FSB Diggers Rest. Right: Dog Trajan in his role as a 'Grenadier' sans camouflage paint. Photographs courtesy of the 6RAR Association and John (Doggie) Neervoort.

By 9 September D Company had been airlifted to FSB Diggers Rest and was now patrolling to the north. Late in the day 10 Platoon (*2Lt AK Houseman*) was patrolling along a track when the Forward Scout (*Pte N Sleeman*) informed the Section Commander (*Cpl RD Brown*) that he could smell smoke. At that moment enemy in bunkers (3) fired RPGs wounding four men including the Forward Scout and the Section Commander who nevertheless continued to fight his section out of the contact. The Platoon was closed up as did the remainder of the Company and 10 Platoon then withdrew under cover of artillery fire. After artillery and airstrikes the Company on the following day cleared the bunkers which were of company size but with only a squad occupying them.

V Company now at NDP Comanche was about to be relieved by A Company when on 15 September it located recently occupied bunkers that housed a Chicom Claymore Mine and grenade factory (4). On 24 September 2 Platoon V Company (*Lt BE Hall*) was taking a water resupply when it was approached by 12 enemy; the Machine Gunner Sentry (*Pte WG Doherty*) engaged the enemy and despite receiving heavy return fire killed four one of whom was a Company Commander in 74 NVA Artillery Regiment which was equipped with 107mm and 122 mm Rockets (5).

The same day 6 Platoon (*Lt L MacLean*) was patrolling when the lead section's Forward Scout (*Pte RJ Fitzpatrick*) encountered three enemy moving towards him; he immediately opened fire killing one and wounding two who returned fire wounding two of his section. He then dispatched one more and during a section assault killed the third (6).

On 25 September, 2 Platoon W Company (*Lt RG Milne*) was the point platoon in a company move when a recently used track was discovered by the lead section (*Cpl SHP Hokianga*) and shortly after a sentry bunker. As the bunker was being observed a VC appeared and was engaged and during a sweep of the area the Platoon was engaged by an enemy platoon with two men being wounded (7). The Platoon withdrew and artillery, mortars and airstrikes used against the enemy position overnight. Not too much use as it happened because when the Company attempted to enter the system next morning it received heavy fire. The position was finally cleared that afternoon after more artillery and airstrikes skilfully applied by the Company Commander (*Maj LG Williams*) as he had also done the previous day.

The following awards were made for Op Burnham and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross: Maj LG Williams, RNZIR, OC W Company (see 25/26 Sep).**
- **Military Medal: Cpl RD Brown, Sect Comd 10 Pl (see 9 Sep); Pte RJ Fitzpatrick, Forward Scout 6 Pl (see 25 Sep).**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Pte WG Doherty, RNZIR, Machine Gunner 2 Pl V Coy (see 24 Sep).**

9RAR Operation Jack: 30 September – 31 October 1969

In late September 1969, 9RAR deployed into the same area of operations where, nine long months earlier, it had begun full-scale operations on *Operation Goodwood*. This time however, it was battle hardened. It relieved 6RAR/NZ for the security of US Army land clearing operations committing D Company (*Maj IJC Hearn*) as the NDP (*Apache*) Security Company with B Company (*Capt GA Dugdale*) patrolling some 3000 metres in front of the land clearing group. C Company (*Maj LJ Lewis*) initially remained under command of HQ 1ATF to continue searching for a missing SAS soldier (*Pte DJE Fisher*) and A Company (*Maj W McDonald*) deployed to the south of the AO.

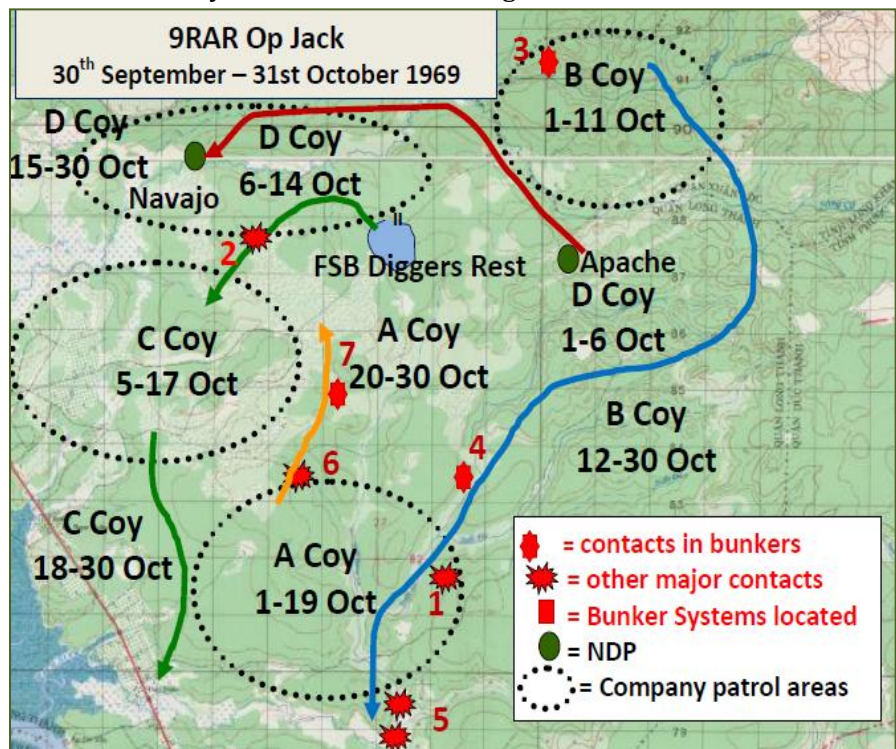
The Battalion was to have a large number of contacts with some of the more notable being: **(1)** on 2 October, 3 Platoon (*2Lt I Jones*) was ambushing a track when about 7am an enemy scout was wounded and taken prisoner with a large number of enemy then counter attacking the Platoon's flank. In the fire fight that followed one soldier was killed (*Pte KJ Prior*) with the enemy finally breaking contact about an hour later.

On 4 October when C Company was moving from FSB Diggers Rest to its patrol area, 8 Platoon (*Lt GM Bagot*) was in an ambush **(2)** when an enemy squad approached but did not enter the killing ground. The enemy were engaged with claymore mines killing two.

The operational experience of the soldiers was evident on 10 October when 5 Platoon (*Lt PJ Cosgrove*) having had a successful contact earlier in the day recognised signs of an occupied bunker system and was ordered by the Company Commander (*Capt GA Dugdale*) to prop and wait. Inevitably the enemy sent out a recce patrol which 5 Platoon promptly dispatched **(3)**.

Further evidence of good battle craft skills occurred on the 16 October when 5 Platoon entered a bunker system killing one and forcing several others to withdraw **(4)**; the enemy returned next day and attacked a forward section from where the Platoon Commander directed the defence with three enemy killed. The Platoon saw further action on 20 October with two contacts also resulting in several enemy dead **(5)**.

At 5 minutes past midnight on 24 October, A Company (*Maj W McDonald*) ambushed some twenty enemy who were part of a larger group and were allowed to pass 3 Platoon's position into 2 Platoon's killing ground **(6)**; most were killed or wounded and withdrawal routes and nearby bunker systems engaged by Spooky Aircraft. A Company was involved in a more savage encounter on 26 October **(7)** when at about 6 pm 2 Platoon (*2Lt AJ Daniels*) as lead platoon came under heavy enemy fire killing the Forward Scout (*Pte JW Holloway*) and seriously wounding the Machine Gunner in the point section (*Pte R Smidt*). The Section Commander (*Cpl MAG Rose*) managed to recover the MG and the casualties and the Company Commander then assaulted the enemy position from a flank with 1 Platoon (*Sgt JS Vautin*) and 3 Platoon (*2Lt I Jones*) allowing 2 Platoon to withdraw and evacuate its casualties. Artillery, mortar and Light Fire Teams were called but they and the Dustoff helicopters were soon being engaged by enemy ground fire. With skilful fire and movement, 1 Platoon (*Sgt JS Vautin*) got to within a few metres



of the enemy bunkers when one of the RAAF Helicopters was shot down and all fire support discontinued while the four man crew was successfully rescued. At about 7pm and in fading light A Company successfully broke contact and the enemy position was engaged by Spooky aircraft. On 27 October, the Company assaulted back into the bunker system which had been occupied by at least a company of enemy; there was evidence of substantial enemy casualties before it withdrew during the night.

On the same day the Battalion had a tragic accident when a 10 Platoon soldier (*Pte BGF Binder*) was carrying a Claymore Mine during a thunderstorm when lightning detonated the mine severely wounding him; he died a few minutes later.

On 31 October and 1 November the Battalion deployed by helicopter to *Phu My* on Route 15, by Caribou aircraft and Chinook helicopters to Nui Dat (*Luscombe Field*) and then by vehicle to the Battalion's Lines. This was to be the last major operation conducted by 9RAR which began the procedures for returning to Australia following a hand over to the replacement Battalion, 8RAR.

The following awards were made for Op Jack and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross: Lt PJ Cosgrove, OC 5 Platoon (see 10, 16 and 17 Oct).**
- **Medal for Gallantry: Maj W McDonald, OC A Coy (see 26 Oct)**
- **Mentioned In Despatches: Cpl MAG Rose, Sect Comd 2 PI (see 26 Oct); Sgt JS Vautin, Acting OC 1 PI (see 26 Oct).**

On 19 November the Advance Party left by air and the Main Body embarked in HMAS Sydney on 25 November 1968 bound for Port Adelaide via Fremantle



9RAR's farewell parade. Led by the CO, Lt Col AL Morrison, Capt RJ Rayward, Adjutant (left) and the RSM, WO1 D Cassidy (right). Centre rear is OC A Coy, Maj W McDonald.

By courtesy of the 9RAR Association

Chapter XI: At the Enemy's Throat

The Grey Eight Arrives

8RAR was raised on 8 August 1966 at Enoggera, with some 150 troops from the recently returned 1RAR among the founding members. Early in 1967, the Battalion was warned for service with FARELF and moved from Brisbane to Malaysia between August and November 1967 where it came under command of 28 Brigade. It returned to Australia in May 1969 and commenced intensive training in preparation for service in Vietnam. In November 1969 the Battalion (*Lt Col KJ O'Neill, CO and WO1 GJC Lee, RSM*) deployed by *HMAS Sydney* to Vietnam where it relieved 9RAR.

After completing in country training the Battalion deployed on its first Operation to the north of the Province (*Operation Atherton: 10th December 1969- 10 January 1970*). Then following a Cordon and Search operation at Xuyen Moc and reconnaissance and ambushing operations west of Route 2, the Battalion deployed on what would be one of the more significant operations conducted by the Regiment, ie *Operation Hammersley*.



Pte WE Maschette, CO 8RAR's signaller, about to deploy on Op Atherton.

Photograph courtesy of Wayne Maschette

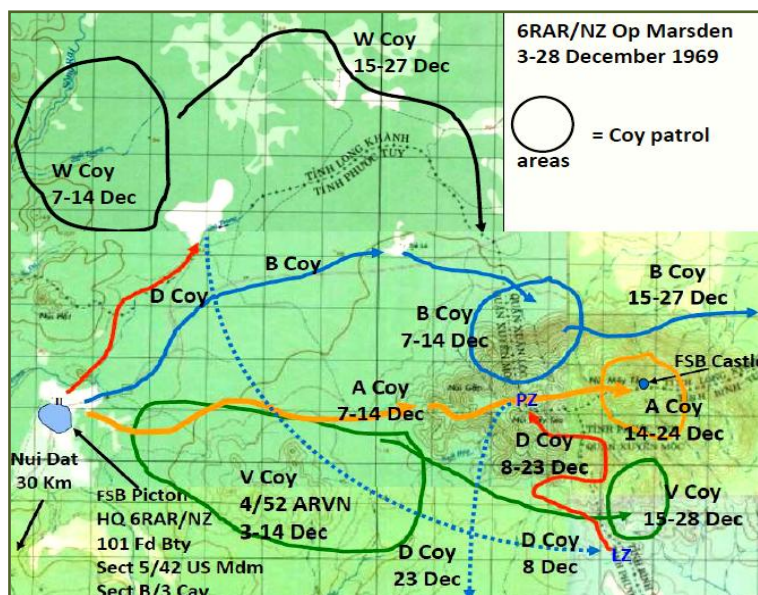
Assault on the May Tao Base

Before that however, first 6RAR/NZ and then 5RAR were to conduct operations that had a profound impact on the enemy's primary logistics base in the Mây Tào Mountains in the far north east corner of the Province, ie *Operation Marsden and Operation Bondi*.

6RAR/NZ Operation Marsden: 1 -27 December 1969

In late November 1969, 6RAR/NZ had already been on operations west of Xuyen Moc for 6 weeks when it was ordered to move some 20 kilometres north to attack and destroy the enemy's *May Tao Secret Zone*. Located in the Núi Mây Tào, a massif of some 30 square kilometres rising 600 metres above the surrounding country, it had long been a sanctuary for Main Force Units and was a strategic logistics base. 5VC Division had occupied the base until it moved to War Zone D in late 1967/early 1968. The main enemy logistics organisation, *84 Rear Services Group* was based there until mid 1969 when it also moved to War Zone D; however, major logistics elements involving supply, repair and medical facilities remained in the base area. This included *K76A Hospital* which was the principal provider of medical services to 274 VC and 33 NVA Regiments.

The outline of the operation is shown on the map, ie: with A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) tracking across the centre spine; B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) advancing across the north and followed up by W Company (*Maj LG Williams*); D Company (*Maj RM Gill*) after patrolling north west of FSB Picton was flown to the southern flank and joined later by V Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*).



The assault on the mountain commenced in earnest on 9 December when 6 Platoon (*Lt L McLean*) (1) and 4 Platoon (*Lt SR Sainsbury*) (2) discovered bunker systems with the latter being the Out Patients Ward of *K76A Hospital*; normally collocated with the Hospital, this ward had moved just after the operation had commenced. A large amount of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals were retrieved.

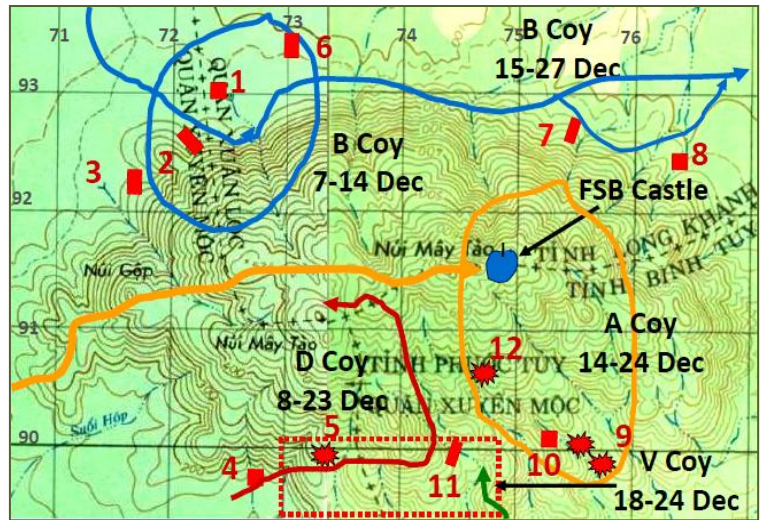
That afternoon 11 Platoon (*Sgt NJ Rankin*) discovered the first significant ammunition dump in a cave (see map enlargement next page - 9 Dec Cache). There were some 3 tonnes of explosives and weapons which was one of the largest found in the 1ATF TAOR. The following day 5 Platoon (2*Lt AR Kimpton*) discovered another major medical facility (3) with 12 bunkers each for 8 people and 7 dug-in kitchens. Later that day 11 Platoon (*Lt DM Hodda*) discovered a bunker system (4) which was a base camp for the *K76A Hospital's Security Unit*. On the 11 December 12 Platoon (*Lt PA Jackson*) contacted 3 VC from the *Security Group* with one Australian being killed (*Pte R Buchan*) (5).

On 13 December B Company located a recently vacated base camp (6) of 9 bunkers and 3 cookhouses. On the same day D Company (*Capt MF Fairhead*) discovered a huge weapons cache and importantly, an 'administrative unit' with staff including an 'Adjutant', a 'Quartermaster' and a 'QM Store' with clothing, food and carpentry tools indicating the hospital was in the parish (see Admin Sect on the enlargement).

On 14 December, A Company having reached the mountain's crest established *FSB Castle* with a section of mortars which were needed because of the mountain's topography and the extreme range to *FSB Picton*. It was soon discovered however, that the mortars firing from an altitude of 600 metres to targets that were hundreds of metres lower had its own technical problems (see End Notes, paragraph 18). Later that day D Company located the *Xuan Loc Worksite*, a major installation for the production of claymore mines and grenades and the repair of small arms. Staffed by some 30 people, its equipment included armourer kits, dies and casts, a large forge, oxy-acetylene gear, UXBs and weapons spare parts. The next day, a 6 Platoon patrol found another medical facility (7) identified as the *Ba Long Province's* (enemy's name for *Phuoc Tuy Province*) medical unit which supported provincial forces such as *D445 VC Battalion*. On 17 December, 6 Platoon located a further 5 large bunkers, cooking and (medical) training facilities (8).

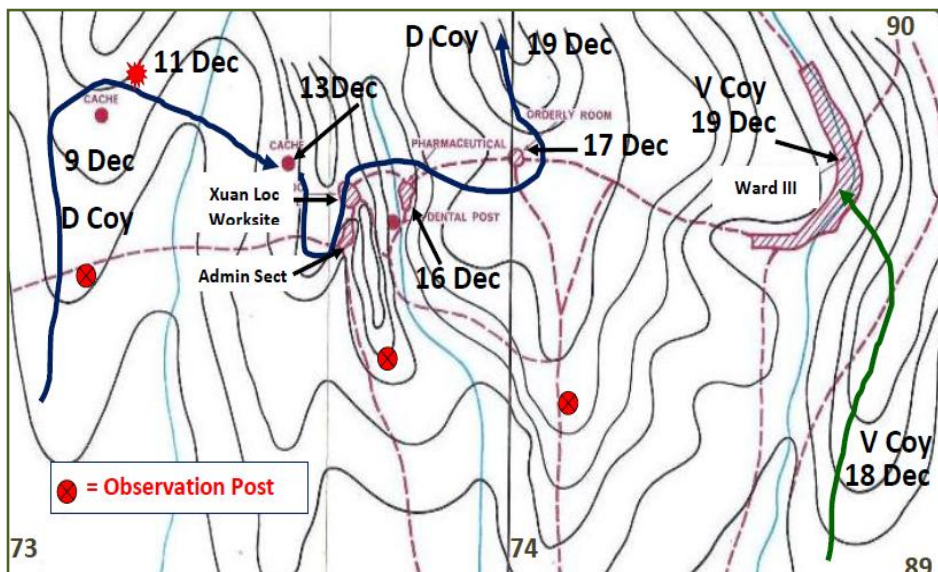
About mid morning on 18 December, 3 Platoon (*Lt PR Marks-Chapman*) was searching a re-entrant when the forward section (*Cpl JC Fler*) was engaged by a claymore mine from an enemy sentry post (9). The section returned fire killing one enemy soldier while two others withdrew to a suspected camp further up the re-entrant. After evacuating one wounded soldier the Platoon continue to patrol to the enemy camp when the forward section (*LCpl GI Stanford*) saw movement which it engaged. As the Platoon Commander was moving forward an estimated enemy squad opened fire with claymores and small arms killing the Forward Scout (*Pte AR Brown*) and fatally wounding the Section Commander and the Platoon Commander. The Intelligence Section's A Company Interpreter (*Cpl VV Zhukov*) ran forward and retrieved the Platoon Commander and the Section Commander before the Platoon (*Sgt SA West*) forced the enemy to withdraw and then evacuated the casualties by winch. The following day, 1 Platoon (2*Lt JT Mellington*) located the enemy camp (10) which had been occupied by about 30 people.

On 20 December V Company located *Ward III, K76A Hospital* (11) (see enlargement next page) and the Anti Tank Platoon (2*Lt JB Neervoort*) which had been flown into a LZ near *FSB Castle* contacted a number of enemy who were wounded patients fleeing from the Hospital (12). Seven enemy soldiers were taken prisoner and evacuated for treatment.



K76A Hospital

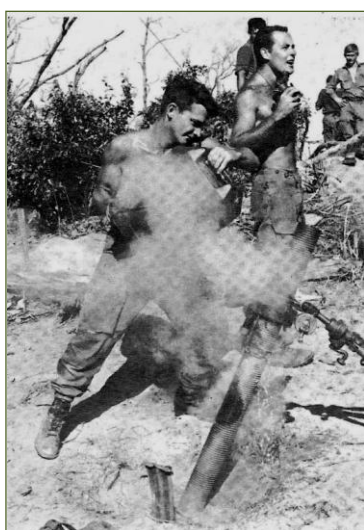
On 16 and 17 December, D Company had located the K76A Pharmacy with a huge supply of drugs, the hospital's Dental Post and the Orderly Room (Hospital Admissions and Discharges). Clearly the hospital was near and as mentioned earlier V Company, with advice from D Company, located the main part of the Hospital, ie *Ward III* on 19 December. Located in heavily wooded slopes



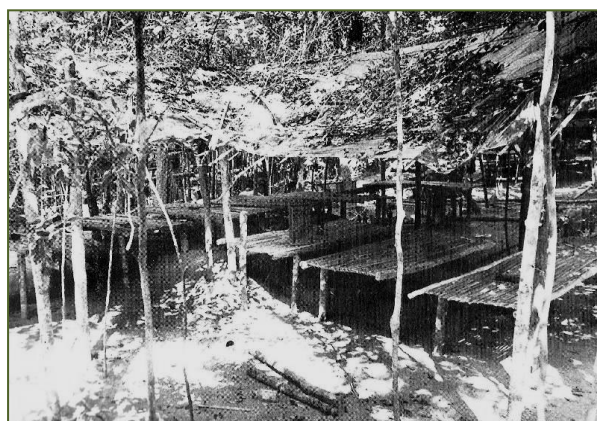
and built astride a perennial stream which fed into wells, the Hospital had both rudimentary surgical and medical wards for a total of about 200 patients. It was later learnt that the medical staff (about 25) and cooks and bottle washers (30) together with about 100 walking patients left the hospital just after 6RAR/NZ's operation started; stretcher cases were left to be captured. What was left behind however was a massive amount of pharmaceuticals which, when added to that captured by D Company on the 16 December, came to about 1.5 tonnes, the largest amount ever seized in the war. The drugs were sent to Long Binh for analysis (for source of origin) and then distributed to Prisoner of War Camps.

One of the reasons the enemy knew we were coming, as had occurred with a number of SAS Patrols and 1 RAR in November 1968, was that he had observation as far as Nui Dat. A string of *observation posts* were located around the mountain higher slopes linked by lateral tracks. When the enemy had established a clear idea of where our forces were he would move security forces over these tracks and down the relevant spur or spurs.

Operation Marsden caused a great deal of pain to the enemy's logistic system in Phuoc Tuy Province which never really recovered in the Regiment's time in the war. On 28 December the Battalion, exhausted after 11 weeks of continual operations, withdrew to Nui Dat.



Left: Sgt RR Pyne calling for a fire mission at FSB Castle and L Cpl LR Coles cooling the tube with water. The Mortar Section fired over 2000 rounds in 21 fire missions over 10 days. Right: Some of the 25 'Bed Wards' found at K76A Hospital
By courtesy 6RAR



For his bravery in the 3 Platoon contact on 21 December Cpl VV Zhukov was awarded a Mentioned in Despatches

5RAR Operation Bondi: 1 January – 15 February 1970

Soon after 6RAR/NZ returned to Nui Dat, 5RAR was deployed in and around the Núi Mây Tào and then further east to the western flank of an even bigger mountain, ie the Núi Bé. *Operation Bondi* was planned to follow-up on 6RAR/NZ's success and to prevent any large scale movement of enemy forces through the area prior to and after TET 1970.

It commenced on 1 January with companies deploying by road and air: A Company (*Maj RF Sutton*) was inserted by APC to FSB Pat and patrolled east and then north; B Company (*Maj RE Haring*) was inserted into the west by air and patrolled north east; C Company (*Capt DS Wilkins*) was inserted by air to the north west of the AO and patrolled east; D Company (*Maj MP Blake*) was inserted into the north of the AO and patrolled north.

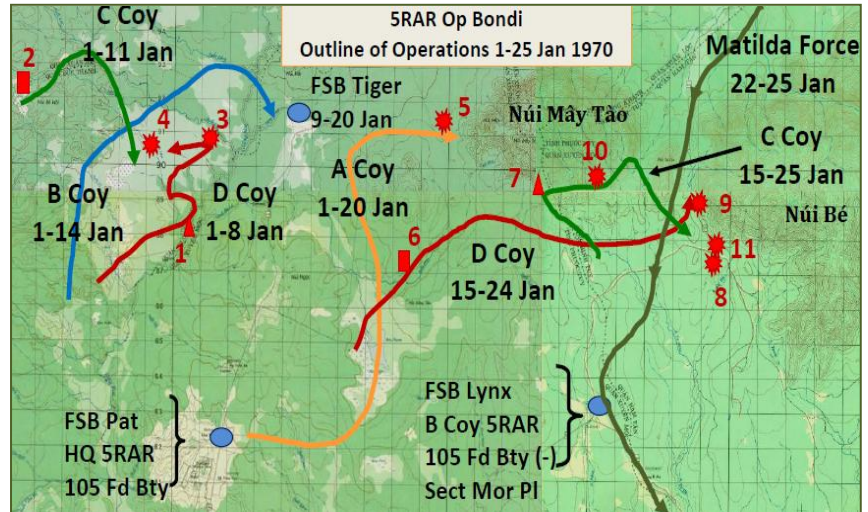
Commencing on 8 January D, C and B Companies returned in succession to Nui Dat for 4 days rest. When the companies returned to the AO it had moved further to the east with B Company securing FSB Lynx. This deployment was to support the movement of *Matilda Force* an armoured force that had travelled some 200 Km east into Ham Tan Province and was returning via the gap between the Núi Mây Tào and the Núi Bé. The force comprised A Sqn 1 Armd Regt (*Maj JAN Chipman*), 3 Troop and two mortar APC sections from B Sqn 3 Cav Regt (*Capt DA Formby*) and B Company 6RAR/NZ (*Capt MF Fairhead*) with two mortar sections.

Before that, A Company had moved to the western slopes of the Núi Mây Tào initially to support a SAS Patrol but stayed there until it returned to Nui Dat on 20 January. FSB Tiger was established to support A Company with a section of artillery and mortars, APCs and security platoons.

On 2 January, D Company located a large weapons and ammunition cache (1); on 5 January, C Company located 32 bunkers with a cache of grenades (2). The same day D Company had two contacts (3): a patrol from 11 Platoon (*2Lt J Russell*) engaged a single enemy who withdrew into a bunker system which the patrol didn't enter. The following morning the Platoon cleared the bunker system (22 bunkers) and found one dead enemy; D Company Headquarters was approached by two enemy who were engaged by the Support Section MG killing one but the second returned very accurate AK 47 fire seriously wounding the MG Number Two (*Pte EJ Archbald*).

On 7 January, 11 Platoon was in a harbour position (3) when two enemy approached and were engaged by the sentry killing one who was a Section Commander from *K76A Hospital*. The same day 10 Platoon (*Lt MK McDermott*) was with Company Headquarters in a harbour when six enemy approached the sentry position (4). The MG fired on the enemy but only dispatched one before the gun had a stoppage allowing the rest to escape. The dead soldier was a Section 2iC from *K76A Hospital* proving the intelligence assessment that the enemy would attempt to re-enter the *May Tao Mountain Base* once 6RAR/NZ had left.

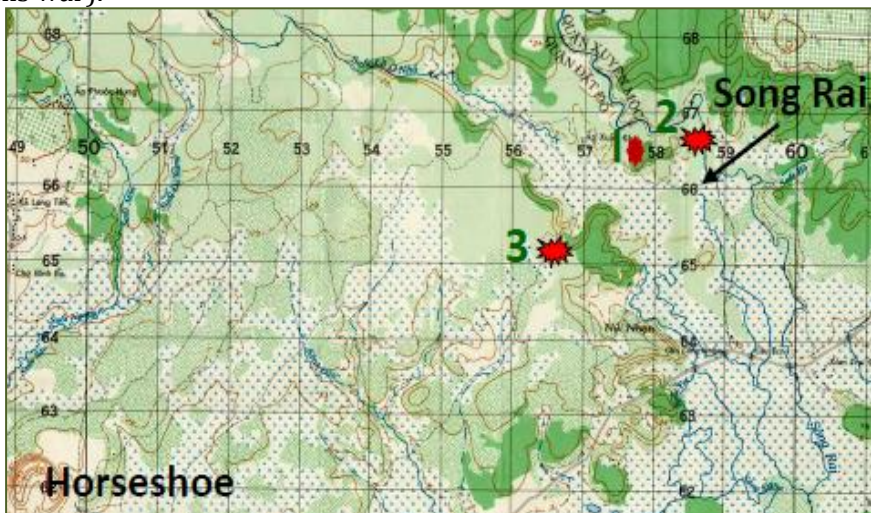
A week later 1 Platoon (*Lt RW Randell*) was in an ambush position but taking a resupply some 200 metres away when three enemy approached the security group left at the ambush site (5). The MG (*Pte RJ Amos*) let the enemy into the killing ground and engaged them with MG and claymores killing two and wounding one. On 16 January D Company located a Munitions Workshop (6) which was the *Z301 Workshop*, a sub unit of *84 Rear Services Group*. The loss of this facility together with the *Xuan Loc Worksite* destroyed by D Company 6RAR/NZ a month earlier meant that *84 Rear Services Group's* capability to manufacture grenades and mines had been severely disrupted.



Another significant discovery was made the following day by HQ C Company (*Capt DS Wilkins*) and 9 Platoon (*Sgt RW Inglis*) when a hospital system was found in a network of caves on the southern slopes of the Núi Mây Tào (7). The caves went to a depth of 15 metres with the main cave supplied by a subterranean stream and with a rudimentary operating table. In nearby caves there were 12 timber beds and a large quantity of medical supplies. The facility was probably a Dressing Station established to treat Provincial VC Units after the demise of *K76A Hospital* and was most likely the elusive *K76C Hospital* which for many years had operated from the *Hat Dich Base* far to the west.

On 21 January, 12 Platoon (*2Lt RA Fenwick*) had a section ambushing a fire trail (8) when 11 Platoon advised that 4 enemy were headed towards them. The ambush was reinforced with another MG which initiated contact killing two and capturing 4 packs that were full of vital food supplies. That night 11 Platoon (*2Lt J Russell*) some 2 Kms north (9) was investigating the sounds of a vehicle when it contacted two VC killing both. One was the Adjutant of a branch of *HQ Ba Long Province* who was carrying a report that described the difficulties units in the area were having as a result of 6RAR/NZ's and 5RAR's operations.

On 24 January, 7 Platoon (*Lt IR Hosie*) was ambushing a track when a sentry heard enemy approaching (10); the Platoon stood to and two sections engaged 8 enemy who responded with small arms and RPG fire. As the Platoon swept the contact area it was fired upon by wounded enemy causing three seriously wounded (*Ptes EK Davies, DF Nicholls and JA Reid*). After evacuating the casualties the Platoon cleared the area finding that half of the enemy's numbers had been killed or wounded. Later that night, 12 Platoon was ambushing a track with a section with an extra MG group when it contacted 3 VC killing two. The dead enemy were both medical staff members of *K76A Hospital* (no Red Cross Armbands in this war).



A few days later B, C and D Companies redeployed to an area west of Xuyen Moc and astride the Song Rai River where enemy movement was likely to increase during the Tet period in early February. The last major contacts occurred with C Company on 11 February when 8 Platoon (*2Lt PW Commerford*) surprised a platoon-size enemy group in bunkers (1) and after attempting flanking attacks supported by a Light

Fire Team and mortars, the enemy stood its ground and only withdrew when a troop of tanks arrived from the Horseshoe to support an assault. Five Australians were wounded by RPG shrapnel and AK 47 gunshot, two seriously requiring repatriation to Australia. An hour or so later 7 Platoon (*Lt IR Hosie*) was in an ambush on a track running parallel to the Song Rai (2) when a squad size group entered the ambush and were engaged by a bank of 10 Claymore mines, killing or wounding all of them. The Platoon Commander was wounded by an (un) friendly M79 grenade exploding some 50 metres from his position. On 14 February the last 5RAR contact occurred when 8 Platoon ambushed three enemy killing one (3).

Partly for his courage and leadership on Operation Bondi, Maj MP Blake was awarded a Military Cross.

On 15 February the Battalion returned to Nui Dat where it began its procedures to handover to 7RAR prior to returning to Australia on 27 February 1970.

8RAR Operation Hammersley: 10 February – 3 March 1970

Initially, the operation was controlled by HQ 1ATF (*Brig SP Weir*) and involved the securing of a Quarry for 17 Construction Squadron to win aggregate to rebuild Route 44.

On 10 February, C Company (*Maj D Rankine*) with a troop of tanks, a troop of APCs and a mortar section moved to secure NDP Isa and then conduct reconnaissance and ambush operations. At about 6.30 pm that day, 8 Platoon (*Lt CW Sinclair*) mounted in APCs was moving along a fire trail when the lead APC saw a number of enemy 200 metres away and moved to engage them. The Platoon dismounted but an APC hit an M16 mine and the contact was terminated.

On 13 February, 9 Platoon (*2Lt PJ Lauder*) was inserted into an ambush position by 2 Troop A Sqn tanks (*Lt JH Brennan*) which dropped the Platoon a kilometre short of the ambush site then covered its remaining movement by engaging targets some distance away.

Two days later on 15 February, 9 Platoon was involved in one of the most significant ambush operations of the war, not only for its intensity, but also because it led directly to the destruction of *D445 VC Battalion's* main base in the *Minh Dam Secret Zone*.

The ambush site (see sketch) was on a hillock covering a known enemy track; during the day, the Platoon withdrew to the reverse slope of the hillock and occupied the ambush position at 7pm. As the

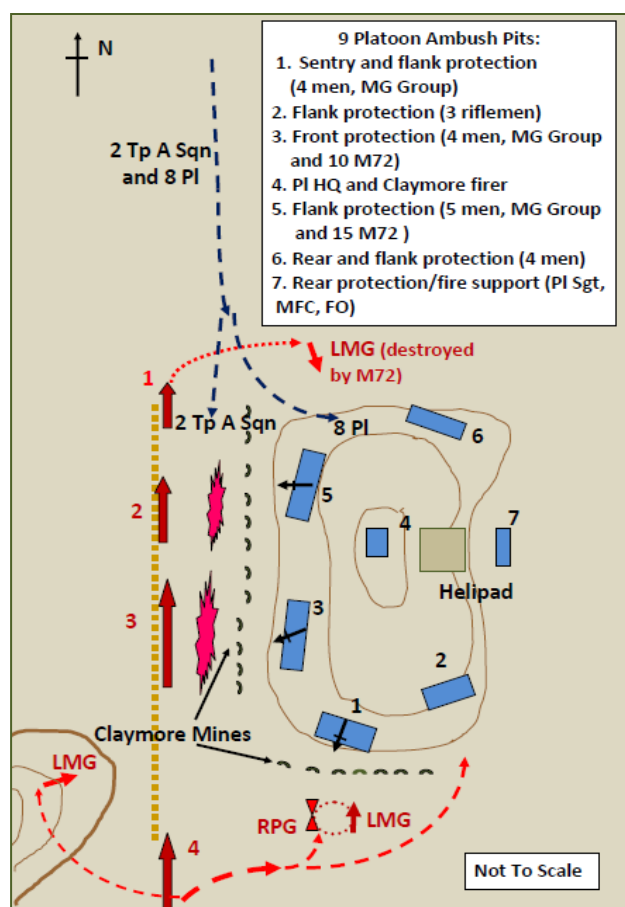
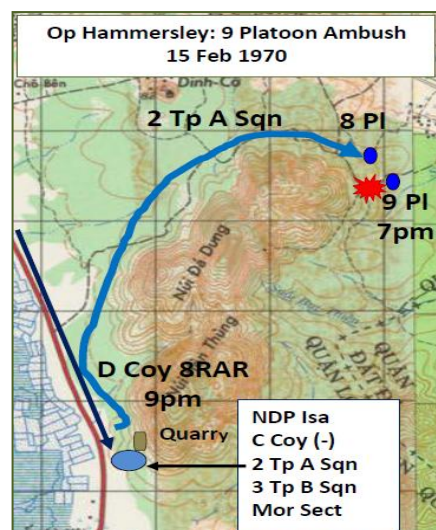
ambush was being set the Sentry group (**Pit 1**) saw a large group of enemy 200 metres to the south. The ambush was quickly occupied and the enemy moving in four groups was allowed to pass through the killing ground as shown on the sketch.

The ambush was then initiated by firing a bank of 15 claymore mines which essentially destroyed **Groups 2 and 3**. At the rear, **Group 4** was quick to react splitting in two; one established a RPG/LMG base which maintained a heavy rate of fire into **Pits 1 and 2** and the second, probing the Platoon's left rear flank wounding the three men in **Pit 2**.

The Section Commander (*Cpl RM Weston*) countered this probe with hand grenades and withdrew the wounded to the helipad where the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt BR Matthews*) had them evacuated and at the same time receive and distribute an ammunition resupply (two first lines were supplied during the battle).

The Platoon Commander then reinforced **Pit 2** with men from **Pits 6 and 7**. At the enemy's point, **Group 1** established an LMG post on the northern flank but it was quickly destroyed by an M72 from **Pit 5**. The enemy also positioned a LMG on the high ground to the south west. By now artillery (Field, Medium and Heavy) and mortar fire had been called by the Platoon Sergeant to good effect and the tank troop

had left NDP Isa, picked up 8 Platoon and broke into the ambush area about an hour later causing the enemy to withdraw to the south. The enemy comprising elements of the *Long Dat* guerrilla group supported by a company of *D445 Battalion* numbered about 100; half of them were casualties and about



a third killed including the *D445 Company Commander* with most of the dead being removed from the battlefield.

During the battle, D Company 8RAR (*Maj MC Peck*) as the Task Force Ready Reaction Company was deployed to C Company's position at NDP Isa which had been harassed by enemy light mortars at about 7pm.

On 16 February, it was decided that 8RAR would not replace 5RAR on *Operation Bondi* but concentrate most of the Battalion in the Long Hai Hills to find the enemy contacted by 9 Platoon. Battalion HQ moved to NDP Isa and B Company (*Maj PM Jeffrey*) to ambush in the gap between the hills east of Isa; D Company moved to the northern slopes of the hills while A Company (*Maj VN Murphy*) remained at Nui Dat.

Assault on the Minh Dam Base

By 18 February CO 8RAR (*Lt Col KJ O'Neill*) sent C and D Companies, supported by tanks and APCs to search to the south and north respectively of where B Company was ambushing.

By late morning C Company with 2 Troop A Squadron (*Lt JH Brennan*) and 3 Troop B Squadron 3 Cav (*Capt KC Ashman*) had moved passed the eastern edge of the Long Hai Hills when Company HQ contacted 3 VC capturing one who was a member of *C1 Company D 445 Battalion*. The PW provided information where a company size force was located some 200 metres away in timber (1).

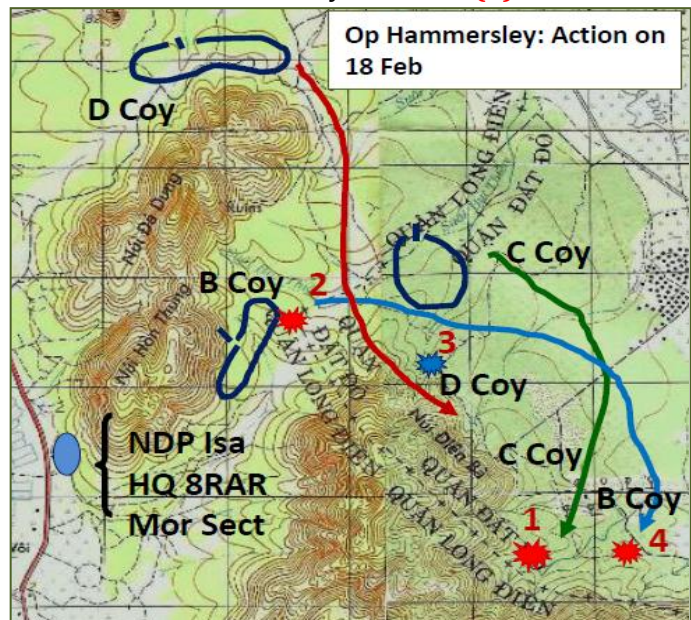
The Company in APCs advanced with two platoons up and ominously, the vehicles detonated several M16 mines; 30 metres into the tree line it contacted enemy in bunkers and an APC was hit by two RPGs. A heavy fire fight occurred and attempts to recover the damaged APC were prevented by heavy enemy small arms and RPG fire. Two badly wounded APC crew and five C Company soldiers were trapped in the burning vehicle and two men from an adjacent APC (*Cpl RC Macey, APC Crew Commander and Cpl BK Coe, C Company Section Commander*) ran to the disabled vehicle and forced open the rear door allowing the five Infantrymen to escape.

In the meantime a Tank (*Cpl GJ Gott*) attempted to tow the vehicle to safety and as Macey and Coe returned to rescue the crew, the VC threw a satchel charge into the vehicle, totally destroying it and killing the crew (*LCpl BJ Whiston and Tpr H Carlyle*).

Under cover of tank fire support the group withdrew to evacuate the seriously wounded which included the CSM (*WO2 PL Healy*) and to receive an ammunition resupply. At 1 pm the Tank Troop followed by C Company mounted in APCs and supported by artillery and a Light Fire Team successfully moved through the enemy position however, reports were received of more anti personnel and anti mines and the group were ordered to break contact and withdraw. As it did it was engaged by RPGs and small arms from enemy who had reoccupied the bunkers; the Troop Commander's tank was hit by 8 RPGs but it and its crew continued to function.

By 3.30 the force had broken contact, evacuated a further 5 wounded and directed artillery and airstrikes before the Tank Troops assaulted the position again to recover the burning APC from which the enemy were attempting to remove weapons. That mission was successfully completed by 7pm.

Earlier, B and D Companies were redeployed to establish blocking positions for the C Company contact. At 1.15 pm 5 Platoon (*Lt PN Thompson*) was heading toward the RV with the APC Troop (which had come direct from Nui Dat) when an APC was hit by an RPG (2) badly wounding the driver; he was replaced by the vehicle commander (*Sgt DW Davies*) who drove the vehicle to safety where 5 Platoon secured a LZ to evacuate the wounded man.



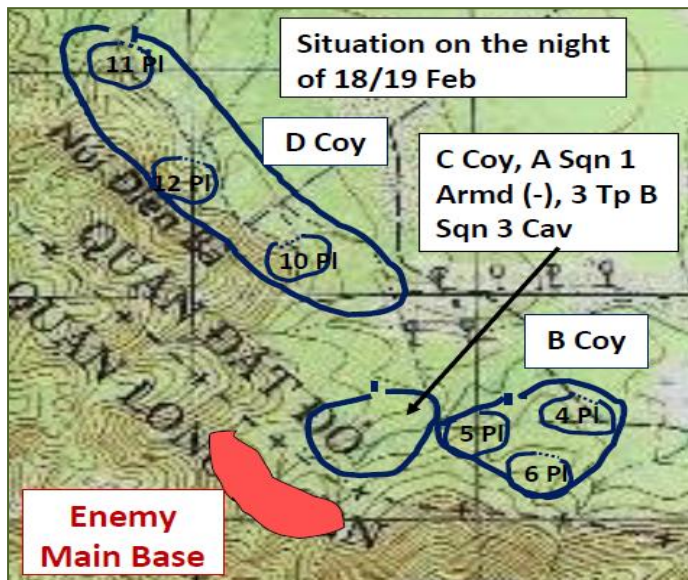
As B Company was moving past the D Company position, 11 Platoon (2Lt AJ Lombardo) was clearing enemy on a hill (3) when the APCs below mistook the Platoon for enemy and fired some 6000 rounds at it. Ten D Company soldiers were wounded, three seriously (*the Platoon Commander, Cpl DC Williams and Pte RA Pick*).

B Company arrived to support C Company at about 4 pm and 4 Platoon (2Lt DR Warren) had dismounted about 50 metres from the jungle edge when an APC next to the Platoon was hit by RPGs (4) wounding the Crew Commander (*Sgt DW Sheppard*), the Driver and 5 men from 4 Platoon including the Platoon Commander. The Platoon and APCs returned heavy fire and had commenced to move into the jungle where discovering a strong enemy defensive position, withdrew to reorganize.

The situation that night was: C Company and the Armoured Group in a night defensive position only 300 metres from the main enemy position; B and D Companies, supported by APCs, were in blocking positions on the flanks of C Company; a massive amount of artillery support was provided by Heavy (175mm and 8 inch) US Artillery at Nui Dat, Medium (155mm) US Artillery at the Horseshoe. In addition, the RAN Destroyer *HMAS Vendetta* was on station to provide Naval Gunfire Support. Clearly 8RAR was sure, that with this amount of firepower, plus Light Fire Teams and of course the lethal firepower of a squadron of Main Battle Tanks, it would be entirely possible to destroy what was clearly the majority of *D445 VC Battalion* it had cornered. Accordingly, CO 8RAR (*Lt Col KJ O'Neill*) issued orders

for a combined Infantry/Armoured attack for the following morning.

However, the Task Force Commander (*Brig SP Weir*) had a different view; from his experience as a Company Commander in Korea, he reasoned that the enemy were going to stand and fight and that because it was in prepared positions with ample cover from artillery in deep caves etc, the attack would most likely cause a serious number of casualties. As the Task Force had already 'booked' a USAF B-52 (Arc light) bombing attack, the Commander was now determined to use it before any attack was made on the enemy position. Consequently, early on 19 February, CO 8RAR was directed by the Acting Commander (*Col P Falkland*) to withdraw from the battlefield to allow the B-52 strike to



take place.

As anyone with any knowledge of enemy tactics knew, this meant *D445 VC Battalion* would certainly be allowed to escape to fight another day; which indeed it did shortly after, at some cost to the Regiment, especially 6RAR/NZ (see *Operation Gisborne*).

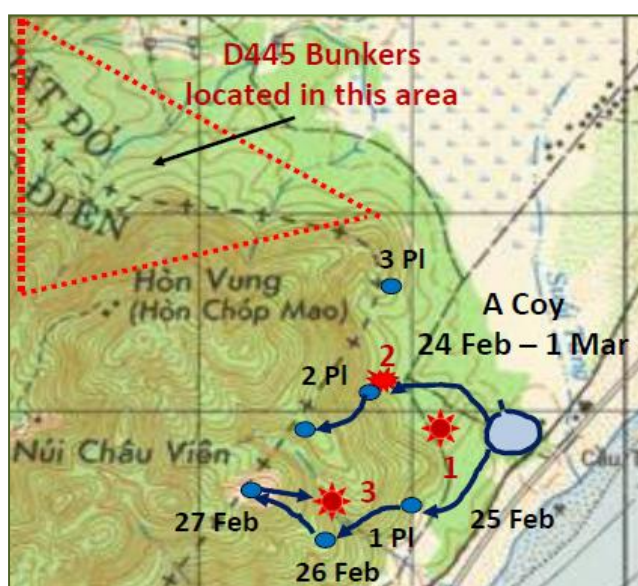
It is apparent that the withdrawal had already commenced when in the wee hours of 19 February a Sector ambush at Dat Do reported some 50 VC to the west of Dat Do moving north. The 8RAR companies withdrew to the vicinity of the Dinh Co Monastery to the north west of the Long Hais and perhaps in hindsight it may have been useful to have placed blocks on Route 23 between An Nhut and Dat Do. As it was, the main enemy force withdrew through where B Company had been

Typically, the B-52 airstrike was late and didn't occur until early on the morning of 21 February; it also did very little damage to the bunkers in the 400 metre square area of the main base camp. After that it was basically a matter of battlefield clearance and C Company cleared some 100 bunkers (of a total of 150) which were then destroyed by Engineers. The base had been occupied for an estimated 7 months which coincides with 1ATF's move away from Route 44 operations when 6RAR/NZ finished *Operation Mundingburra* in August 1969. *All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel!*

Black Saturday: 28 February 1970

While all this was going on, A Company (*Maj VN Murphy*) had deployed east to the Song Rai on 19 February and had patrolled west through the Light Green towards the Long Hais. By 24 February the company was positioned on the south east corner of the Long Hais and began to deploy platoons on reconnaissance and ambushing tasks. On 25 February a mine was detonated near Company HQ (1), killing the MFC (*Sgt DA Baker*) and wounding two others. That afternoon 2 Platoon (*Lt FG Harvison*) was establishing an ambush when enemy movement was heard by the sentry who saw three VC and engaged them with MG fire wounding at least one (2).

On 28 February, 1 Platoon (*Sgt WJ Hoban*) was tasked by the CO to ambush a creek to the east of the Platoon's 27 February night position. Wearing Flak Jackets the Platoon moved at about 100 metre/hour behind a two man Engineer 'Splinter Team' clearing the route for mines. At about 11 am the Platoon had reached the ambush position where it had found a booby trapped M26 Grenade and called for the Splinter Team to destroy it. At that stage a water party was passing through Platoon HQ when one of the Engineers (*Spr TR Binney*) detonated an M16 mine (3) which killed his team member (*Spr RN Hubble*),



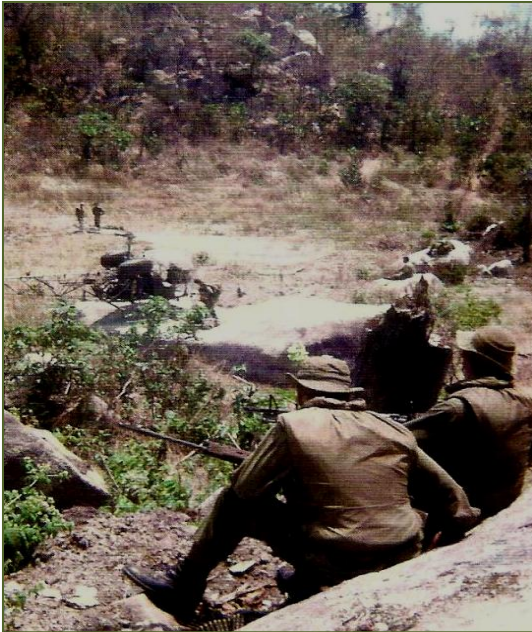
six Infantrymen (*Sgt WJ Hoban, Cpl RJ Jackson, Ptes MJ MacLennan, BJ Munday, TEA Pesonen and PM Richter*) and wounded another 13 one of whom subsequently died (*Pte GM West*). One of the three men not wounded (but in a state of shock) was the Platoon Stretcher Bearer (*Pte DJ Casey*), who quickly organized treatment of the wounded; the badly wounded *Sapper Binney* (with a broken leg and shrapnel wounds) also gave directions regarding clearing an area for evacuating the wounded. At that stage an Engineer Troop Commander (*Lt AP Thorp*) arrived in a Possum Helicopter, alighted on a large rock and took charge of proceedings. As the evacuation of the most serious wounded was occurring another mine was detonated killing one more (*Cpl JJ Barrett*) and wounding another three. The 8RAR RMO (*Capt RA Green*) was then flown in by

helicopter and tended the wounded while the survivors sat on rocks waiting to be taken out which wasn't complete until about 5pm.

A few days later the Battalion redeployed from the operation to a new AO further east on *Operation Hamilton*. The tragic events of 28 February notwithstanding, *Operation Hammersley* had been a brilliant success in terms of the crushing blow delivered to *D445 VC Battalion* and its base in the *Minh Dam Secret Zone*. 8RAR had set a new standard for close engagement with the enemy.

The following awards were made for Op Hammersley:

- **Military Cross:** Maj PM Jeffrey OC B Coy (see 18 Feb); 2Lt PJ Lauder OC 9PI (see 15 Feb).
- **Military Medal:** LCpl BK Coe C Coy and Cpl RC Macey 3Tp B Sqn (see 18 Feb).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Sgt BR Mathews (see 15 and 18 Feb); Lt JH Brennan OC 2 Tp A Sqn, Sgt DW Davies, Sect Comd 3 Tp B Sqn, Cpl GJ Gott, 2 Tp A Sqn, LCpl PJ Moore, 2 Tp A Sqn, Maj D Rankine OC C Coy (see 18 Feb); Spr TR Binney, 1 Fd Sqn, Pte DJ Casey, 1 PI, Capt RA Green, RMO 8RAR, Lt AP Thorp, Tp Comd, 1 Fd Sqn (see 28 Feb).

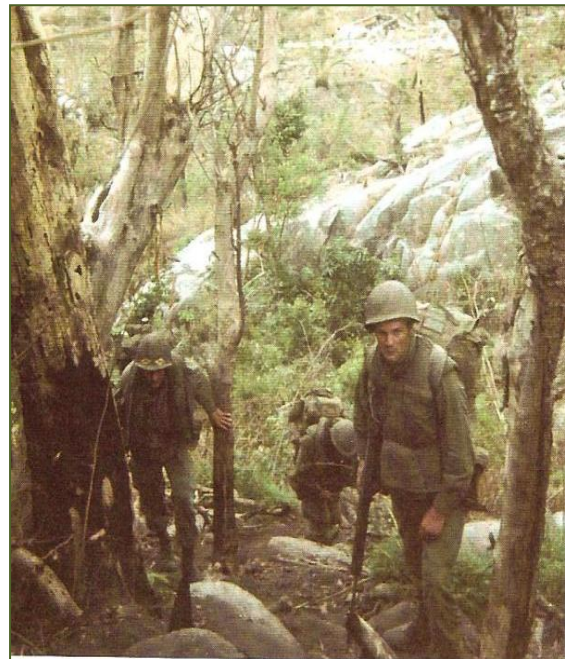


A scene from 'Black Saturday'. The Battalion commemorates this day each year.
Courtesy of 8RAR Association and Michael Prendergast



The Minh Dam Base looking from east to west
Courtesy 8RAR Association

9 Platoon searching in the Long Hais
Courtesy of 8RAR Association and Bruno Schaumann



C Coy 8RAR with tanks and APCs
18 Feb 1970
Courtesy 8RAR Association

7RAR Returns and 1 ATF continues to pursue D445 VC Battalion: Operations Gisborne (6RAR/NZ) and Hamilton (8RAR)

On 27 February 7RAR (*Lt Col RA Grey, CO and WO1 R Bandy, RSM*) replaced 5RAR which returned to Australia on *HMAS Sydney*.

After the opportunity was lost to do serious damage to *D445 VC Battalion* during *Operation Hammersley*, Commander 1ATF (*Brig SP Weir*) ordered a series of operations in the north and east of the Province to attempt to close with the elusive enemy.

While 8RAR was in the Long Hais, 6RAR/NZ had, been on *Operation Napier* in the area of the Courtenay Rubber Plantation since 10 January. On 28 February, instead of returning to Nui Dat, the Battalion was reassigned to an operation specifically against *D445 VC Battalion* in the centre of the Province, ie *Operation Gisborne* (28 February-10 March 1970) After *Operation Hammersley*, 8RAR was also reassigned to an operation in the centre and east of the Province, ie *Operation Hamilton* (3 – 24 March 1970).

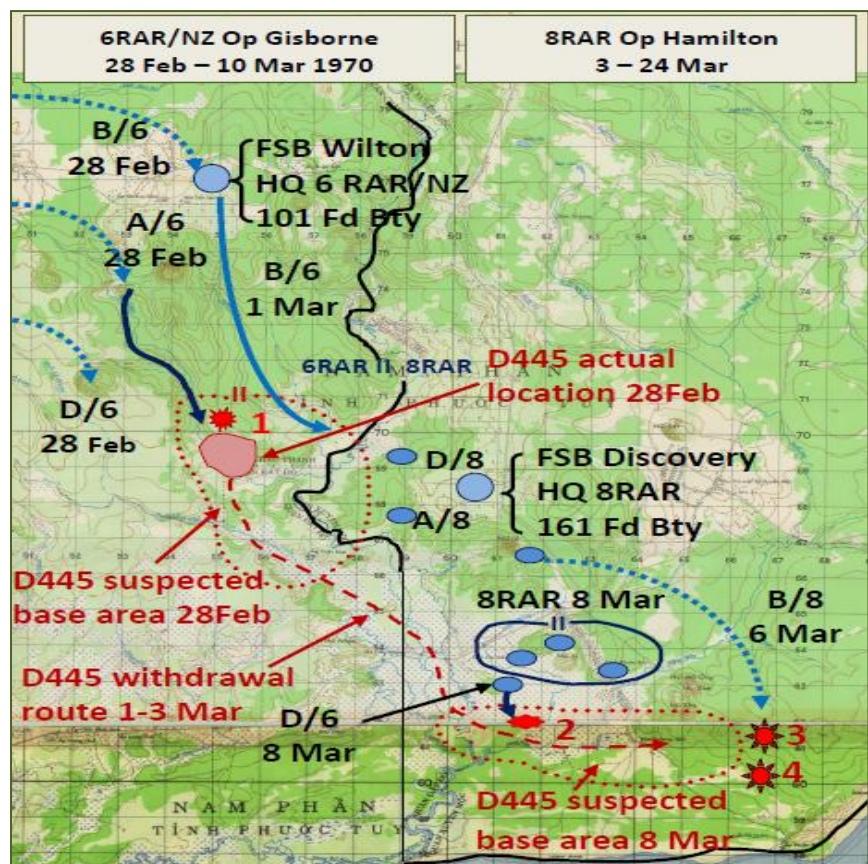
The situation on the map shows that on 28 February, the 6RAR/NZ rifle companies had deployed by air into the AO and FSB Wilton was established by road convoy. A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) began patrolling towards the suspected *D445* base area and late that afternoon the company contacted most of the enemy Battalion **(1)** (see [enlargement next page](#)).

The enemy then withdrew to the south east and established a new base area. On 8 March, D Company 6RAR/NZ (*Maj RM Gill*)

was placed under Operational Control of 8RAR and tasked to establish a blocking position to the south of the three 8RAR companies; in the process of doing so it contacted an enemy platoon in bunkers **(2)**, most likely a security screen on the western approach to the main position (see [sketch on page 110](#)).

Before that, on 6 March, 5 Platoon 8RAR (*Lt PN Thompson*) was investigating an old bunker position when a mine was detonated **(3)** killing two men (*Ptes J Bressington and SJ O'Dal*), seriously wounding the Platoon Commander, another soldier who lost both legs (*Pte GJ Harris*) and wounding four other men. One of those (*Cpl BJ Mills*) seeing the Platoon Commander was *hors de combat* took control of the situation, securing the Platoon and organising the evacuation of the wounded. Another wounded man (*Pte PT Wilson*) though severely shocked prodded his way to Pte Harris and applied tourniquets using his boot laces.

8RAR's hellish experiences with mines continued on 15 March when 6 Platoon (*2Lt JR Brien*) detonated a mine **(4)** (by the Forward Scout (*Pte DM Hazell*) who lost his legs), seriously wounding a Section Commander (*LCpl J Danyluk*) and wounding two others. The Combat Engineer attached to the Platoon



(Spr GW Miller), as he had done during the 6 March mine incident, cleared safe lanes to the wounded and then to allow their evacuation; in the clearing process for this incident he discovered another mine which would have put the Platoon at further peril.

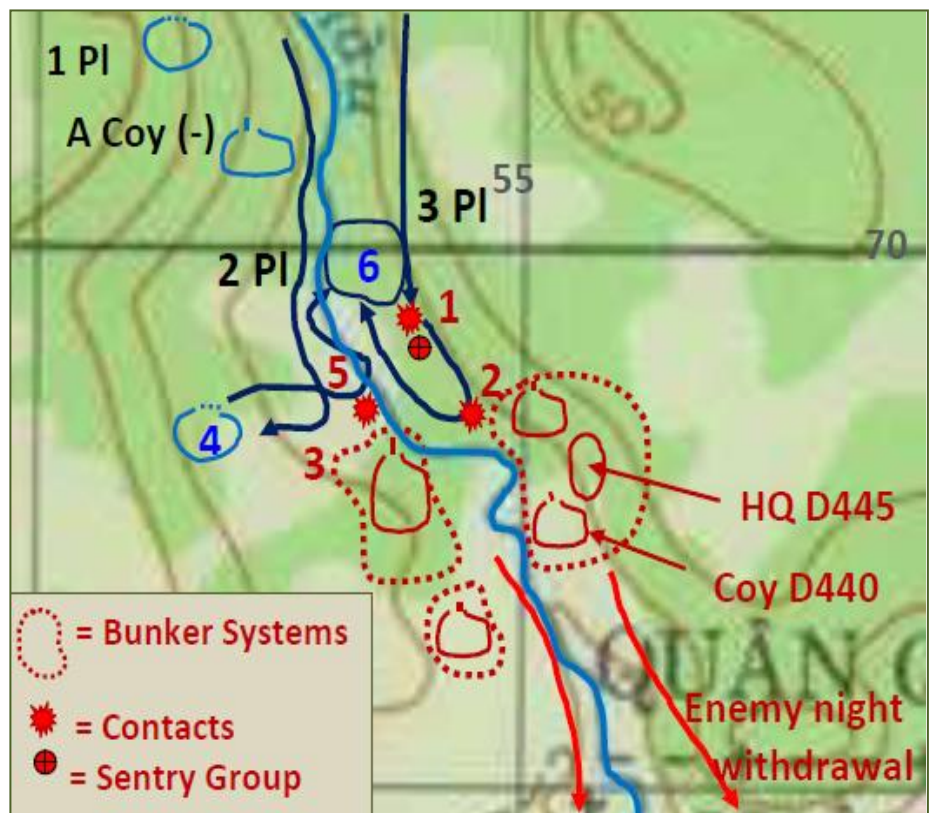
28 February A Company 6RAR/NZ Contact. Late in the day 3 Platoon (*Lt SG Thornton*) was patrolling along a ridge line on the eastern bank of a river when the lead Section (*LCpl PF Titchener*) was engaged by a sentry group (1) badly wounding the Forward Scouts (*Pte FN Wilson and Pte DR Sorenson*). After recovering and evacuating the wounded the Platoon had advanced a short distance when it was engaged with heavy MG and RPG fire (2) wounding a further 9 men including the Platoon Commander and two Section Commanders. The remaining Section Commander (*Cpl JC Fleer*) skilfully directed covering fire while he organised his Section and recover the wounded from danger; after extracting the wounded he then directed the withdrawal of the Platoon.

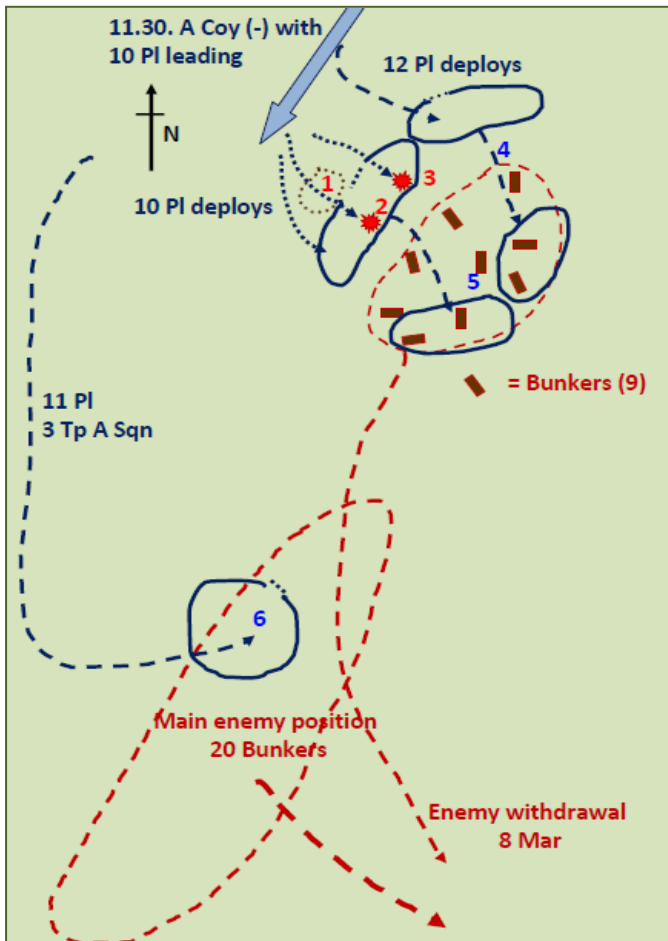
Earlier, 2 Platoon (*2Lt DP Kelso*) had been moving on the western side of the river when it discovered the signs of an enemy bunker position (3) and was ordered to withdraw to a night defensive position (4) while the Company concentrated for action the following morning.

When the 3 Platoon contact occurred an hour later however, 2 Platoon moved east towards it and contacted an enemy squad in the river; it then received heavy RPG, HMG and small arms fire from its right flank (5) wounding one man. Both Platoons then withdrew and linked up at about 8 pm to establish a night defensive position (6) and to evacuate the wounded. Light Fire Teams and artillery were used in support of the platoons' withdrawal and artillery engaged the enemy positions throughout the night.

The next day, A Company located two company size bunker systems on the west bank of the river while V Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*) discovered three bunker systems sited for mutual support on the eastern bank of the river.

The enemy which had withdrawn during the night, comprised the Headquarters and three companies of D445 VC Battalion and a company from D440 VC Battalion.





8 Mar D Company 6RAR/NZ Contact.

At 11.30 10 Platoon (*2Lt AG Valentine*) discovered freshly cut timber and a latrine, indicating bunkers were nearby (1); newly constructed bunkers were then sighted. With the Platoon deployed *2Lt Valentine* and a Section Commander (*Cpl M Wuttke*) moved forward to investigate and received a burst of AK 47 fire wounding both, *Wuttke* seriously (2). A Section was deployed to the left flank (*Cpl PJ Ashton*) which immediately came under heavy fire causing casualties to the MG Group which was the normal enemy tactic to pinpoint. The Number One (*Pte KA Duffy*) was killed as was the Number Two (*Pte RD Clark*) when he attempted to engage the enemy and finally the Section 2iC (*LCpl RE Power*) was also killed; they had all inadvertently entered a fire lane (3). *Cpl Ashton* used his toggle rope to retrieve the MG and then used it while leading his Section during the continuing assault by 10 Platoon to force the enemy from their position. The Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt RG Sheppard*) moved through the contact area distributing ammunition and relaying information to 12 Platoon (*Lt PA Jackson*) which deployed to the left flank (4). With the support of artillery used in a 'fire and movement' mode, both Platoons secured the enemy position (5).

In the meantime 11 Platoon (*Sgt N Rankin*) which had been moving on a flank to the west was joined by a Troop of Tanks and secured the main enemy position (now vacated) to the south west (6). Three men had been killed and six wounded during this fierce action.

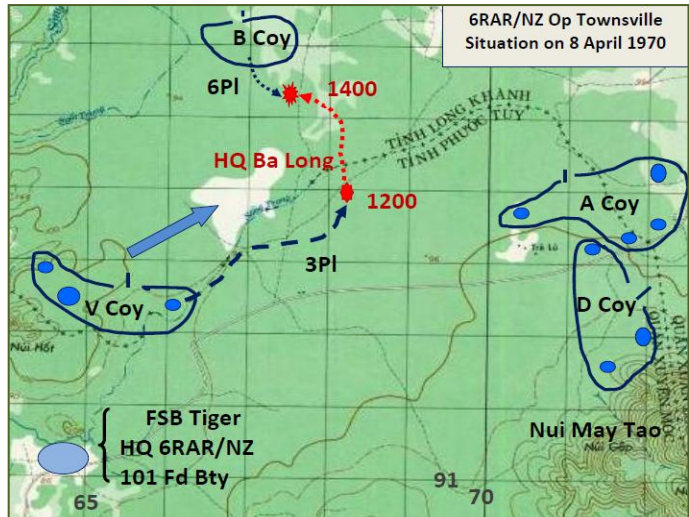
28 February 1970 was a black day for 8RAR and also for the Regiment; 8 men had died and 28 wounded, most so seriously they were repatriated to medical facilities in Australia. Initially however, the wounded were evacuated to the 1st Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau (*Lt Col MA Naughton*) where the combined number from the 8RAR mine incidents in the Long Hais and the 6RAR/NZ contact with *D445 VC Battalion* nearly overwhelmed the Hospital's ability to triage, operate, treat the wounded in intensive care and subsequently prepare them for repatriation. The fact that the Hospital managed to do this was a testament to the professionalism of the Army Doctors and Nurses, something for which the Regiment has been forever grateful.

The following awards were made for Operations Gisborne and Hamilton and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- Distinguished Conduct Medal: *Cpl JC Flear*, 3 PI 6RAR/NZ (see 28 Feb); *Cpl PJ Ashton*, 10 PI 6RAR/NZ (see 8 Mar)
- Military Medal: *Spr GW Miller*, 1 Fd Sqn (see 6 and 15 Mar).
- Order of the British Empire: *Lt Col MA Naughton*, CO 1AFH (see 28 Feb).
- Mentioned In Despatches: *Cpl BJ Mills*, 5 PI 8RAR (see 6 Mar); *Pte PT Wilson*, 5 PI 8RAR (see 6 Mar); *Sgt RG Sheppard*, 10 PI 6RAR/NZ (see 8 Mar)

The Ambush that helped to change the direction of the War

On 23 March 6RAR/NZ deployed on its last operation back to the north east of the Province, this time in search of *D445 VC Battalion*. In early April however, 1 ATF Signals Intelligence advised that the main enemy headquarters in the Province, *HQ Ba Long*, was in the parish and was continuing to transmit radio traffic despite the presence of 6RAR/NZ companies. By 8 April, A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) and D Company (*Maj RM Gill*) had been deployed by helicopter to blocking positions in the east and B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) to the north. V Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*) was to patrol from the west to flush out this important enemy HQ.



At 12 noon on 8 April, 3 Platoon V Company (*Lt HK Pope*) had approached a suspected enemy camp and a patrol was sent forward to investigate. There was no enemy sentry and the patrol made contact with a Platoon size group which immediately fled northwest. The enemy was in fact the command group of *HQ Ba Long* and in their haste to avoid capture had left HF Radio aerials dangling from a tree and a Morse Key, though the radio itself had been carried away.

Meanwhile B Company was in the middle of a resupply when it heard the contact to its south east and two Platoons were sent to ambush likely withdrawal routes. 6 Platoon (*Lt L McLean*) dropped their packs and ran to an ambush position previously sited in savannah country covering a track emerging from the jungle. After a few minutes a group of enemy appeared at the jungle's edge and cautiously moved forward into the ambush which was initiated when it was thought the command group had entered the killing ground. The contact report simply says: "10-15 VC contacted. Result: 3 VC KIA, 2 VC WIA; 1 AK 47, 1 SMG, 1 K54 pistol, quantity of documents, 2 US compasses and 1 transistor radio CIA".

The documents were quickly retrieved by an APC and delivered to the Intelligence Officer (*Capt MF Fairhead*) at FSB Tiger who immediately recognised that they were radio code books, ie 'One Time Pads' (See End Notes, paragraph 19). He quickly contacted the HQ 1 ATF Intelligence Officer (*Capt RJ Wickham*) on the secure (scrambled) radio who in turn came to the FSB in an Iroquois Helicopter and flew the codes direct to the US Military Assistance Command's (USMACV) Document Exploitation Centre in Saigon.

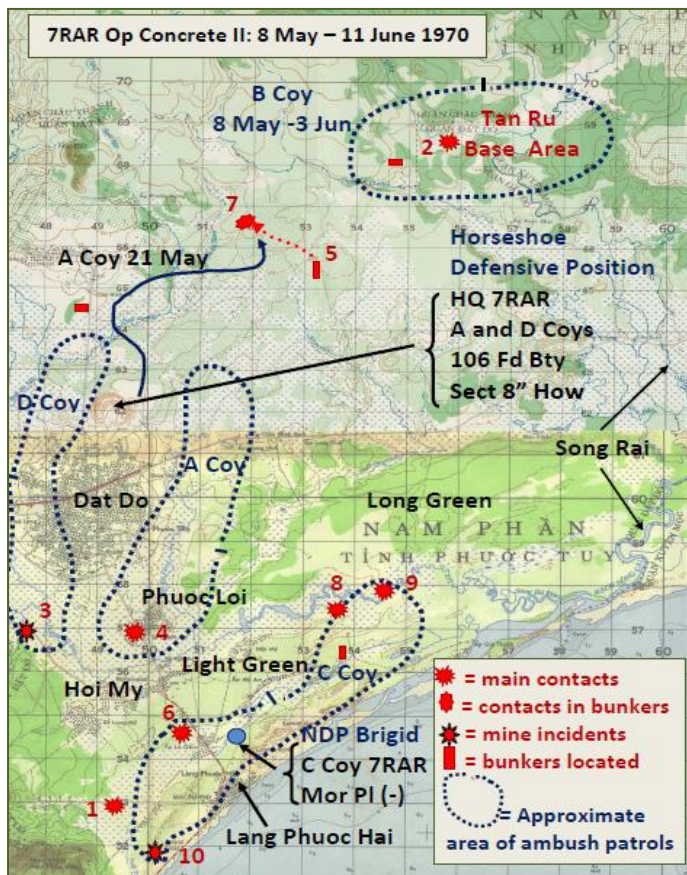
A minute sent a few weeks later from the USMACV's Intelligence Branch to the Commander Australian Forces Vietnam (*Maj Gen CAE Fraser*) included: "Of special note were documents of a cryptologic (sic) nature which were most valuable and have caused a decided impact on the enemy". In fact senior US commanders, including the Commander USMACV (*General CW Abrams*) were known to refer to it as "the biggest intelligence coup of the war".

The "decided impact on the enemy" was the US and ARVN invasion of Cambodia in May 1970 to destroy the senior enemy headquarters in the south, ie the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) (see End Notes, paragraph 20). Because the enemy remained unaware of the capture of the codes plus the speed of their exploitation (with the aid of computers), intelligence was gained from enemy radio transmissions which gave US Military Commanders, including the President (*Richard Nixon*), confidence that the operation was feasible. In terms of the primary mission of destroying COSVN however, the operation was a classic example of a breakdown in planning between Washington and the field commanders in Vietnam. The Commander USMACV was well aware that "major COSVN elements are dispersed over approximately 110 square kilometers of jungle and the feasibility of capturing major elements appears remote". The immediate consequences of the operation were increased anti war protests in both the US and Australia, while the long term consequences were to prove catastrophic for the Cambodian people.

Chapter XII: Denial Operations

By May/June 1970 the enemy's local forces (*D445 VC Battalion* etc) were in bad shape and attempted to avoid contact with the Battalions, ie 2RAR/NZ (*Lt Col JM Church, CO and WO1 LA Williams, RSM*) which had returned for its second tour, replacing 6RAR/NZ in May; and 7RAR and 8RAR. The impact of the previous 12 months of operations had severely weakened enemy troop strengths and caused serious shortages of food, ammunition and medical supplies. Indeed *D445 VC Battalion* was probably at best 200 in number with the companies only 30-40 men strong. Even so, while 1ATF dominated the Province by day, the enemy continued to move relatively freely at night, particularly in and around the population centres. Main Force units such as *274 VC Regiment* and *33 NVA Regiment* had withdrawn from the Province and were waiting for 1ATF to leave before coming back.

Thus began a series of operations to attack enemy forces in and around Provincial towns and villages,



the first described in this book being 7RAR's **Operation Concrete II**. The operation commenced on 8 May with A Company (*Maj CF Thomson*), C Company (*Maj GC Skardon*) and D Company (*Maj NR Smethurst*) in firm bases at the Horseshoe Defensive position and a Night Defensive Position near Lang Phuoc Hai (NDP Bridget), ambushing the approaches to Dat Do, Phuoc Loi, Hoi My and Lang Phuoc Hai. B Company (*Maj GP Warland*) was tasked to continue searching for *D445 VC Battalion* in the *Tan Ru Base Area*. The first contact however, was by a patrol from the Recce Platoon (*SSgt C Rowley*) on 10 May (1). At about 8 pm the patrol was moving from its day 'lie up position' to an ambush when it contacted 3 VC moving towards Lang Phuoc Hai over open paddy, killing two (see also [End Notes, paragraph 21](#)). Two days later a patrol from 5 Platoon (*Lt PD Gibbons*) commanded by *Sgt GA Collins*, was returning from collecting water from the Song Rai when the Forward Scout saw about 10 VC sitting around an anthill (2) and engaged them at a range of 30 metres killing or wounding most.

Whereas the mine clearance of the Barrier Minefield was nearing completion (finally on

28 May 1970), there was nevertheless many mines and anti lift devices scattered around the villages on Route 44 and adjacent areas such as the Light Green and the approaches to the Long Hai Hills. These would continue to be dangerous to infantry operations as the 7RAR Pioneer Platoon (*Sgt TSJ Bourke*) was to find out on 12 May when it was tasked to destroy some VC bunkers near Route 326 (3). An M16 mine was detonated but didn't jump, wounding three soldiers including one seriously (*Pte GJ Edwards*) who lost both legs.

At about 8pm on 13 May, A Company contacted a VC squad attempting to enter Phuoc Loi killing one who was a Section Commander from *D445 Battalion Recce Platoon* (4). On 17 May the 7RAR Direct Support Light ('Possum') Helicopter was fired at and hit; when the Pioneer Platoon with a troop of Tanks reacted it located a recently vacated transit camp (5). The occupants proved to be from *C2 Company, D445 Battalion* which moved to a bunker system to the northwest and was contacted by A Company a few days later see (7).

At about 11.30 pm on 18 May an ambush patrol from 7 Platoon (*Lt MM Hughes*), commanded by *Sgt D Edmonds* was alerted to approaching enemy by barking village dogs and the flight of Plover birds. They were sighted at 250 metres and when 80 metres away were engaged by all platoon weapons including a 90 mm RCL. Three enemy were killed one of whom was a medic from *D445 Battalion* (6).

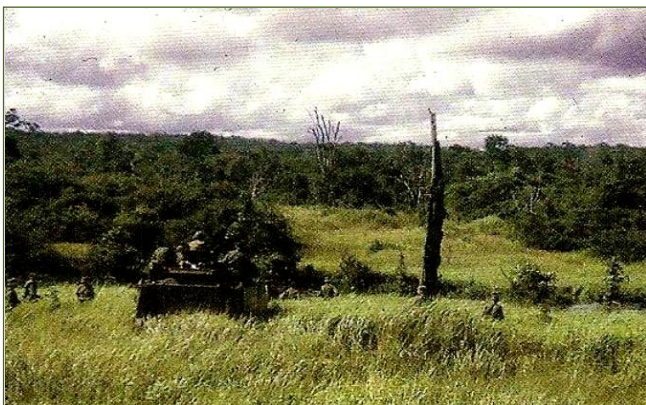
On 21 May 1 Platoon (*Lt C Johnson*), the Recce Platoon (*SSgt C Rowley*) in APCs and supported by 3 Troop A Squadron tanks (*2Lt GV Jones*) left the Horseshoe Defensive position and headed north and north east in search of the enemy company that had been previously located in the area. By about 1 pm, the group was closing on a bunker system located by the 'Possum' helicopter with the tanks leading and with 1Platoon searching for the right flank and the Recce Platoon the left flank (7).

As the force attacked the bunkers with grenades the enemy reacted as usual with RPG and automatic weapon fire killing the 1 Platoon lead section Machine Gunner (*Pte NC Crouch*), seriously wounding the Section Commander (*Cpl MR Powell*) and wounding another eleven soldiers including two tank crewmen. While 1 Platoon was withdrawing to evacuate wounded, the Recce Platoon had become isolated however, *SSgt Rowley* was able to rescue a wounded soldier and by neutralising bunkers with hand grenades was able to organize a withdrawal. In the meantime an APC (*Cpl JJ Swan*) moved forward to collect casualties despite being hit by RPGs; the damaged tank was recovered under intense enemy fire by an ARV (*Sgt DL McLean*) and the remaining two tanks, including the Troop Leader's, persisted in providing accurate covering fire at close range. Eventually the group was able reorganize some 250 metres from the enemy position where it was joined by HQ A Company and 3 Platoon which had reacted from the Horseshoe in APCs. The relieving force cleared the bunkers with Tank and Light Fire Team support finding five dead enemy and capturing three who were from *C2 Company and the D445 Battalion Recce Platoon*. Half of the twelve Australians wounded were serious requiring repatriation back to Australia. Another bad day in bunkers!



The Horseshoe looking northwest towards Nui Dat and the Nui Thi in the left distance. By late 1970, the position had been developed into a permanent Battalion base.

Photo courtesy of the 7RAR Association



A Company 7RAR soldiers dismounted with a Centurion Tank preparing to cross a water obstacle.

Photo courtesy of the 7RAR Association

At first light on 27 May, a 7 Platoon ambush patrol (*Sgt D Edmonds*) in the Light Green (near *Bribie*) spotted three enemy moving out into overgrown paddy field and were most likely heading for an RV with villagers coming out of *Hoi My* (8). The patrol left the ambush area and tracked the enemy through the paddy and in finding them, captured two and killed one. The group were *Hoi My VC Cadres* returning from jungle hides for sustenance.

At about midday on 31 May, 8 Platoon (*2Lt G Lindsay*) was patrolling through wet and overgrown paddy when four enemy were spotted and engaged at 250 metres. The Platoon then assaulted over some 800 metres through the paddy and over a creek toward high ground where the enemy had propped to return fire

especially at the MG Group (9). The enemy were all killed, wounded or captured and were carrying

medical supplies. They were subsequently identified as being from the *VC District (Long Dat) Medical Section*.

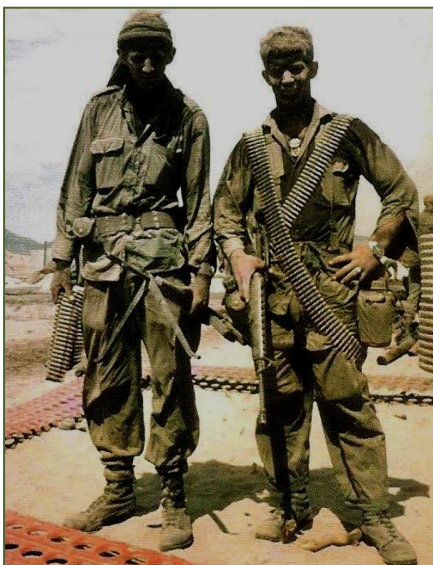
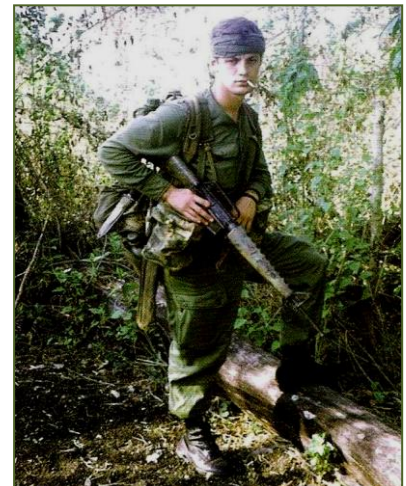
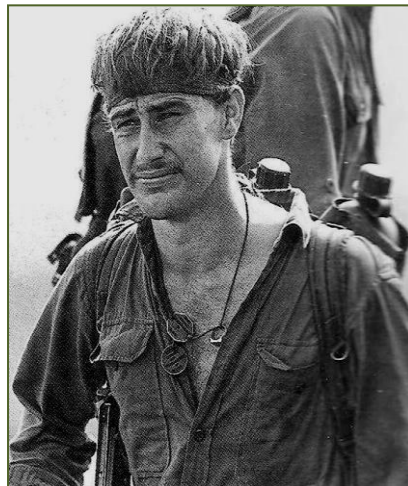
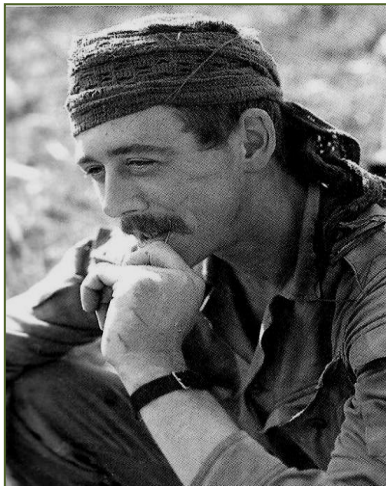
The Regiment's exposure to land mines continued when at about 8 am on 6 June a patrol from 9 Platoon (2Lt DW Kibbey) was returning from following a blood trail from a VC wounded in an ambush earlier in the day (3 am). An M16 mine was detonated (10) killing two men (Ptes SW Dickson and SG Larsson) while a third died of wounds some hours later (Pte PJ Navarre).

Operation Concrete II concluded on 12 June and was successful in denying the supply of rice to VC units, had further damaged his medical support and had revealed the enemy was rebuilding base camps in areas previously land cleared.

The following awards were made for Operation Concrete II and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

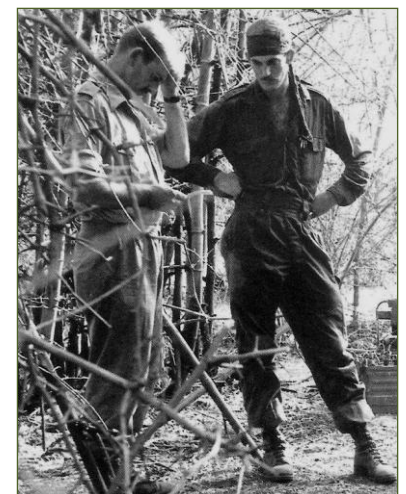
- **Military Cross:** 2Lt G Lindsay, OC 8 Pl (see 31 May)
- **Military Medal:** SSgt C Rowley, OC Recce Pl (see 21 May).
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Sgt TSJ Bourke, OC Aslt Pnr Pl (see 12 May); 2Lt GV Jones, OC 3 Tp A Sqn (see 21 May); Sgt DL McLean, A Sqn (see 21 May); Cpl JJ Swan, B Sqn (see 21 May).

**The Apache look was big in 7RAR circa 1970
Left to right: Cpl GR Bateman, Pte MM Hoenselaars, Lt MM Hughes**



Left: Cpl RJ Andrews and Pte NW Cooper. Pte Cooper was badly wounded in a 7 Pl contact on 30 April 1970 when an enemy bullet hit a M26 Grenade on a rifle adapter killing the soldier (Pte HJ Stanczyk) with another seriously wounded (Pte MD Berry).

**Right: Maj GP Warland and Lt PD Gibbons.
Photos courtesy of the 7RAR Association**



The Task Force Returns to Pacification Operations and Close Ambushing of the Villages

On 1 June 1970 Brigadier WG Henderson assumed command of the Task Force and introduced a change in tactical direction away from the large scale Reconnaissance In Force operations conducted during 1969 and the first half of 1970. The new commander reasoned that as the major enemy units had withdrawn out of contact, the emphasis should now be on conducting operations close to the villages, ie to prevent VC access to supplies and VCI in the populated areas of the Province.

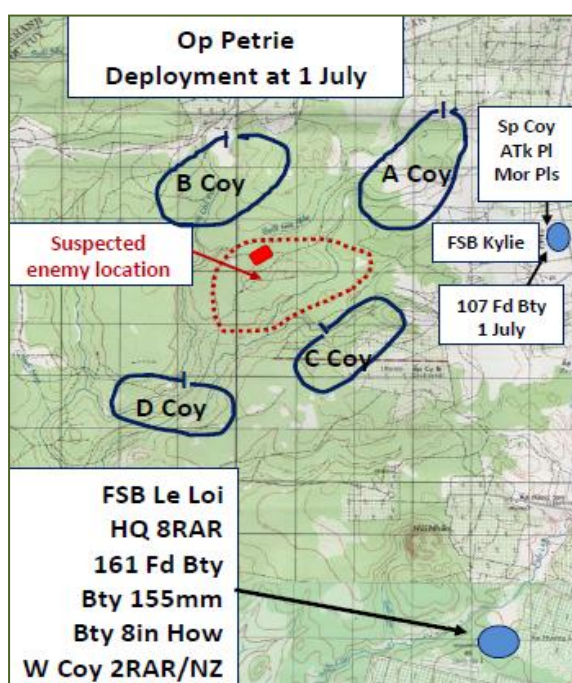
There had also been a change in command at Corps Headquarters (HQ IIFV) with *Lt Gen MS Davison* replacing the gung-ho *Lt Gen JJ Ewell* and in July he directed 1ATF to recommence Pacification Operations in the south east of Phuoc Tuy. Given the appalling casualties caused by land mines to the battalions in the earlier attempt to secure Route 44 Villages in 1969 this change was not particularly welcome. Neither was the suggestion by HQ IIFV that operations against VC bases in the Long Hai hills resume, an idea which was politely declined by the Commander AFV (*Maj Gen CAE Fraser*).

Operation Cung Chung

By the second week of June 1970, 1ATF had concentrated to commence a series of combined Australian – Vietnamese pacification operations with South Vietnamese local forces and local district headquarters throughout most of Phuoc Tuy Province. The first operation, called *Cung Chung I (Together)* involved all three battalions and aimed to prevent enemy access to the population centres. Each battalion was allotted an AO with 2RAR/NZ in the north west operating astride Route 15 from Baria to Phu My; 7RAR in the south east astride Routes 23 and 44; and, 8RAR in the centre astride Route 2 from Long Dien in the south through Hoa Long to Binh Ba.

Because of the nature of the operation there were few major contacts, however the objective of reducing enemy infiltration into the populated areas was achieved. In addition, new levels of joint operations between 1ATF and Provincial local forces had occurred.

Following the operation, 2RAR/NZ returned to Nui Dat for two weeks rest and retraining while 7RAR and 8RAR were deployed directly to separate operations, viz *Operations Birdwood and Petrie* respectively.



8RAR Operation Petrie: 29 June – 13 July 1970.

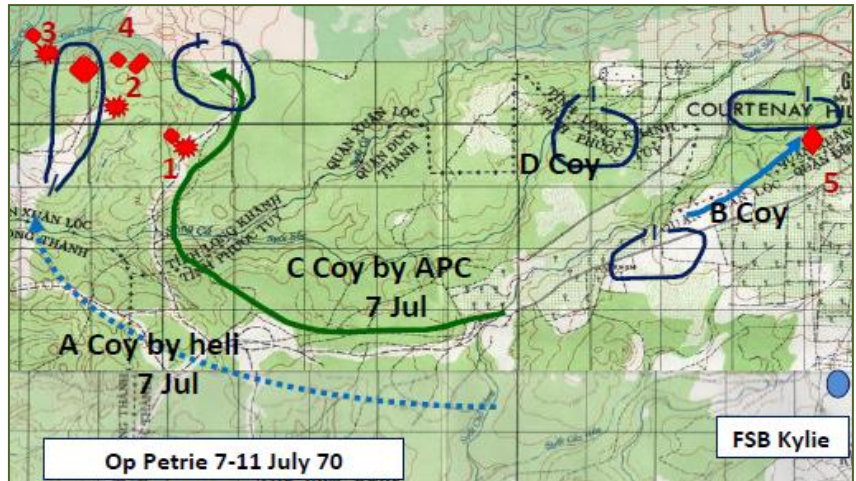
The initial objective of *Operation Petrie* was to locate and destroy *D440 Local Force Battalion* thought to be in the north west of the Province a few kilometres west of Route 2. 8RAR had developed very sensible tactics for dealing with enemy defensive positions (bunkers) located in close country, ie: **(i)** after detailed reconnaissance, deploy companies in ambushes on likely withdrawal routes from the enemy position; **(ii)** engage the position with field, medium, heavy artillery and air strikes; **(iii)** move against the position with Infantry/Tank groups to flush the enemy out into the waiting ambushes.

On 29 and 30 June, 8RAR, reinforced by three sections of mortars and W Company (*Maj EJ Torrance*) from 2RAR/NZ, deployed around the suspected location of *D440 Battalion*; the rifle companies establishing platoon and half platoon ambushes within the AOs shown on the map opposite. Major artillery assets were also deployed into FSBs Le Loi and Kylie and on 1 July after an intensive artillery preparatory bombardment, platoons from A and B Companies with tank support moved against the enemy position.

On this occasion the VC battalion had slipped away however, A Company located a large bunker system that had been occupied the previous day.

On 6 July B Company (*Maj PM Jeffries*) captured an NVA soldier who presented himself as a Hoi Chanh (returnee) and was from a logistic sub unit of 274 VC Regiment ; on 7 July, based on the information he provided, 8RAR redeployed further north to the Provincial Border to find a medical facility used by 274 VC Regiment.

A Company (*Maj GF Walker*) deployed by helicopter and established platoon ambushes while C Company (*Maj D Rankine*) moved by APC with tank support to patrol against the likely enemy position.



On 8 July, C Company with the Hoi Chanh and a troop of tanks moved to a suspected enemy camp and at about 6pm the escort group (Support Section) with the Hoi Chanh reported the bunkers were near (1). As the tanks began to assault, Support Section was pinned down by fire but with covering fire from the tanks was able to withdraw. The tanks with two platoons on the flanks assaulted the position destroying a number of bunkers however, because of dense vegetation and fading light the assault was halted. The following day a sweep revealed evidence of a number of enemy casualties.

This action had the desired effect because on 9 and 10 July A Company had two contacts with enemy from 274 VC Regiment withdrawing from the area. The first was by 2 Platoon (*2Lt AJ Clarke*) at about 8pm when it ambushed five enemy at a track junction (2) killing or wounding all of them.

On 10 July 3 Platoon (*Lt BD Darr*) was in the process of setting an ambush position on a track that linked two bunker systems (3) when two enemy were sighted taking a short cut between the systems. The sentry engaged the enemy killing one. It was discovered subsequently that the ambush had been positioned only 50 metres from each system and that it was achieved without detection was a measure of the battle craft skills of the platoon. Over the next few days A Company with a troop of tanks discovered a number of large bunker systems (4) all providing evidence of recent occupation by various elements of 274 VC Regiment.

Meanwhile B Company had located a number of food caches near the Courtenay Rubber in the area where 6RAR/NZ had discovered so many caches during *Operation Lavarack*.

On 13 July 8RAR returned to Nui Dat satisfied that its Battle Procedure for dealing with enemy in camps/bunker systems was successful.



Pte GD Gillam 2 Platoon, Signaler during Operation Petrie.

Photo by courtesy of Gordon Gillam



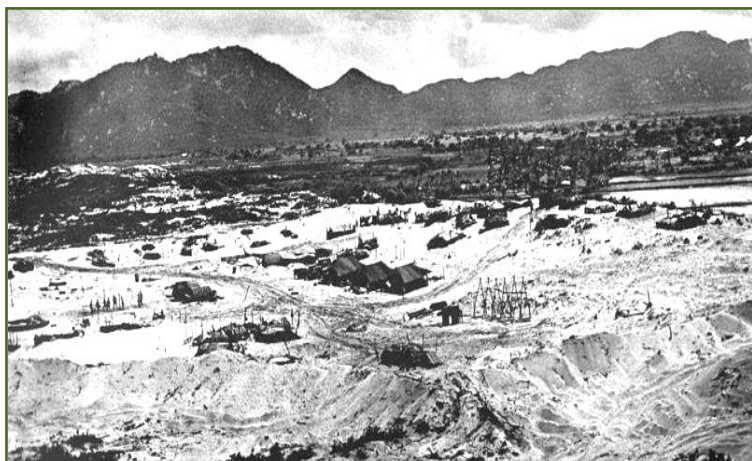
Artillery in action at FSB Le Loi. Gunners from 161 Fd Bty RNZA in the foreground and rear, a US 8inch howitzer. By courtesy of the 8RAR Association

7RAR Operation Birdwood: 29 June – 23 July 1970.

Operation Birdwood was a continuation of Cung Chung I and aimed at denying the enemy access to the villages adjacent to Routes 23 and 44. Although the Area of Operations allotted for the operation covered almost the entire eastern half of Phuoc Tuy Province, the focus of activities was pretty much in the same area as *Operation Concrete II* (see map on page 112). Battalion Headquarters, Support and B and C Companies commenced the operation based at the Horseshoe Defensive Position; A Company at NDP Brigid (adjacent to Lang Phuoc Hai); and D, Company at NDP Isa on the west of the Long Hai Hills. From these bases, platoon and section ambushes were deployed on routes leading to and from the Long Hai Hills to the population centres while company operations specifically against *D445 VC Battalion* were conducted in the Tan Ru Base area and either side of the Song Rai. The companies were also rotated to Nui Dat for a few days for a rest from the arduous task of sustained patrolling.

The operation was particularly successful in preventing enemy access to the villages with a number of minor contacts with local guerrilla units, the discovery of bunker systems, the destruction of mine and weapons caches and the realisation that *D445 VC Battalion* had been forced north to the *May Tao Base Area* where supplies were easier to access from Long Kahn Province (Xuan Loc) lines of supply. This long time opponent of the Regiment would however, be back in business late in 1970 (see *Operation Cung Chung III*).

The dangers of operating in the Route 44 area was still high with a number of booby trap and land mine incidents the two worst again being near Hoi My: on 14 July a booby trapped M26 (6 inches above ground with a short trip wire) wounded two C Company soldiers while the following day four A Company soldiers were wounded by an M16 mine. Five of the six wounded were serious requiring repatriation to Australia (*Sgt TM Bourke, Cpl RJ Andrews, Pte L Christie, Pte RG Ferrier and Pte GJ Masters*).



After 25 days of constant ambushing the battalion returned to Nui Dat with Support Company remaining at the Horseshoe.

NDP Brigid in sand hills some 500m north east of Lang Phuoc Hai. The village of Hoi Cuu can be seen in the right middle distance and to the west and south west, the Long Hai Hills. Courtesy of the 7RAR Association

A C Company patrol crossing a creek at the eastern end of the Light Green. Courtesy of the 7RAR Association



2RAR/NZ Operation Nathan: 13 July – 2 August 1970

Operation Nathan was a good example of the complex tasking that battalions were being given in the latter half of 1970. 2RAR/NZ was tasked to: **(i)** replace 8RAR for interdiction tasks on Route 2, with W Company (*Maj EJ Torrance*) based at FSBs Le Loi and Kylie – see *Operation Petrie*; **(ii)** provide protection for 1 Field Squadron Plant Troop's reconstruction of Route 2 north of FSB Kylie (Anti Tank Platoon); **(iii)** provide protection for Land Clearing Operations by 17 Construction Squadron (one rifle company on rotation based at NDP Marie); **(iv)** conduct reconnaissance and ambush operations specifically against *D65 NVA Engineer Battalion*; **(v)** deploy Boat Patrols into the eastern part of the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ); **(vi)** provide the Task Force Ready Reaction Force and Base protection (one rifle company on rotation); and, **(vii)** task and control Regional Force (RF) ambush operations within the 2RAR/NZ AO.

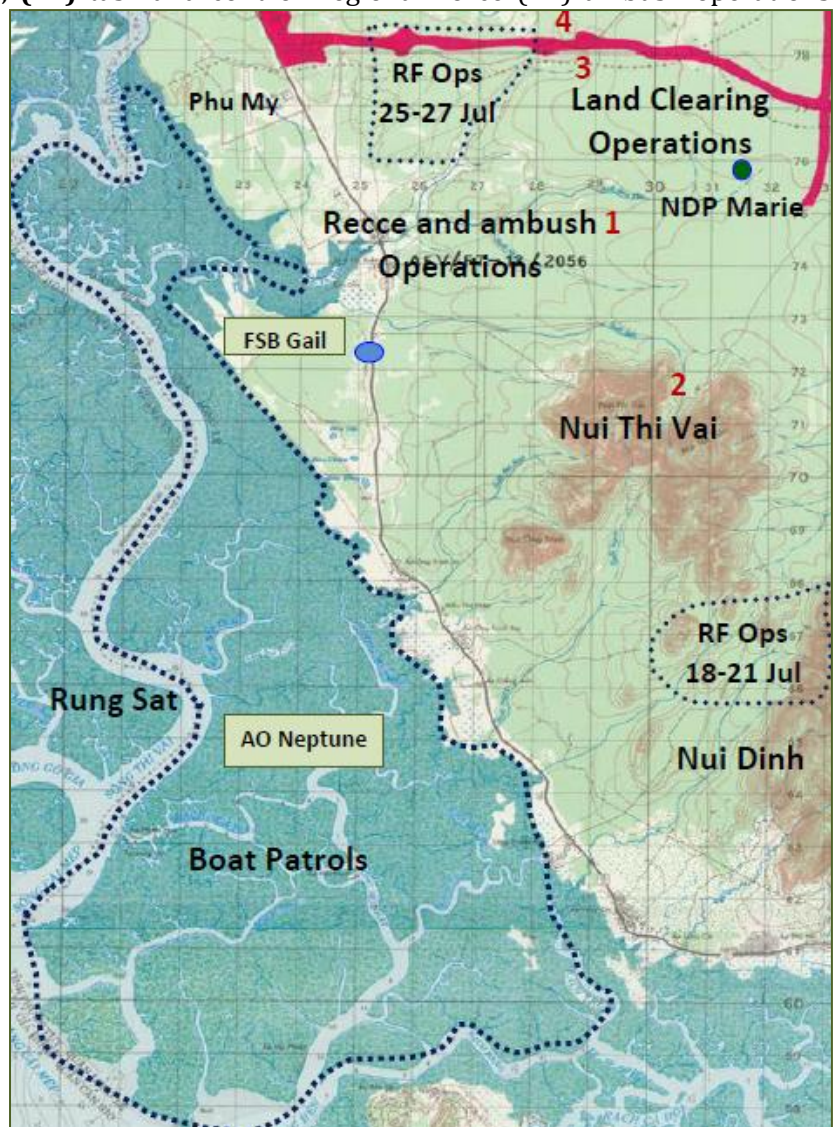
Bearing in mind this diversity of operations was to continue into 1971, the 'Troops to Tasks' equation was resolved by rotating companies and also allowing a 48 hour rest period at Vung Tau every four to five weeks.

Communications between FSBs Gail (Battalion Headquarters) and Le Loi (W Company) 20 Kms away were soon found unsatisfactory and at the request of 2RAR/NZ, the elements on Route 2 were placed under Operational Control of HQ 1ATF.

The Boat Patrol comprised: four Assault Boats with Coxswains from 1 Field Squadron; from 2RAR/NZ, an Officer or Sergeant Patrol Commander, three NCOs, eight Privates, three M60 GPMGs with tripods and five PRC 25 radio sets. A Vietnamese National Policeman was also allotted to each boat. The main task for these patrols was to intercept 'civilians' involved in enemy supply operations crossing the RSSZ from the Saigon River region.

The Battalion had a number of contacts during the operation with elements of *D65 Battalion* and

continued to do so as the operation extended into *Operation Cung Chung II* on 2 August. The primary role of this NVA unit was the manufacture and laying of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and booby traps, particularly around base camps, on likely LZs and on Fire Trails. Given the close proximity that patrols got to enemy camps before they were detected these mines had potential to cause a number of casualties. The first of such occurrences was on 18 July when 4 Platoon (*Lt PJ McNamara*) was following a well worn track with a half platoon patrol when it was engaged with small arms **(1)**; as the patrol went into a contact drill the enemy detonated three claymore type mines slightly wounding three men.



On 26 July 3 Platoon V Company (*Lt ARF Mackenzie*) had been following enemy tracks leading into the northern main re-entrant in the Nui Thi Vai (2) when it was engaged by enemy in caves with grenades and small arms causing shrapnel wounds to six men. After evacuating the wounded the platoon searched the caves and detonated two mines wounding a further five men.

A few days later on 1st August, a patrol from 1 Platoon A Company (*Lt WA Rolfe*) was checking a track when the Patrol Commander (*Cpl RW Henry*) and the Forward Scout were fired on by a group of enemy. The Platoon quickly concentrated with the Platoon Commander leading a Section to follow a blood trail. This led to a occupied bunker system (3) that engaged the patrol. Because of the rapid follow-up the enemy was forced to withdraw and was not able to properly prepare commanded detonated mines for firing; thus the speed of action had most certainly prevented casualties.

The Platoon Commander had also warned about the dangers of bunching in such situations and in one of those ironic twists of war, the following day when 1 and 2 Platoons (*2Lt PL Cameron*) were searching the bunker system a mine (or possibly a booby trapped artillery shell) was detonated. A Combat Engineer (*Spr WP Penneyston*) was killed, an A Company soldier mortally wounded (*Pte DL Thompson*) and both Platoon Commanders seriously wounded, having legs amputated.

A similar incident occurred a few days later in the same area on 8 August when the Anti Tank Platoon (*2Lt JE Alcock*) detonated a mine (4) wounding seven including the Platoon Commander. The Platoon Radio Operator (*Pte AJ Goulevitch*) despite being seriously wounded, continued to pass messages to enable a Dustoff to occur. He and four others were subsequently repatriated to Australia.

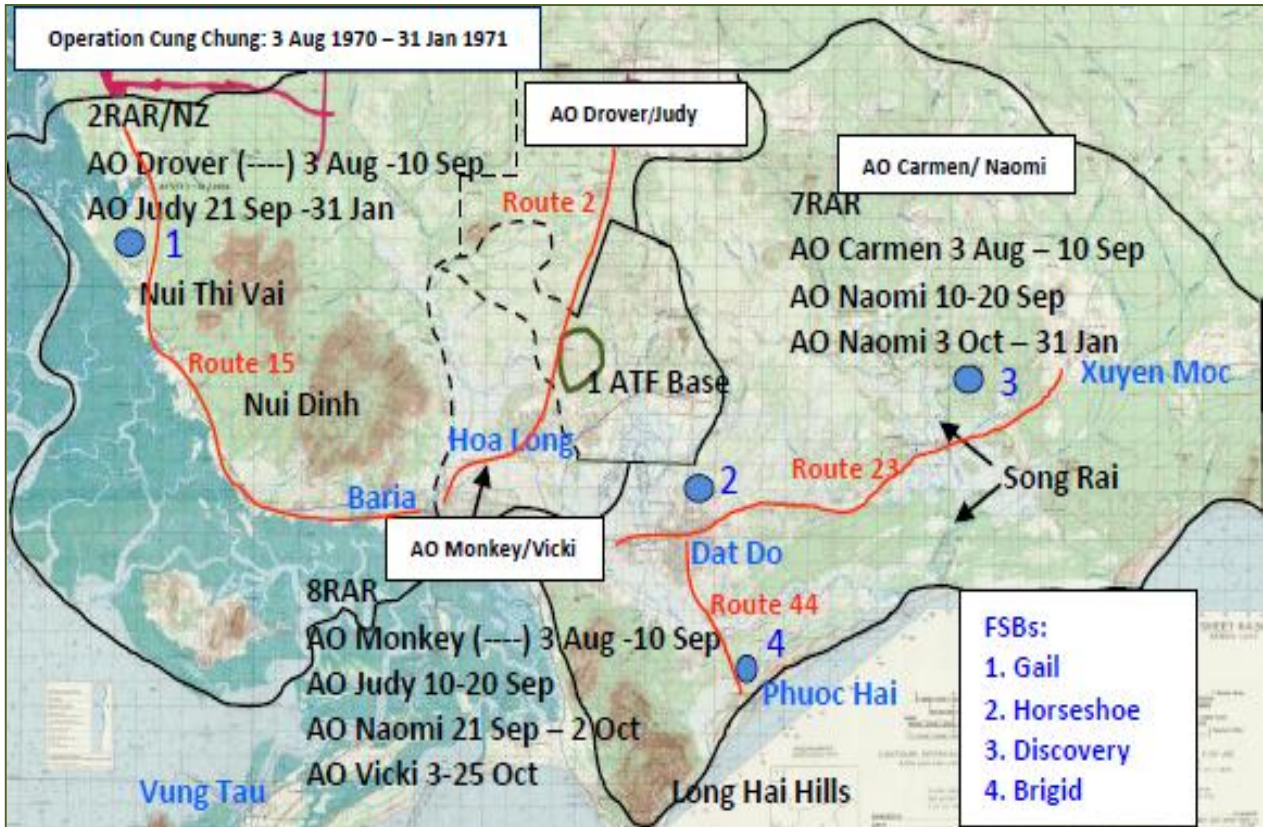


A 9 Platoon 2RAR/NZ Boat Patrol in the Rung Sat circa August 1970

Courtesy of the 2RAR Association

**The following awards were made for Operation Nathan:
Mentioned In Despatches:**

- **Lt ARF Mackenzie RZNIR, OC 3 PI V Coy (See 26 July); Lt WD Rolfe, OC 1 PI A Coy (see 1 Aug); Cpl BR Seeley , Sect Comd 1 PI (see 2 Aug); Pte AJ Goulevitch, ATk PI Radio Op (see 8 Aug)**



Operations Cung Chung II and III: 3 August 1970- 31 January 1971

The map of this very long operation shows that not only did the AOs change in both size and name but also the battalions moved from one to the other. This was to cover the periods when battalions returned to Nui Dat for rest and retraining, ie 2RAR/NZ 10-20 September and 7RAR 21 September to 2 October. 8RAR's companies were withdrawn from operations on 25 October to commence preparation for the Battalion's return home in early November and W Company 2RAR/NZ was also withdrawn from operations in November 1970.

8RAR and W Company RNZIR were not replaced and despite the placatory remarks by High Command in Canberra regarding the little effect that this would have on the two remaining battalions operational commitments, it of course meant that life for the men of the Regiment was about to become more arduous and perilous (see also End Notes paragraph 22).

The first phase of the operation (*Cung Chung II: 3 August - 20 September*) was basically a resumption of the denial operations conducted on *Cung Chung I*, ie with 2RAR/NZ astride Route 15, 8RAR Route 2 and 7RAR Routes 23 and 44. These operations were extremely arduous involving as they did intensive ambushing every night, security operations around the villages by day and reconnaissance in depth in search of enemy base camps. A number of operations also involved Regional Force (RF) units with the aim of making them more self reliant and able to provide the level of security required to keep the VC out of the villages. This of course proved an impossible task because many of the villages were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the VC's cause and it is more than likely that so were many of the Regional Force soldiers drawn as they were from those villages. Nevertheless, 7RAR in particular had a number of successful ambushes when a Section of RF soldiers was included in the patrol.

Despite the hard work there was not a great deal of success in this phase involving direct contact with the enemy however, this would change as the operation progressed through the later months and into 1971. There was also one spectacular ambush by C Company 8RAR on the night of 11 August.

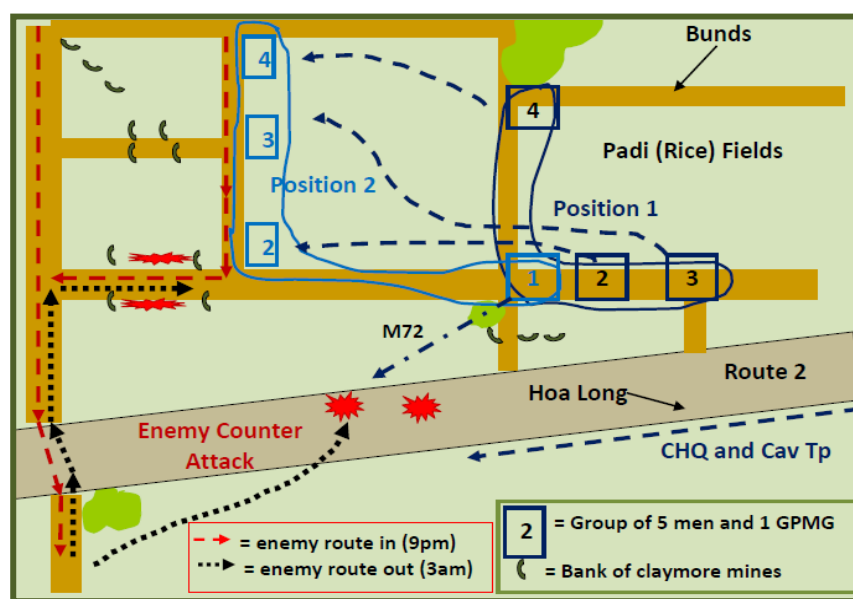
Anatomy of an Ambush: 8 Platoon 8RAR 11/12 August 1970

A good example of the success that can be achieved by skilful ambushing of enemy resupply routes near villages was demonstrated on the night of 11/12 August 1970.

Early on 11 August the HQ 1ATF D & E Platoon (2Lt JD Burrows) ambushed a twenty strong resupply party from the C41 Chau Duc Guerilla Unit, capturing all its food packs. The party was returning from the VC sympathetic village of Hoa Long to the unit's base in the Nui Dinh Hills. Given the acute shortage of food in VC units at that time it was assumed there would be another run to Hoa Long and C Company 8RAR (Maj D Rankin) based at Nui Dat deployed in ambush positions on likely routes.

8 Platoon (Sgt CJR Sherrin) was the close-in ambush and the Company Commander had devised a very good deception plan to prevent enemy agents in Hoa Long giving warning to approaching enemy. The Platoon moved by vehicle from Nui Dat to Baria where it waited until dusk and then debussed from moving vehicles as they returned to Nui Dat. The ambush was set by 7.45pm –see **Position 1**.

At about 9pm a large group of enemy were seen moving quickly and well dispersed on parallel bunds



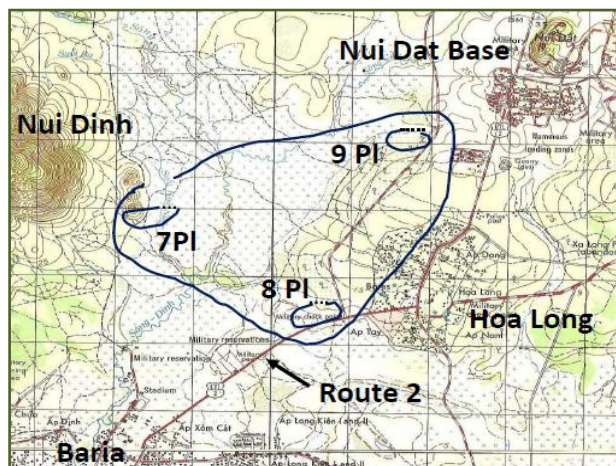
towards Hoa Long. The Platoon Commander made an astute decision; in reasoning they would most likely return on the same route, he decided not to engage the rapidly disappearing enemy. He then redeployed the ambush to **Position 2** by about 10pm while at Nui Dat an APC Troop was placed on standby to support 8 Platoon.

At about 3am the enemy returned in two groups of 30 moving about 30 metres apart and heavily laden with supplies. The lead group made a right turn towards 8 Platoon and the Commander of Group 2 (Cpl GF

Hassall) waited until the enemy were within 10 metres and then fired a bank of claymores followed by MG fire from Groups 3 and 4; seventeen enemy were killed in this exchange.

Group 1 (LCpl NA Sinclair) was responsible for flank protection and was required to do so when the enemy second group attempted to cross Route 2 to recover casualties. Group 1 engaged the enemy with claymores, MG and the Platoon's M72 rockets while illuminating the area with hand held flares. The counter attack was held and in the face of the weight of fire put down by Group I, the enemy were forced to withdraw. Aided by mortar illumination, the killing ground was secured and shortly after Company Headquarters and the Cavalry arrived sweeping through the enemy opposing Group 1, killing two more and capturing five. They were assisted by a 161 Recce Flight Sioux Helicopter (2Lt PA Bysouth) which illuminated the enemy with the aircraft's landing light.

As a result of this outstanding action some 1000 lbs of rice and other essential foodstuffs were captured from the Chau Duc Guerilla Unit.



7RAR *Cung Chung II: August- September 1970*

As can be seen from the map on page 120, 7RAR's AO was basically the eastern half of the Province . During the early phase of the operation companies generally ambushed around Route 44 villages. A Company (*Maj CF Thomson*) to the south operating from FSB Brigid; B (*Maj GP Warland*), C (*Maj GC Skardon*) and Support Companies from the Horseshoe and D Company (*Maj Alj Mattay*) patrolling the Long Green.

Late in August it became clear that elements of *D445 VC Battalion* were returning from the vicinity of the *May Tao Base Area* to more traditional base areas along the Song Rai (*Tan Ru*), south and east of Xuyen Moc and into Route 44 villages. C Company was deployed to the north east of the Horseshoe and was joined later by C Company 2RAR/NZ (*Maj AB Petersen*) which air assaulted into the *Tan Ru Base Area*.

The first major contact occurred on 14 August (1) when a patrol from 2 Platoon (2Lt *IM Dunn*) led by *Cpl RD McNeilly* ambushed seven enemy killing and wounding most of them. The patrol included a section from the Hoi My Regional Force while the enemy were identified as members of the *C25 Long Dat Guerilla Unit*.

A fortnight later (27 August) and some 25 kilometres to the east two platoons of B Company were involved in ambushes of the same enemy group (2). 4 Platoon (2Lt *K Metcalf*) had just set an ambush on a track running through high grass when the sentry challenged an unarmed



female; when the Section Commander (*Cpl SN Taylor*) stood up to see what was going on he saw two more armed enemy and engaged them to allow the sentry to withdraw into the ambush. The enemy returned fire wounding the Section Commander before withdrawing leaving one dead behind.

5 Platoon (*Lt PD Gibbons*) was in an ambush position 100 metres to the south of 4 Platoon when one of the escaping enemy ran into one of the MG positions; he was invited to surrender and in not complying was dispatched. B Company had moved 6 Kms in two hours that morning and clearly had done so undetected.

Later that day the Recce Platoon (*SSgt C Rowley*) was in the process of selecting a night harbour position when an enemy sentry was sighted and engaged (3). A number of enemy returned fire wounding a forward scout and a Section Commander (*LCpl NT Richardson*) who later died from his wounds. A further three men were wounded when an enemy round hit an M26 Grenade about to be fired from a rifle adapter. The enemy were later identified as being from *C2 Company D445 VC Battalion*; one of the many contacts with that enemy unit in this area over many years.

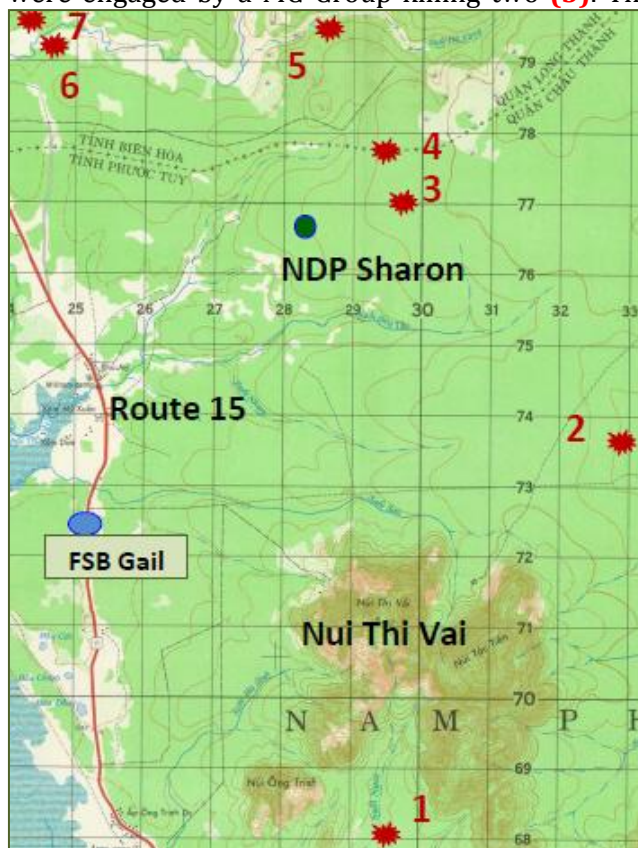
Minor contacts occurred in early September and then just before dawn on 14 September the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Sgt TS Bourke*) had a successful ambush on the outskirts of Dat Do (4). A sentry sighted two VC who were identified as being forward scouts and were not engaged. A few moments later four more enemy appeared and were engaged with claymores killing and wounding all six; the dead were identified as members of *HQ D445 VC Battalion* with one being the Battalion 2IC.

2RAR/NZ Operation Cung Chung II: August – September 1970

In late August 2RAR/NZ continued with operations in the same area and with the same mission as *Operation Nathan* (pp 118-119).

There were a number of contacts with elements of *D65 NVA Engineer Battalion* which had been targeted on *Operation Nathan*, the first being by 6 Platoon (2Lt PN Gibson) on 16 August (1). The Platoon was leaving a night harbour when the forward scout detected enemy movement which continued after the Platoon went to ground. Two NVA soldiers were engaged at short range killing one. Two days later 3 Platoon A Company (2Lt TJ Petrie) sighted two enemy and went into an immediate ambush (2); a short time later four local force enemy detected the ambush flank protection fired and withdrew leaving a Chinese PPS sub machine gun.

On 21 August, 5 Platoon (Lt GAC Chasling) was ambushing a track junction when four NVA entered and were engaged by a MG Group killing two (3). The remaining enemy withdrew and were engaged by



mortars and a few minutes later more enemy were detected a 100 metres from the initial contact and engaged by a section doing battlefield clearance. A few days later a W Company patrol discovered a pack and AK 47 in the area of the contact.

The following day, 4 Platoon (Lt PJ McNamara) was protecting Land Clearing operations and was in an ambush on a track (4) when a single enemy was detected and killed by MG fire.

On 27 August, 6 Platoon was following sign of five enemy through thick bush when the forward section (Cpl KN Johnston) came to a track junction and was deploying around it when five enemy came around a bend (5). Detection was simultaneous as was the firing of weapons with the enemy forward scout being killed. The enemy deployed on a broad front using a well executed fire and movement drill. The Section Commander then led an assault using fire and movement to clear the enemy despite being wounded during the assault. The enemy then withdrew using fire and movement.

On 10 September, 3 Platoon W Company (Sgt JB Yandall) had two successful contacts; the first at about 9am, occurred when the Platoon had paused at a track junction to recce a route around an obstacle (clearing) when three enemy approached (6). The MG sentry at the track junction engaged the enemy killing one. At about 3 pm and some 400 metres away (7), the Platoon was following a track when enemy movement was detected to a flank. After a few minutes the forward section fired at about five enemy killing and wounding all of them.

The following awards were made for this phase of Cung Chung and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross: Maj D Rankine, OC C Coy 8RAR (see 11/12 Aug) ;**
- **Distinguished Flying Cross: 2Lt PA Bysouth, 161 Recce Flt (see 12 Aug);**
- **Military Medal: Sgt CJR Sherrin, OC 8 PI 8RAR (see 11/12 Aug); Cpl KN Johnston , Sect Comd 6 PI 2RAR/NZ (see 27 Aug);**
- **Mentioned In Dispatches: Sgt TSJ Bourke, OC 7RAR Aslt Pnr PI (see 14 Sep); Sgt JB Yandall, RNZIR, OC 3 PI W Coy 2RAR/NZ (see 10 Sep)**

8RAR Operation Cung Chung II and III: 3 August -25 October 1970

The operation from 3 August to 11 September 1970 was aimed at denying enemy access to villages, especially Hoa Long. There was immediate success on 3 August when 3 Platoon (*Lt BD Darr*) was following sign on a track and the forward section heard noises around a bend; the section went into an immediate ambush killing three enemy who were probably a food resupply party.

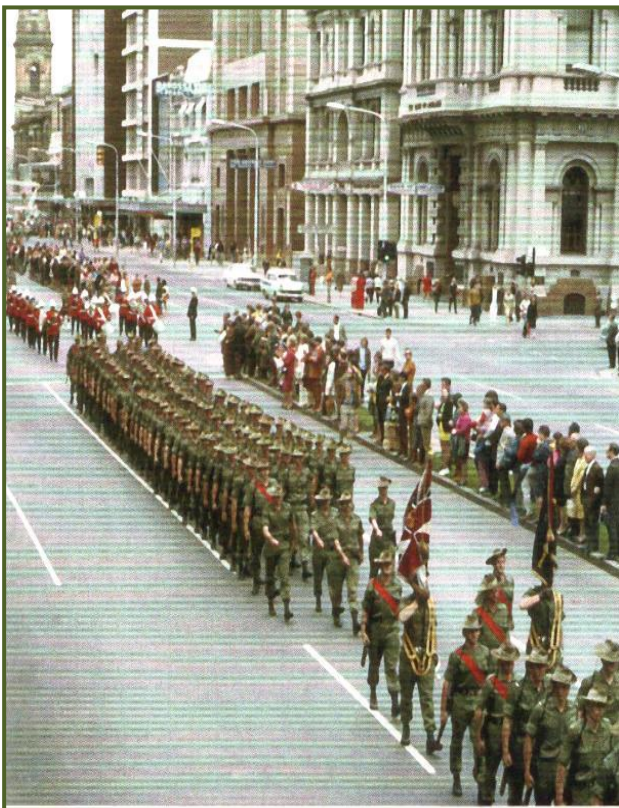
The annihilation of the *C41 Chau Duc Company's* resupply group by 8 Platoon (*Sgt CJR Sherrin*) near Hoa Long on 11/12 August was described earlier ([see page 121](#)) and further success in disrupting food resupply groups occurred on 6 September when a 7 Platoon Patrol (*Sgt GE Piper*) was ambushing the north east approaches to Hoa Long and detected and engaged an enemy squad hitting several.

By this stage of the Regiment's time in the war, technology in the form of ground sensors were used by companies during close ambushing; mainly to give early warning of enemy approaching the ambush position ([See also End Notes paragraph 23](#)).

On 3 October the Battalion less one company withdrew from operations and returned to Nui Dat. The last contact by an 8RAR company was at 1.30 am on 9 October when 9 Platoon (*2Lt PJ Lauder*) ambushed a group of VC in the same spot that 8 Platoon had met with such success in the wee hours of 12 August. Four enemy were killed and one captured - a NVA Officer who had served in the Viet Minh in the First Indo China War, deployed to South Vietnam in 1965 and assigned to a local (logistics) guerilla unit.

On 28 October 8RAR was presented with the Vietnamese Meritorious Unit Commendation primarily for its brilliant operation in the Long Hai Hills in February/March 1970 when it located and destroyed the *D445 VC Battalion* base in the *Minh Dam Secret Zone* ([See Operation Hammersley](#)).

The Battalion Main Body embarked on HMAS Sydney on 31 October and arrived in Brisbane on 12 November.



**Left: "Brisbane's Own" is welcomed Home on 12 November 1970
Right: Pte WL Bishop a Regimental Signaler with his heavy load.**

Photographs by courtesy of the 8RAR Association and (L) Paul Roberts, (R) Ron O'Connor.

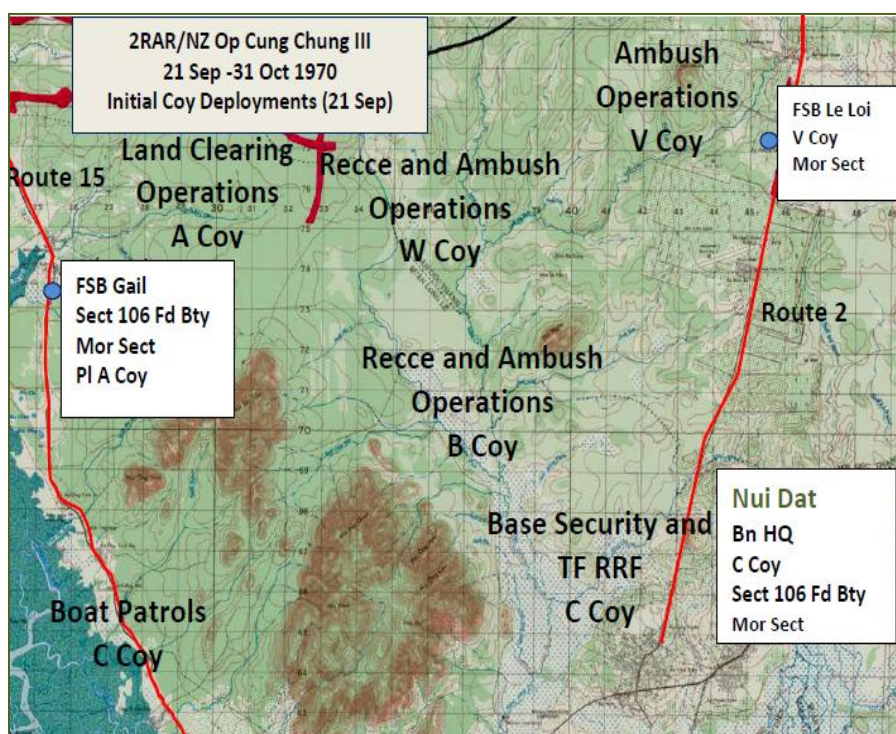


Operation Cung Chung III

After 10 days of rest and retraining, 2RAR/NZ resumed operations on 21 September. During this period 8RAR had assumed responsibility for AO Judy (see map on p120) however, W Company (*Maj EJ Torrance*) had remained in the AO to protect 17 Construction Squadron land clearing and had been under operational control of 8RAR. 7RAR returned to Nui Dat on the same day for 10 days of rest and retraining and was replaced temporarily in AO Naomi by 8RAR because it, less one company was to withdraw from operations on 3 October. The remaining company was withdrawn on 25 October in preparation for the Battalion's return to Australia on 31 October. (See also End Notes Paragraph 24)

The change in operational direction introduced by Commander 1 ATF (*Brigadier WG Henderson*) meant significant changes to the way in which battalions were employed, probably most markedly in their tactical deployments. 2RAR/NZ's tasks and deployment on Operation Cung Chung III for instance bore little resemblance to how battalions had operated only six months before as illustrated on the map:

As mentioned previously W Company at the start of the operation was protecting Land Clearing and when replaced by A Company, conducted recce and ambush operations for a few days before returning to Nui Dat for a rest period at Vung Tau. B Company went to the *Hat Dich* for recce operations; C Company provided base security, the Task Force Ready Reaction Force (RFF) and Boat Patrols in the Rung Sat. V Company based at FSB Le Loi was responsible to protect engineer works on Route 2 and to conduct security (ambush) operations around the villages. One platoon of V Company was deployed further north to an engineer NDP called Garth, adjacent to the Courtenay Rubber. Battalion Headquarters remained at Nui Dat.



This 'thin on the ground' deployment was a testament to the efforts of the battalions in 1969 and 1970 to clear the Province of most Main Force enemy units. There were of course still risks, in the east where *D445 VC Battalion* was returning to its traditional area of operations and in the west where VC units like *C41 Chau Duc* were still present. This reduced operational tempo also allowed companies to be 'rostered' for various tasks as for example 2RAR/NZ did for the two months in advance from mid December 1970 to mid February 1971. This allowed companies on average to complete 3 weeks on various tasks before a period of rest and retraining at Nui Dat/Vung Tau. How different was that to 6RAR/NZ some 12 months earlier when instead of returning to Nui Dat for rest and retraining after a 6 week operation, was directed straight to another 4 week operation to clear the *May Tao Base Area*! In February 1971, 7RAR produced a similar document which described locations and thus tasks by date.

2RAR/NZ Operation Cung Chung III: 21 September 1970– 31 January 1971

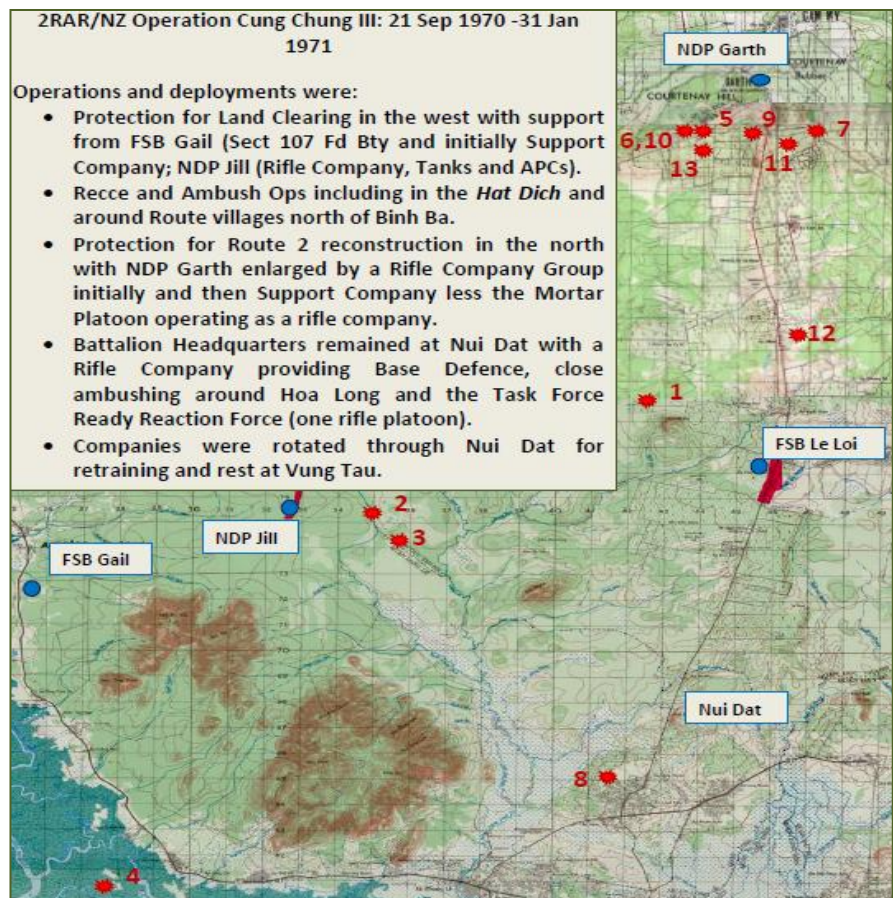
The early stages of the operation were relatively quiet though in late September/ early October there were some significant contacts with the *C41 Chau Duc VC Company*. The first of these was by a 3 Platoon V Company (*Lt AR Mackenzie*) ambush patrol (*Sgt DP Beattie*) which contacted an enemy squad early on 28 September (1). The ambush was sited on a VC track as it crossed a vehicle track and it was sprung by MG fire killing 5 VC and wounding several others which nevertheless engaged the patrol as it swept the killing ground. A Light Fire Team was used to force the remaining enemy to withdraw.

C Company (*Maj AB Petersen*) had been following the tracks of a large enemy group for several days which had led the company to a position on the *Suoi Cha Pha* about 1 Km north of where A Company 7RAR had its battle on 6 August 1967. On 8 October 7 Platoon (*Lt GE Bradd*) and 8 Platoon (*Lt CJ Purcell*) were patrolling on either side of the stream (2) when the 8 Platoon Patrol had a fleeting contact; the 7 Platoon patrol went into a contact drill and a few minutes later three VC were seen

running some 20 metres across the patrol's front and were engaged, killing two. A short time later 7 Platoon discovered a bunker system (28 bunkers) which had been vacated during the contact. 8 Platoon with a Tracker Team moved south east to follow enemy sign and at 3.10pm contacted an enemy sentry. The Tracker Team (*Cpl RS Harris*) initiated the contact and as it closed to protect it, 8 Platoon was engaged by small arms and RPGs from enemy who were preparing a defensive position in thick bamboo (3). One man was killed (*Pte GI Willoughby*) and another severely wounded in the initial burst of fire (*Pte RJ Draper*); despite the lack of cover the Platoon Stretcher Bearer (*Pte BJ Graham*) moved forward under fire to treat the wounded man who along with the Tracker Team leader, was later repatriated to Australia.

During November Boat Patrols in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) were discontinued as being an inefficient use of combat resources. In its place the Battalion developed measures to react fighting patrols to areas where an enemy presence had been discovered, especially by very low level VR by the Direct Support Sioux 'Possum' Helicopter. The patrol would be winched in from three RAAF Iroquois Helicopters with cover from a Light Fire Team. One such operation was occurring on 9 November when the VR 'Possum' received several bursts of AK 47 fire wounding the CO (*Lt Col JM Church*) and causing the aircraft to crash and burn (4). A few days later a patrol from C Company was inserted and discovered a platoon size enemy camp including above ground bunkers.

Meanwhile things were about to heat up in the northern part of the AO with patrols operating from NDP Garth, including by Support Company which was used as a Rifle Company for the last months of the



operation. The area had traditionally been a choke point for enemy logistic operations and a transit area for Main Force units such as *274 VC Regiment*.

On 11 November an Anti Tank Platoon section strength patrol (*LCpl BR Johnstone*) was moving to destroy a bunker found the previous day when it saw an enemy squad in a rubber plantation 250 metres away (5); simultaneously the enemy saw the patrol and withdrew through thick scrub and across a creek that had very steep banks. The Patrol moved along the creek, crossed it and swept back through where the enemy had regrouped but had gone leaving weapons and equipment behind. Documents identified one enemy soldier as a senior member of a *274 Regt* company.

On the night of 5 December two ambush patrols from the Assault Pioneer Platoon on opposite sides of Route 2 (6) (*Lt MJ Wyeth*) and (7) (*Sgt LJ Dennert*) contacted enemy with the former killing two enemy who had received a torchlight signal from a nearby house; they were identified as *Sub Region 4 Logistics* (Medical) personnel.

A week later A Company (*Capt CJ Brewer*) had the task of patrolling in the Hoa Long area. At 7.15 pm on 13 December, a six man recce patrol (*Cpl RW Kenny*) was moving to an OP when contact was made with some 15 enemy moving out of Hoa Long (8); with the M60 MG jammed, the patrol withdrew to fend off a possible counter attack which was achieved by the Patrol Commander firing 40 rounds from an M79 Grenade Launcher and by 90 mm RCL supporting fire from the remainder of 1 Platoon (*Lt PD Savage*).

On 14 December B Company (*Maj GD Hoffman*) relieved Support Company at NDP Garth and was quickly in contact with the enemy. At about midday on 15 December a recce patrol from 5 Platoon (*2Lt RS Heyde*) engaged a group of enemy (9) wounding at least two with one subsequently dying (found in a grave three days later). Documents identified *274 VC Regt*.

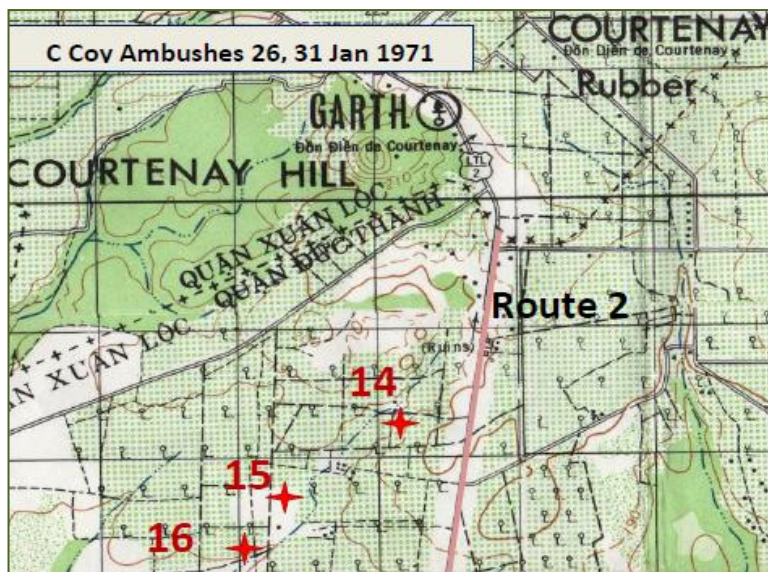
That same night 6 Platoon (*2Lt PN Gibson*) was ambushing in the same location as the Pioneer Platoon had on 5 December (see (6)) and were covering the approaches to the house mentioned in that contact. Movement and lights were seen over about an hour and then at 9pm some 20 enemy were heard moving slowly toward the ambush the location of which had most likely been passed by the occupants of the house (10). When the enemy were 15 metres from the MG pit (*Pte RK Hawkins*) the ambush was sprung with claymores and a long burst of very accurate MG fire; simultaneously the enemy engaged the patrol with grenades and small arms wounding two men including the MG Group Commander (*Cpl KN Johnston*) who continued to direct fire during the next 45 minutes under the control of the Patrol Commander who was fired at every time he gave an order. With the aid of mortar illumination and aircraft flares the patrol forced the enemy to withdraw leaving ten dead behind, all from a logistics resupply group.

On 17 December an ambush patrol from 5 Platoon (*Cpl PJ Healy*) was setting the ambush in a rubber plantation when an enemy squad was seen (11) and engaged killing three who were from *84 Rear Services Group*.

On 21 January, 2 Platoon A Company (*2Lt TH O'Neill*) was in a harbour (12) when a group of VC approached on a track running 30 metres passed the platoon. A fire fight began between an MG and the enemy with one being killed as he attempted to withdraw but was followed by a Section Commander (*Cpl BR Seeley*). A few weeks later a B Company patrol discovered two further bodies 100 metres from the contact and a Support Company Patrol found another body in the same area on 8 February. The VC killed on 21 January was identified as a member of *HQ Ba Long Province*.

By 18 January C Company had assumed responsibility for operations from NDP Garth and on 22 January a 9 Platoon ambush patrol (*2Lt IM Rafferty*) was about to set the ambush at last light near houses (13) when it observed what was most likely an enemy recce patrol searching for ambushes to avoid them later when moving to the houses for resupply. Good battle craft had allowed the patrol to occupy its position undetected by civilians and then with support from an APC section killed and mortally wounded five of the enemy who were all from *Sub Region 4* logistics.

This enemy unit was put under further pressure when another 9 Platoon ambush patrol (*Sgt JK Alexander*) contacted it on 26 January. The patrol had established the ambush after dark near two houses to its north and north east (14) and at 10pm heard movement of a small party move from one house to the other. The patrol was considering its options when two VC were heard approaching from the south and were engaged by grenade and rifle fire (the bank of claymores on that approach failed to detonate). With illumination from mortars, the patrol swept the contact area finding two dead enemy but with the search group being fired on



from both houses. The enemy in the houses were engaged with several escaping to the west leaving one left dead near one of the houses. At 8 am the following day the patrol intercepted a civilian vehicle carrying a wounded VC who led the patrol some 500 metre west where three more VC surrendered. The enemy were mainly local guerrillas who were working with *Sub Region 4* logistics.

On 31 January two patrols from 8 Platoon were ambushing near houses and at 7.15 pm the southern patrol (*Lt CJ Purcell*) observed enemy moving towards the northern patrol (*Cpl JJ Brander*) which was alerted to the movement. At 8.20 pm the northern patrol detected an enemy squad moving with torches along a track (15) which led into the ambush. Claymores initiated the ambush with five enemy killed and the remainder withdrawing back the way they had come. In the meantime the southern patrol had repositioned to ambush the route taken initially by the enemy and 5 minutes after the first ambush two enemy were contacted with one being killed. (16). Among the dead was a Political Officer from the transport section of *Sub Region 4* logistics.

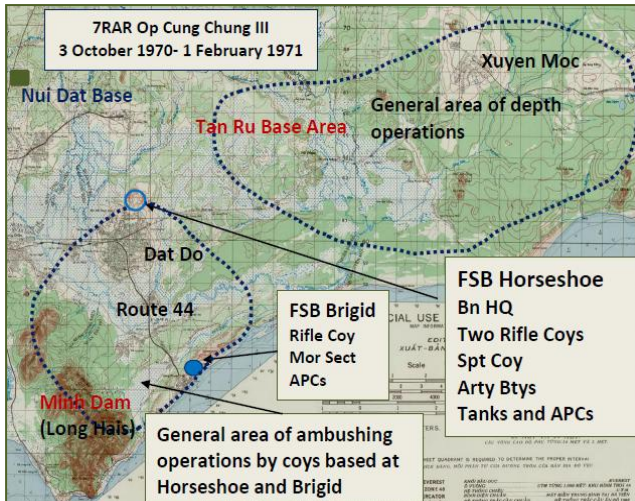
The following awards were made for 2RAR/NZ on Cung Chung III and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross:** 2Lt PN Gibson, OC 6 PI (see 15 Dec).
- **Military Medal:** Sgt JK Alexander, PI Sgt 9 PI (see 26 Jan); Pte BJ Graham, Stretcher Bearer 8 PI (see 8 Oct); Cpl KN Johnston, Sect Comd 6 PI (see 15 Dec); Cpl RW Kenny, Sect Comd 1 Platoon, A Coy (see 13 Dec)
- **Mentioned In Dispatches:** Pte RK Hawkins MG No 1 6 PI (see 15 Dec); Cpl BR Seeley, Sect Comd 2 PI A Coy (see 21 Jan).

Private EL Wallis, Support Company, 2RAR/NZ on sentry duty at Defensive Position 'Garth', adjacent to the Courtenay Rubber Plantation.

Photo by courtesy of Rick Wallis





7RAR Operation Cung Chung III: 3 October 1970 - 1 February 1971

For this operation lasting as it did for 122 days, two firm bases were established, ie at the Horseshoe and FSB Brigid near Lang Phuoc Hai. The Battalion deployed as shown on the map; the fourth rifle company was generally employed on depth (search and ambush) operations, reinforced from time to time by other companies when intelligence was obtained on specific enemy base areas.

In addition, sustained ambushing operations were done to protect the villages around Route 44 and to deny access to supplies, especially by enemy

located in the Long Hais Hills (*Minh Dam Base*). Given the length of the operation it was possible for sub units to develop relationships with the local people, identify behaviour patterns and establish methods for on the job training for Regional Force subunits which benefitted the planning and conduct of ambush operations.

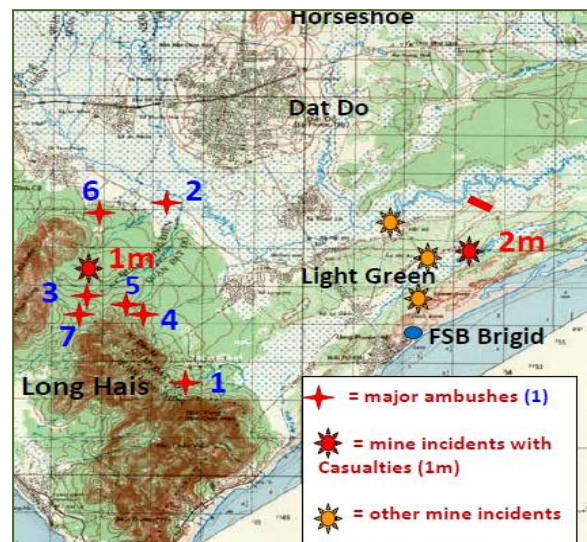
Ambush Operations. As shown on the second map, there were a number of ambushes on enemy routes to and from the Long Hais mainly against groups from the *C25 Long Dat Company* which was just about decimated by 7RAR during this period. Included in the successful ambushes were: **(1)**. A half platoon patrol from 4 Platoon (*2Lt K Metcalf*) deployed at night and ambushed by day in heavy secondary growth and jungle; at mid afternoon on the third day it ambushed six VC however, the ambush was sprung too early by the MG sentry and the majority escaped leaving 5 packs behind.

On 6 November patrols from A and C Companies had a series of contacts with a resupply group from *C25 Company*. The first at first light **(2)** was by an A Company section ambush (*Cpl GH Rousell*) when during a sentry change, four enemy were contacted. Two were killed and the others returned fire with automatic (M16) weapons at close range wounding two Australians, one (*Pte IW Catton*) having a leg amputated as a consequence. About 6 hours later, a half platoon patrol from 7 Platoon (*2Lt T McGovern*) had been lying in ambush for three days inside the tree line of a fire trail **(3)** when it contacted a single enemy wounding and capturing him. A few hours later the same patrol was establishing a new ambush position about a kilometre south east **(4)** when it engaged and killed a single VC who was most probably the last of the original four.

Mid morning on 27 November a patrol from 12 Platoon (*Lt RJ Wood*) was establishing a lie-up position **(5)** from which to ambush when movement was detected. Six VC were allowed to move closer and then engaged with most being killed or wounded; the enemy were identified as members of *C25 Company*.

Late on 15 January a patrol from 5 Platoon (*Cpl WR Hollings*) was ambushing a well used track near the base of the northern Long Hais **(6)** when a group of 20 plus enemy, heavily camouflaged and some wearing steel helmets entered the ambush; about half the enemy were killed or wounded but returned fire killing one Australian (*Pte MR Dufty*) and wounding three others including the Patrol Commander. The patrol was then joined by a section of APCs and returned to the Horseshoe.

The following day 6 Platoon (*Lt GR Wenhlowskyj*) ambushed another resupply group from *C25 Company* **(7)**. The half platoon patrol had been in a 'lay-up' position for four nights and had heard and observed



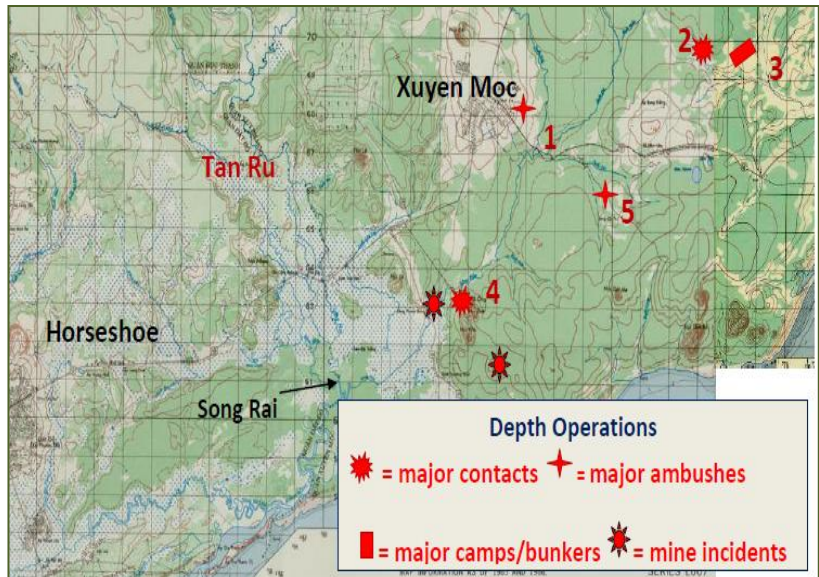
several enemy groups which prompted the patrol commander to re-orient the ambush. At about 7am some twenty enemy approached the ambush and were engaged when about half were in the killing ground; all were killed or wounded while the remainder moved to a flank and returned fire. One of the wounded VC also threw a grenade into the ambush killing the MG Number 1 (*LCpl E Halkyard*) and seriously wounding the Number 2 (*LCpl WE Rodgers*). A Light Fire Team was called to cover the extraction of the Patrol by helicopter as the terrain was unsuitable for APCs. In all over 25 members of *C25 Company* had been killed or wounded by these ambushes.

The ambushes near the Long Hais and in the Light Green were still at risk from mines; despite the clearance of the Barrier Minefield the enemy still had ample stocks of M16 mines and 7RAR was to identify the same defensive and offensive use of those mines as had been discovered earlier during the 'Pacification Operations' in mid 1969 (see page 84). By late 1970 the condition of many mines had deteriorated with some 'jumping' but not detonating and some detonating and not 'jumping'. There were two incidents in the latter category (1m) on 2 December and (2m) on 9 December causing a total of six wounded, three seriously requiring repatriation to Australia (*Cpl KA Pattle, Spr BA Fenwick, and Pte JL Boundy*).

Depth Operations. Company and Platoon operations to the east of the Song Rai were also successful and as expected, were mainly with elements of *D445 VC Battalion* which returned to the populated areas after retraining in the *May Tao Base* area.

Before that however, on 14 October C Company (*Maj GC Skardon*) had deployed to Xuyen Moc to conduct ambushes close to the village. As 7 Platoon (*2Lt T McGovern*) was moving into two half platoon ambushes it was warned by 8 Platoon that enemy had been sighted moving toward 7 Platoon and soon after talking was heard. A group of 3 or 4 VC then approached the ambush and were engaged (1) with three being killed all from the *Xuyen Moc Local Guerrilla Unit*.

The first major contact with *D445* was on 9 December when a 4



Platoon (*2Lt K Metcalf*) ambush patrol of only 11 men was mortared and then attacked by an enemy platoon size force (2). Two days earlier the patrol had observed three enemy and it was assumed they had not detected the ambush position. If they hadn't then someone else had because at about 7 am enemy 82mm mortars rounds were impacting a 100 metres from the position and then adjusted to within 50 metres. The patrol was then engaged by an enemy HMG (12.7mm) and an M60 MG from a position about 75 metres north. The patrol held its fire because it heard the enemy lining up to assault; however, the assault force went past the patrol which then engaged it with enfilade fire killing and wounding several.

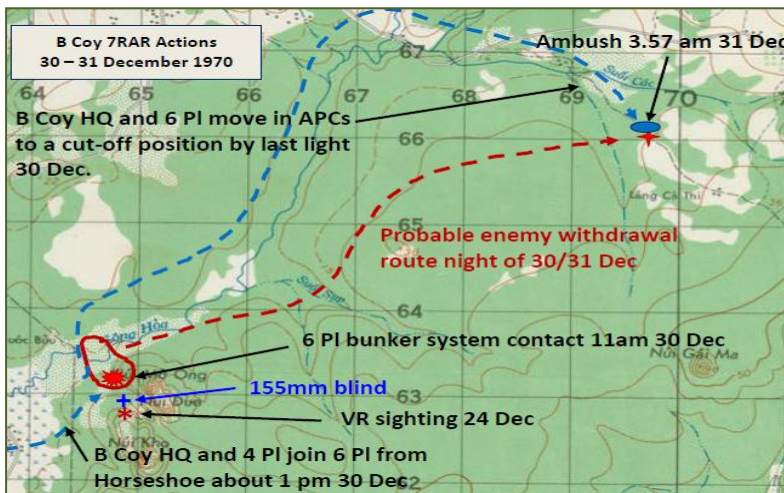
The enemy reorganised and attacked again however, with the support from a RAAF Light Fire Team were forced to withdraw but not before hitting one gunship forcing it to land. The Patrol Commander and a Section Commander (*Cpl KM Weightman*) were also wounded.

Given the high probability that large numbers of the VC battalion were likely to be in the area it is, in hindsight, a point to note that deploying section strength patrols was likely to be extremely hazardous. The fact that the following day, the rest of B Company (*Maj GP Warland*) discovered a battalion size enemy base a few hundred metres distant (3) with 90 bunkers (35 hectares) including anti aircraft and mortar positions and which had been recently occupied gives support to that proposition.

Closing on D445 VC Battalion.

On 24 December CO 7RAR (*Lt Col RA Grey*) while doing a visual recce in the Direct Support 'Possum' helicopter located sign of fresh bunkers in the jungle clad Nui Kho Hills (*) and on 29 December 6 Platoon (*2Lt GR Wenhlowskyj*) was deployed by APC from the Horseshoe to investigate the bunkers. About mid morning on 30 December the platoon discovered and destroyed a 155mm artillery shell which would have alerted the enemy because about a half an hour later the Platoon was engaged by heavy fire from the bunker system (4) located by the CO. Three men were wounded in the initial burst and typically included two from the MG Group the number one of which (*Pte A Lloyd*) though mortally wounded kept firing. The Platoon then manoeuvred to bring maximum fire to bear on the enemy position and in doing so another MG number one was wounded.

The Section of APCs supporting the Platoon (*Sgt GM Kemble*) arrived and moved to engage the enemy on the right flank before extracting the wounded to a pad for a Dustoff Helicopter Simultaneously, a Light Fire Team directed by the CO in the 'Possum' helicopter suppressed the enemy fire to within 50 metres of the Platoon's position causing the enemy to withdraw.



B Company HQ (*Maj GP Warland*) and 4 Platoon (*2Lt K Metcalf*) then arrived as 6 Platoon was securing the enemy position. 4 Platoon was tasked to follow up while Company HQ and 6 Platoon in what was an inspired move, travelled quickly in APCs to a known enemy route as cut-off.

The ambush position was established on the edge of a large clearing with jungle to the flanks and rear (5). The main firepower of the ambush was a Section of APCs (*Sgt ES Levy*) and a bank of 32 claymore mines. The troops were warned that the enemy would move at night with scouts well forward of the main group and at 3.57 am on 31 December that is what occurred. The APC Commander let a forward scout 20 metres in front of the main group pass through and when the killing ground was full, initiated the ambush with claymores followed by fire from .50 and .30 calibre machine guns on the Carriers. This fire was sustained to prevent enemy counter attacks on the flanks and attempts to retrieve casualties firing MGs and RPGs (11000 rounds of .30 cal ammunition were expended during the contact). A Porter Aircraft was bought on station to support the defence against attempted counter attacks with flares and remained until first light when the enemy withdrew.

About fifty enemy were ambushed with two thirds killed or wounded; there were no friendly casualties. Among the many weapons captured were six pistols indicating a command group was involved which was subsequently identified as the D445 Battalion 2IC, a company 2IC, a platoon commander, two platoon 2ICs and a company political officer.

In early January B Company deployed from the Horseshoe on ambushing operations at the base of the Long Hai Hills and the successful ambushes by 5 and 6 Platoons were described earlier (see page 129). The operation concluded on 1 February; it had been very successful in achieving its objective of denying access by the VC to the populated areas in south eastern Phuoc Tuy Province.

The following 7RAR awards were made for Cung Chung III and in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross: 2Lt GR Wenhlowskyj , OC 6 PI (see 30 Dec and 16 Jan)**
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal: Sgt ES Levy, OC 1 Sect B Sqn 3Cav (see 31 Dec)**
- **Mentioned In Dispatches: Sgt GM Kemble B Sqn 3 Cav (see 30 Dec)**

Chapter XIII: Thrown to the Lions

The Task Force Order of Battle becomes Raggedy

8RAR had returned to Australia and not replaced in October 1970; in November W Company, 2RAR/NZ had rejoined 1 RNZIR in Singapore and not replaced. In February/March 1971 there were to be many more significant changes that influenced 1ATF's operational capabilities. A number of key US Army units that had been responsible for the northern border region of Phuoc Tuy Province and north through Long Khanh Province were to withdraw. These included 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment (less one squadron), the 2nd Brigade 25th Infantry Division while US Army Heavy (8in) and Medium (155mm) Artillery had already withdrawn from 1 ATF TAOR in November 1970.

In February 1971 3RAR was to replace 7RAR leaving 2RAR/NZ as the sole 'on-line' battalion during the 7RAR-3RAR changeover. 4 Field Regiment would be replaced by 12 Field Regiment with one battery changing in February and the other in May which is when the Artillery Regiment was reduced to two batteries with 161 Battery RNZA handing back its leased howitzers and returning to New Zealand.

These changes were seen at the time as reasonable because of the enemy situation, ie low operational effectiveness of local forces eg, *D445 VC Battalion* and that Main Force units such as *274 VC Regiment* were unlikely to return to Phuoc Tuy in the foreseeable future. That basic assessment would in due course prove to be manifestly incorrect and by March 1971 both *D445* and *274* were back in the Province; shortly thereafter they were joined by elements of *33 NVA Regiment* which in the absence of the US Brigades was able to track south through Long Khanh Province. The mission for these rejuvenated enemy units was to disrupt the pacification operations occurring in the populated areas of Phuoc Tuy and especially the strategically important *Long Dat District* (Dat Do and Route 44 villages).

Indeed in late June 1971 HQ 1ATF became aware the *VC HQ Military Region 7* had been reorganised and that *33 NVA Regiment* "was tasked with protecting Baria Province and will confine itself to the northern and eastern areas of the Province" (Baria being the enemy's name for Phuoc Tuy Province). Things were going to get more difficult for the battalions in the under strength Task Force.

Operation Phoi Hop: 2RAR/NZ; 7RAR: 1 February – 2 May 1971

This operation (loosely meaning 'cooperation') took into account the 1ATF TAOR had reverted to the whole of Phuoc Tuy Province and was generally aimed at preventing enemy access to the populated areas. 2RAR/NZ concentrated operations in the north areas near the Courtenay Plantation with companies rotating at NDP Garth. 7RAR continued to operate in the east as it had done for the previous few months however, 'depth operations' were moved further out to the Province Borders in the north and north east (*May Tao Base*). On 21 February 7RAR transferred operational responsibility to 3RAR.

The operation started badly for both battalions with anti-personnel mines causing casualties. The first to occur was on 1 February when a half platoon ambush patrol from the 7RAR Recce Platoon (*Sgt RE Williams*) was occupying its ambush position some 5 Kms east of the Song Rai. The Machine Gunner (*Pte A Talbot*) rolled onto an M16 mine, lifted years before from the 1ATF Minefield. The explosion killed *Pte Talbot* and wounded four others including the Patrol Commander; one, (*Pte RB Patten*) died 5 days later from the dreadful wounds he received while two others were repatriated to Australia, the Patrol Commander and a Section Commander (*LCpl NJ Godbold*).

The second incident occurred when a patrol from 2 Platoon, A Company 2RAR/NZ (*2Lt TH O'Neill*) was preparing to ambush in the Courtenay Rubber about 2 Kms south east of NDP Garth. Late in the afternoon the Patrol Signaller (*Pte IS Crisp*) trod on what was estimated to be 1.5 kg pressure/electric mine which seriously wounded him (losing a leg) and causing the next man (*Pte PF Kowalski*) to step back and a minute or so later he was mortally wounded by a second mine which was probably a command detonated claymore. When the Platoon Commander arrived at the scene *Pte Crisp* was still conscious and trying to operate his radio which had been totally destroyed by the initial explosion.

Over the next few weeks there was only light contact with the enemy and the battalion's had no further casualties. A number of enemy base camps were located and destroyed including from *HQ Ba Long Province* medical units near the *May Tao Base*. 7RAR had its last contact on 19 February when B Company killed two VC; the following day the 7RAR Sergeant's Mess had its farewell function and the battalion returned to Nui Dat between 21 and 23 February; having passed operational responsibility to 3RAR, the Battalion Command Post closed at 8 minutes past midday on 21 February. A Farewell Parade was held on 24 February and the following day the Battalion embarked on *HMAS Sydney* for the voyage home.

Early on the morning of 24 February 1971 is a sombre scene as the men of 7RAR parade to remember their fallen.

Photo courtesy of the 7RAR Association and the late Andy Mattay.



3RAR Returns

After being relieved by 9RAR in late 1968, 3RAR began the process of reforming in 1969 based at the WWII vintage Woodside Camp in the Adelaide Hills. The battalion became the priority unit in early 1970, tasked to relieve 8RAR in Vietnam in November 1970. The Battalion training programme progressed steadily as well as it could in the non-tropical and limited training areas available in SA where there were also no supporting arms based. This programme was also affected by the Government's decision in May 1970 not to replace 8RAR and Army Headquarters decided that 3RAR would now replace 7RAR in February 1971. Canberra also decreed that training scheduled at the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra in July would be postponed until later in the year – just what a Battalion Commander needs when he is preparing his unit for war! Fortunately commonsense prevailed and after completing the required training the Battalion (*Lt Col FP Scott, CO and WO1 WJ Hill, RSM*) finally sailed for Vietnam from Port Adelaide on 16 February 1971.

Back into the Boondocks

The effect of the unwise decision to reduce the Task Force's strength without concomitant reduction in operational responsibilities was about to become a taxing issue for 2RAR/NZ and 3RAR, a situation made more difficult by the new Task Force Commander (*Brig BA McDonald*) who, in recognising the success of his predecessor's concept of protecting villages by close ambushing, decided to go much further afield to the Provincial boundaries in order to prevent the movement of enemy main force units into the populated areas. There was no doubt that security in the Province had improved however, the Viet Cong Infrastructure was still present in most villages especially Hoa Long and the Route 44 villages and the population remained generally anti government

During the handover period between 7RAR and 3RAR in late February, 2RAR/NZ supplied a rifle company to assist with “In-Theatre” training with the company based at the Horseshoe Defensive Position. Thus in the space of a few weeks 2RAR/NZ was reduced from 5 to 3 rifle companies but with little change in its operational tasks;

The shortage of ‘troops to tasks’ also meant that 3RAR had to do its ‘In Theatre’ training in what became in essence an operational deployment to replace 7RAR on *Operation Phoi Hop*, a less than satisfactory approach and with tragic outcomes.

2RAR/NZ continued operations across the north of the Province including operations from NDP Garth until it was closed on 12 March when the company there moved 500 metres south west to Courtenay Hill. Several contacts occurred with small groups of enemy from the *HQ SR-4* resupply organisation, which suffered some 30 killed and wounded. There were also two tragic incidents that again illustrated the inherent dangers of patrolling in close country.

The first was on 10 March when 1 Platoon V Company (*Lt JR Winton*) was ambushing a track; a sentry engaged an enemy soldier with his rifle which was followed up with MG fire through the killing area. However, tracer ammunition started a fire which caused a claymore mine to detonate from overheating just as the Platoon Commander and one other commenced to clear the contact area. The Platoon Commander died from the wounds he received and the other soldier was seriously wounded.

The second incident occurred on 24 March involving a 4 Platoon (*Lt PJ McNamara*) patrol clash reminding all that even with experienced troops there were risks involved. A half platoon patrol (*Sgt T Birnie*) had patrolled from the platoon’s position and was given approval to follow an enemy track for a few hundred metres and then to request clearance before returning back to the platoon. Unfortunately the track proved circular and the patrol entered the platoon position at the point of the MG Sentry who engaged the patrol wounding the Patrol Commander who although evacuated, died the following day.

Meanwhile 3RAR was having its baptism of fire during its ‘in-country’ training programme with supporting arms which had commenced on 26 February in the area east of Nui Dat 2. It was given a ‘welcome to the war’ by *D445 VC Battalion* in pretty much the same area and fashion 6RAR was given five years earlier on *Operation Hobart* (see page 23).

The Battalion’s first contact occurred on 1 March when D Company (*Maj KE Sticpewich*) was regrouping with 12 Platoon (*2Lt R Ulanowicz*) already in the company harbour position. A sentry saw three enemy (1) (see map on page opposite) but as he was aware that friendly troops were in the area he followed complete rules of engagement and challenged the lead enemy at a distance of 15 metres. As the enemy soldier raised his weapon to fire the sentry shot and killed him.

On 2 March, D Company was in its night harbour waiting to marry up with a troop of tanks for training the next day. At about 8pm, 11 Platoon (*Lt DM Horner*) detected and engaged a couple of enemy and with artillery illumination another ten were seen. Simultaneously 10 Platoon (*Lt JW Wheeler*) on the opposite side of the harbour engaged a number of enemy (2) which responded with heavy small arms and what was probably a satchel charge which killed the Platoon Commander, though initially it was thought he was killed by a grenade detonated by an enemy bullet. One other soldier (*Pte P Manning*) was also killed by small arms and another seriously wounded (*Pte AB Kennedy*) who was treated and retrieved to Company HQ by the Company Stretcher Bearer (*Cpl AF Lowe*).

The enemy probes were well coordinated using whistles and red flares and continued throughout the night; they were met with artillery illumination, company weapons and Light Fire Teams which covered the resupply of ammunition (by winch) and the evacuation of the casualties. C Company (*Maj PL Tilley*) with a troop of tanks was a kilometre to the south-east and identified its position to the Bushranger Helicopters using tank lights. Artillery HE was not used initially for two very good reasons: (i) the enemy were too close to the perimeter and would most likely have stayed inside the impact areas; and (ii) the noise would have prevented the company from detecting movement. The enemy of about company strength withdrew in the early hours of 3 March leaving evidence of having suffered several casualties.

For his efforts on 2 March, Cpl AF Lowe was awarded a Mentioned In Despatches.

Operation Briar Patch I

With *D445 VC Battalion* back in the parish, 3RAR was tasked to stop it from carrying out attacks on local force pacification operations and deployed into the AO with Battalion Headquarters established at *FSB Beth*. Initially the companies were deployed in the south west of the AO with Support Company (*Maj GL Morgan*) operating as a rifle company from *FSB Beth*. As intelligence was gathered on *D445's* intentions the companies moved further north and east to block the approaches to *Xuyen Moc* supported by artillery and mortar sections at *FSBs Marj* and *Toby*.

The first contact to confirm the presence of *D445 Battalion* was made by 9 Platoon (*2Lt RB Lewis*) on 17 March (3). The platoon was moving in single file through open country when four enemy were spotted by the forward scout. The enemy who were moving at right angles toward the platoon were engaged at a range of 20 metres with one being killed another badly wounded. The dead VC was a platoon commander in *D445 Battalion*.

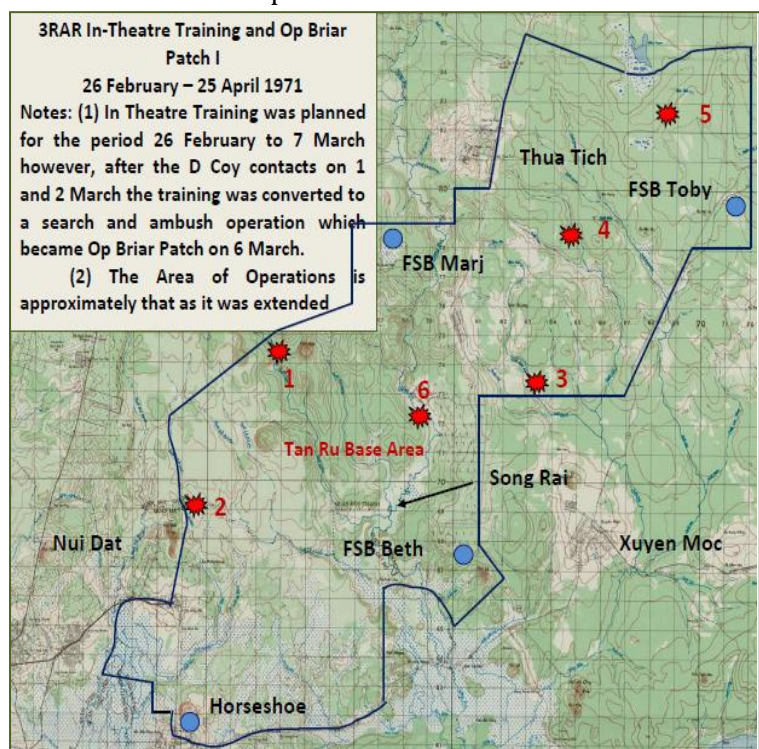
On 20 March, 8 Platoon (*2Lt D Paterson*) experienced the danger of assaulting bunkers without proper reconnaissance and arranging fire support; in this case made worse by the fact it was a half platoon patrol operating 1500 metres south from the other half of the platoon and 1500 metres north of the nearest other platoon (7 Platoon). As mentioned previously (7RAR operations December 1970), such tactics in close country with elements of *D445 Battalion* on the loose were very risky and on this occasion with tragic outcomes.

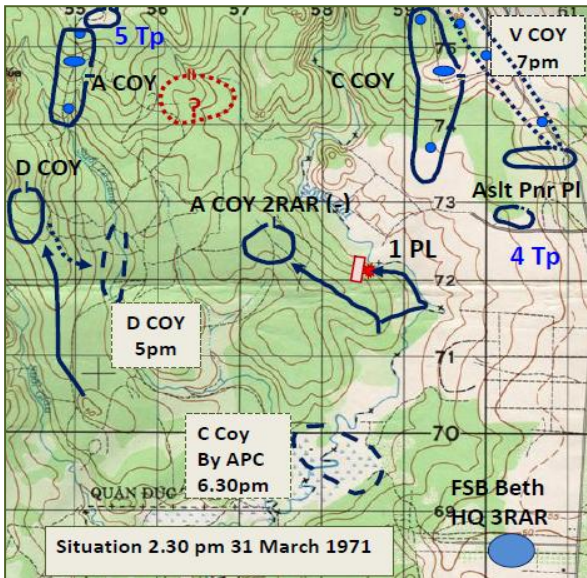
The patrol was following a track when it heard sounds of digging and chopping (4) and after firing an M79 Grenade and rifle grenade in the direction of the sound the Platoon Commander and Machine Gunner (*Pte AN Gould*) moved forward. The enemy in bunkers engaged the patrol with small arms RPG s and hand grenades mortally wounding the Platoon Commander and seriously wounding the Machine Gunner. The remainder of the patrol (*Cpl PG Manoel*) was forced to withdraw with another seriously wounded soldier (*Pte MS Macanas*) and called in a Light Fire Team which however, could not engage because the

patrol was unable to identify its position having run out of smoke grenades. One 'Bushranger' (*FO DC Freedman*) attempted to drop more smoke grenades when it was hit some 25 times by small arms fire as it hovered 50 feet above the patrol. One round hit the co-pilot (*FO RS Betts*) killing him and forcing the aircraft to land at *FSB Beth*. Eventually the patrol was joined by the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt PJ Abigail*) mounted in APCs and the remainder of C Company with a troop of tanks which together forced the enemy to withdraw. The bunker system (20 bunkers) had been occupied by elements of *D445 Battalion Headquarters* and one of its Recce Platoons and was subsequently destroyed using a tank dozer.

Two days later 9 Platoon (*2Lt RB Lewis*) contacted 4 VC, (5) killing one and capturing one who subsequently died on the *Dustoff Helicopter*. The enemy were from the *Ba Long Ordnance Factory* located in the *May Tao Base Area*.

On 26 March A Company (*Maj CJ Brewer*) 2RAR/NZ was placed under operational control of 3RAR and orders were issued to search for *D445 VC Battalion*. This led to 31 March being a day of high drama (6).





The A Company 2RAR/NZ 31 March stoush with D445 VC Battalion

The situation at 2.30 pm is shown on the map, ie: A Company (*Maj JJ Doyle*) and C Company (*Maj PL Tilley*) 3RAR in cut-off positions in the north either side of a suspected location of *D445 VC Battalion* – both with a troop of tanks co-located (5 and 4 Troops C Sqn); D Company 3RAR (*Maj KE Sticpewich*) and A Company 2RAR/NZ were patrolling toward the suspected enemy position; and a reserve force comprising the 3RAR Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt PJ Abigail*) mounted in APCs and supported by a section of mortars also mounted in APCs.

1 Platoon (*2Lt PD Savage*) had diverted east from the remainder of the company to search a bend in the Song Rai and was heading northwest when it discovered a recently used east –west track. The

platoon followed it for about 50 metres when the Forward Scout (*Pte DW Horrigan*) sighted five enemy and moved closer to fire give directions to the section's weapons which were ably controlled by the Section Commander (*LCpl PM Wood*) especially the machine gun which killed or seriously wounded all five. The platoon closed up and immediately was engaged from the front and then also from the flanks including with heavy machine gun fire.

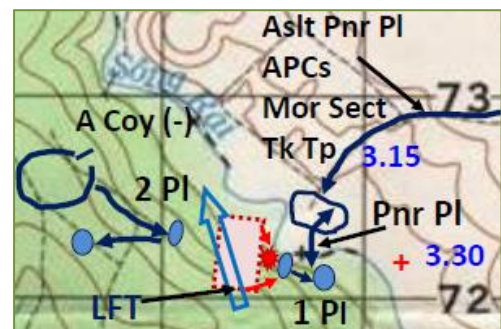
The platoon had either penetrated a bunker system, or more likely, the enemy were counter attacking the flanks as had happened to 2 Platoon 2RAR on 26 January 1968 and B Company 6RAR/NZ on 11 June 1969 (see pages 43 and 79). Both forward sections were pinned down and after about an hour of fire fight, Light Fire Teams and artillery, the enemy began to engage the platoon with 60mm mortars, RPGs, satchel charges and grenades; this raised dust which allowed the Platoon Commander with fire and movement and effective fire control to extricate the platoon which then reorganised to cover the withdrawal of the wounded. The wounded now seven in number were moved to the rear however, one seriously wounded (*Pte LWH Adams*) died before the Dustoff could be organised.

In the meantime, the 3RAR Assault Pioneer Platoon reserve group moved to the contact area bringing 4 Tank Troop with it (see inset). At the same time (3.15pm), 2 Platoon (*Sgt AJ Coleman*) moved to join 1 Platoon and when Light Fire Teams came on station it was halted 200 metres from the enemy position and called for a resupply of smoke grenades; CO 3RAR (*Lt Col FP Scott*) attempted to do so in the DS 'Possum' helicopter (*2Lt FM Gibson*) however, the aircraft received ground fire forcing it to crash land (+) without injury.

Despite their best attempts neither the APCs nor the tanks could find a way to cross the Song Rai however, the Assault Pioneer Platoon did at about 4.30 pm allowing 1 Platoon to withdraw across the river and evacuate its casualties. At about 5pm one of the Dustoff aircraft received ground fire fatally wounding one of the crew (*LAC AC Bloxsom*) and forcing the aircraft to make an emergency landing at FSB Beth. A Bushranger aircraft also received moderate damage from ground fire.

Late in the afternoon companies were redeployed to block the enemy's withdrawal; D Company moved south of A Company 3RAR, C Company moved by APC to south of the contact area and was replaced by V Company 2RAR/NZ (*Maj JD McGuire*) which deployed by helicopter from Nui Dat. Despite that the enemy, comprising at least two companies of *D445 Battalion* were able to withdraw north, mostly likely along the line of the Song Rai which would have provided a natural obstacle on the right flank.

(See also End Notes paragraph 25 for comments on command and control issues in this action)



2RAR/NZ and 3RAR Operations April/May 1971

The operations by 2RAR/NZ and 3RAR to track down *D445 VC Battalion* continued through April 1971 but despite intensive patrolling and a number of redeployments, the elusive enemy managed to withdraw north out of the Province.

In the fortnight after the 31 March action 3RAR, with two 2RAR/NZ rifle companies still under operational control, had a number of minor contacts with individuals with evidence they were from *D445 VC Battalion*. This included Mail belonging to 1 Platoon A Company 2RAR/NZ which had been lost in the 31 March action.

Towards the end of April, 2RAR/NZ with all of its companies back, redeployed to the north east of Binh Gia and had a series of contacts with elements of the enemy battalion as it sought to resupply and withdraw into Long Khanh Province to 'refit'.

The following awards were made for the A Company 2RAR/NZ action on 31 March 1971

- **Military Cross: 2Lt PD Savage, OC 1 Pl.**
- **Distinguished Flying Cross: 2Lt FM Gibson.**
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal: Pte DW Horrigan, Forward Scout 1 Pl.**
- **Mentioned In Dispatches: LCpl PM Wood, Sect Comd 1 Pl.**

L-R: Pte GR Johnston, Pte PV Crofts and LCpl PM Wood, 1 Pl, A Coy 2RAR/NZ.

WAR/70/0654/VN

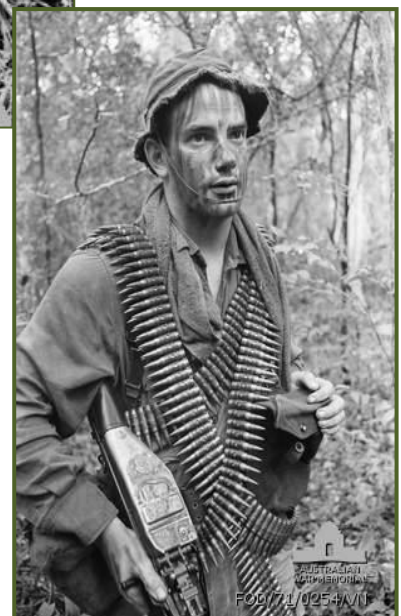


Left: Private RR Klem, Forward Scout 12 Platoon, 3RAR on patrol in late May 1971.

Photograph by courtesy of Ralph Klem

Right: Pte PJ Trease, C Coy 2RAR/NZ, May 71.

FOD/71/0254/VN



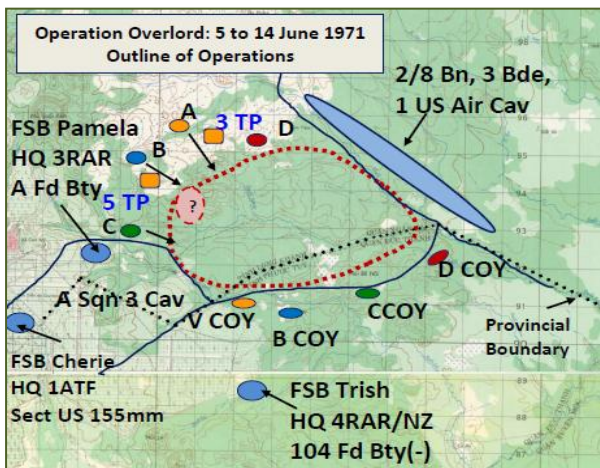
4RAR replaces 2RAR as the Anzac Battalion

On 2 May 2RAR/NZ withdrew from operations to Nui Dat where it prepared to handover to 4RAR. 4RAR had moved from Enoggera Barracks to Lavarack Barracks in Townsville in December 1969 and in late 1970 began its work-up training for deployment to Vietnam in May 1971. Like 6RAR before it, the battalion had access to a number of close country training areas including the High Range and Mt Spec training areas and inevitably, JTC Canungra and Shoalwater Bay. On 1 May 1971 the Battalion's Advance Party (*Lt Col JC Hughes, MC, CO and WO1 WTC Thompson, RSM*) arrived at Nui Dat, followed three weeks later by the Main Body embarked on *HMAS Sydney*. 2RAR returned to Australia on the return voyage.

Chapter XIV: Securing the North

Operation Overlord: 5-14 June 1971

As mentioned previously, it was only a matter of time before Main Force Units would again pose a threat to the security of Phuoc Tuy Province. It was known for some time that enemy units occupied base camps selected deliberately on the border of Provinces and operational areas of responsibility, eg east of the Courtenay Rubber on the border of Long Khan Province, a US responsibility, and Phuoc Tuy Province, an Australian responsibility. In May 1971 it was assessed that *3rd Battalion 33 NVA Regiment and D445 VC Battalion* were based in the area shown on the map, frequently moving from camp to camp to avoid detection.



Early in June 1971, HQ 1ATF (*Brig BA McDonald*) issued orders for *Operation Overlord* involving 3RAR, 4RAR/NZ and a battalion from the US 1st Air Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade operating from Xuan Loc. The plot was for the US 2/8 Battalion, 4RAR/NZ and A Squadron 3 Cavalry to block while 3RAR searched the suspected area supported by two troops of tanks.

4RAR/NZ had already deployed to the border area on 3 June on *Operation Bhowani Junction* with Battalion Headquarters operating from Nui Dat and three companies searching west of Route 2 and one east. On 5 June V Company (*Maj BRH Monks*) and B Company (*Maj RR Hogarth*) moved into blocking positions on the western flank of 4RAR/NZ's AO, C Company (*Maj RE Boxhall*) and D Company (*Maj FJ Kudnig*) moved by helicopter to the eastern flank and Battalion Headquarters and a section of 104 Field Battery (*Maj KF Towning*) occupied FSB Trish.

Meanwhile commencing at 3.30am on 5 June, C Squadron 1 Armd Regt (*Maj PW Bourke*) under operational control of 3RAR departed Nui Dat to establish blocking positions on the north flank followed by D Company (*Maj KE Sticpewich*) mounted in APCs. C Company (*Maj PL Tilley*) also moved in APCs to secure FSB Pamela while A Company (*Maj JJ Doyle*) left at 6.00 am in TCVs to a PZ on Route 2 and then by helicopter (7.30) to its start position. At 8am, B Company (*Maj IJ Cahill*) air assaulted onto a LZ which in hindsight proved to have been dangerously close to the enemy's position.

Given the deployments on 5 June also included HQ 1ATF, three gun batteries and logistic elements it was a well planned and executed movement plan by HQ 1ATF Operations Staff (*Maj BW McFarlane*). The 3RAR companies commenced patrolling to the southeast and late on 6 June, 5 Platoon (*Lt GJ Kells*) discovered a suspected bunker system (voices and movement of sentries). In considering the time of day (5.30), the experience and training of 3RAR was evident when the Platoon was ordered to withdraw to a night defensive position to allow the area to be engaged with artillery and mortars while plans were made for a follow-up at first light the following day. As mentioned earlier ([see page 93](#)), under these circumstances the enemy would have been expected to withdraw during the night however, on this occasion a number stayed to fight in order to allow the bulk of the force including the headquarters to escape.

7 June 1971 Action with 3/33 NVA Battalion

At 6 am on 7 June, artillery and mortars engaged the enemy position and 5 Troop C Squadron (2Lt B Cameron) was moved closer to B Company. At 6.30 am 5 Platoon moved cautiously from its night defensive position in assault formation, ie with two sections up (1), while the remainder of B Company commenced to move to support 5 Platoon (2). After moving some 200 metres the platoon was engaged on the left flank by automatic fire from a bunker at a range of 15 metres (3), seriously wounding one man (Pte AJ Mitchell) who was retrieved under heavy fire by a soldier from the section (Pte RW Payne).

The Platoon Commander skilfully manoeuvred the platoon including bringing the reserve section (Pte PJ Fyfe) forward to provide cover for the extraction of the wounded (now two) and to present a more formidable front to the enemy which ultimately prevented an enemy counter attack on the Platoon's perimeter. Pte Fyfe deployed his section and despite himself being badly wounded moved forward to within 10 metres of an enemy MG bunker and neutralised it with grenades.

A Light Fire Team came on station about 8am and was able to readily identify the platoon's position because the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt EL Desfontaines) had previously activated a marker balloon (see also [End Notes paragraph 26](#)). By about 7.30 5 Troop C Sqn guided by CO 3RAR in the DS Possum began to assault through thick jungle (visibility 10 metres) into the bunker system from the north and came under heavy RPG and small arms fire (4) though with no great effect. By 8.30 it was joined by 3 Troop and pushed further forward until 9.30 when it halted for D Company in APCs to arrive with an ammunition resupply (5).

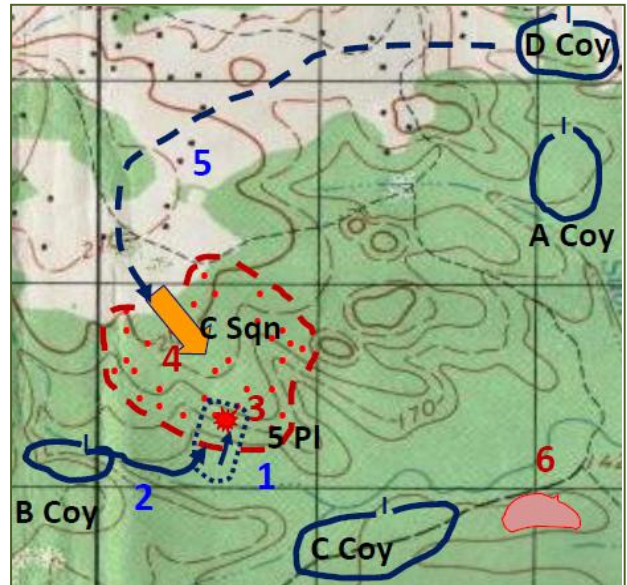
By that time B Company, also guided by CO 3RAR airborne had linked with 5 Platoon and resupplied it with ammunition which had been reduced to one magazine per man and less than 100 rounds per MG. Concurrently a resupply helicopter dropped ammunition and an Ammunition Point established.

At about that time the company Forward Observer (2Lt IG Mathers) inadvertently crossed a fire lane and was shot and killed; fire control was then successfully directed by the FO Assistant (LBdr PM Maher) who had been with 5 Platoon from the outset. A RAAF Dustoff then winched out the 5 Platoon wounded.

About an hour later as the fire fight continued between the enemy and B Company in the south and the tanks and D Company in the north east a RAAF Helicopter carrying a company first line of ammunition was hovering over the rear of B Company's position when it was hit by heavy ground fire and crashed killing the pilot (Flt EM Lance), a crewman (Cpl DJ Drubber) and wounding three others including the 3RAR Padmaster (Sgt JMM Griffiths) who had come to help lower the ammunition; he fell 35 metres out of the helicopter as it slewed to the ground and was trapped near it as it burnt. The B Company Medic (Cpl R Walsh) immediately ran to the wreck and dragged the two wounded aircrew to safety and then with the help of a Section Commander (Cpl TW Byng) retrieved the dead pilot and Sgt Griffiths.

By mid-afternoon D Company and the Tank Troops had cleared through the now vacated bunker system and by 5.30 had linked up with an exhausted B Company which had expended some 25,000 rounds of Small Arms Ammunition, including 16,000 from Machine Guns. About 1700 rounds of 105 mm and 155mm artillery, 330 Mortar HE, a total of 415 2.75in HE rockets and 65,000 7.62 minigun rounds by RAAF and US Army Gunships were also fired in support of the action. Little if any of this considerable amount of firepower caused any physical damage to the well constructed bunkers which had about a metre of Overhead Protection.

Earlier in the afternoon of 7 June, 9 Platoon (2Lt RB Lewis) discovered a bunker system that had been occupied only a few hours earlier by D445 VC Battalion (6) which had scarpered when the attacks commenced by B Company and the Tank Troops against the 3/33 NVA Regiment position. Just as well



the enemy had gone because typically, the lead section had penetrated well into the system before realising they were surrounded by bunkers; just another example of the brilliant use of camouflage by the enemy and the need for patrols to look for 'bunker sign'.

It took a 1 Field Squadron Combat Engineer Team and 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron (*Capt JE Tick*) protected by the 3RAR Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Lt PJ Abigail*) and Anti-Tank Platoon (*2Lt JG Cardwell*) five days to clear and demolish the massive 3/33 NVA bunker system.

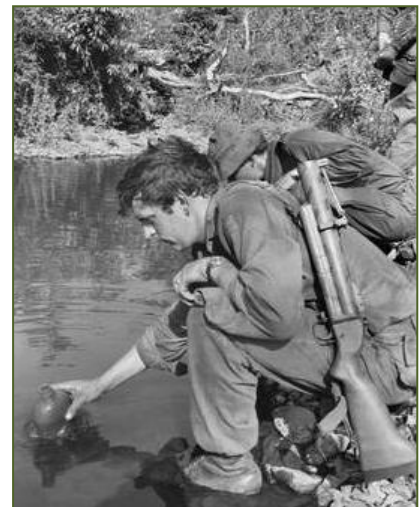


The Bunker, superbly constructed.....and the best weapon to deal with it– a MBT 20 pdr
AWM PO5389 and John Tick AWM FOD/71/0305/VN



Taken on an earlier operation are: Left: Lt GJ Kells, OC 5 Pl with a 'Bushman Scout'; Right: Pte PJ Fyfe 5 Pl, and others taking a water resupply.

AWM PJE/71/0236/VN
AWM PJE/71/0234/VN



The following awards were made for the B Company 3RAR action on 7 June 1971, in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross:** Lt GJ Kells, OC 5 Pl; 2Lt B Cameron, OC 5 Tp, C Sqn.
- **Distinguished Conduct Medal:** Pte PJ Fyfe, Sect Comd, 5 Pl.
- **Medal for Gallantry:** Cpl TW Byng, Sect Comd, 5 Pl.
- **Military Medal:** Pte RW Payne, 5 Pl; Cpl R Walsh, B Coy medic; LBdr PM Maher, A Fd Bty.
- **Mentioned In Dispatches:** Maj IJ Cahill, OC B Coy

4RAR/NZ Does the Hard Yards commencing with Operation Hermit Park: 14 June - 27 July 1971

Following *Operation Overlord*, 4RAR/NZ commenced a succession of operations, all generally astride Route 2 in the far north of the Province, ie from the north of the *Hat Dich* through the Courtenay Rubber towards the *May Tao Base* area; all well known areas for serious enemy Main Force activity. These operations would continue to the first week of October 1971 when, following the premature departure of 3RAR on 6 October, 4RAR/NZ returned to Nui Dat to conduct the last defence of the Task Force Base.

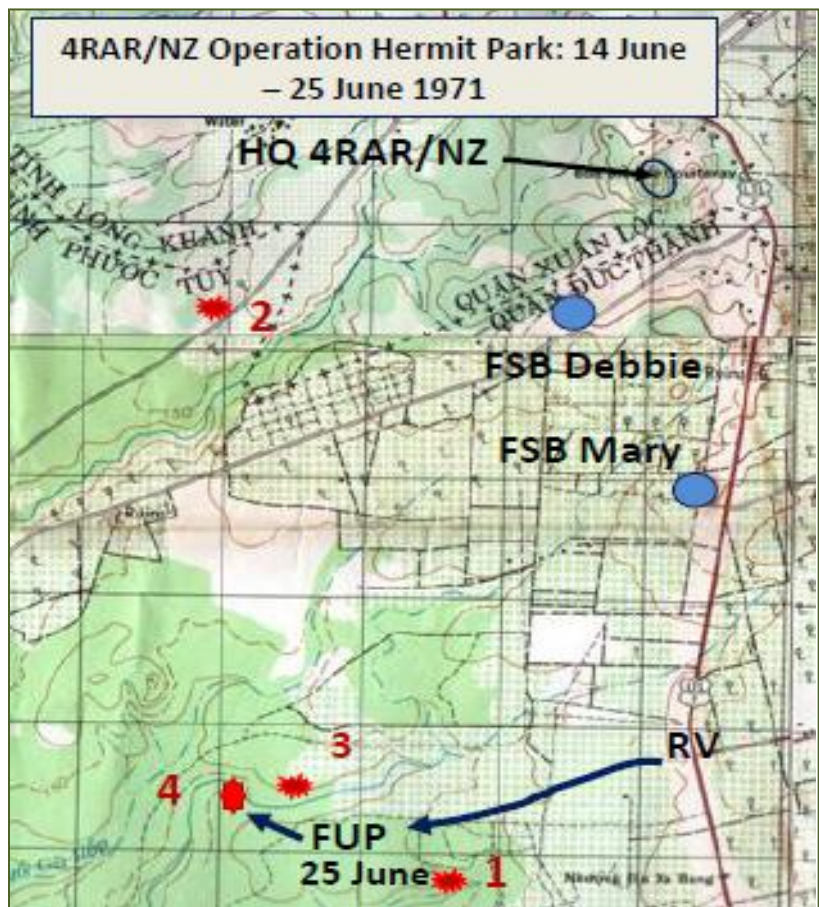
These operations would be especially hazardous, not only because the Armoured Squadron was unwisely withdrawn from operations progressively from mid August, but also because of the Government's public announcement on 18 August that the Task Force would be withdrawn from Vietnam by early 1972. The decision, made essentially to solicit voter support for the embattled government, was to have serious consequences to the safety of the few that would be left. The public announcement was obviously going to be registered by the enemy high command and predictably it would then issue orders for Main Force Units to reoccupy Phuoc Tuy Province in strength. 4RAR/NZ was to suffer serious losses as a result—see *Operation Ivanhoe*.

Operation Hermit Park was a follow-up to locate and destroy elements of 274 VC Regiment contacted in the closing stages of *Operation Overlord*. In the first few days of the operation there were a number of fleeting contacts with the enemy including two on 17 June: the first was by 8 Platoon (*Lt PA O'Brien*) in an ambush position when a party sent to check claymores (*Cpl WJ Pollard*) sighted and engaged six enemy (1) before withdrawing back into the platoon position; as they did so the enemy withdrew leaving one dead behind. The second was in the early evening by B Company Headquarters (*WO2 TA Barnes*) which was in a night defensive position (2) when a sentry (*Pte HA Marum*) 15 metres in front

of the MG heard noises in high grass; he stood up saw two enemy between himself and the flank of perimeter and engaged them as did the Section Commander (*Cpl WR Crapp*). A dead enemy soldier from 274 VC Regt was discovered during the subsequent sweep of the area.

On 24 June V Company HQ (*Maj BRH Monks*) had halted and Support Section (*Cpl AM Lee*) sent to recce for fresh sign when it contacted three enemy in a standing patrol (3) from 274 VC Regt killing one; the enemy returned fire fatally wounding one of the forward scouts (*Pte KH Harding*).

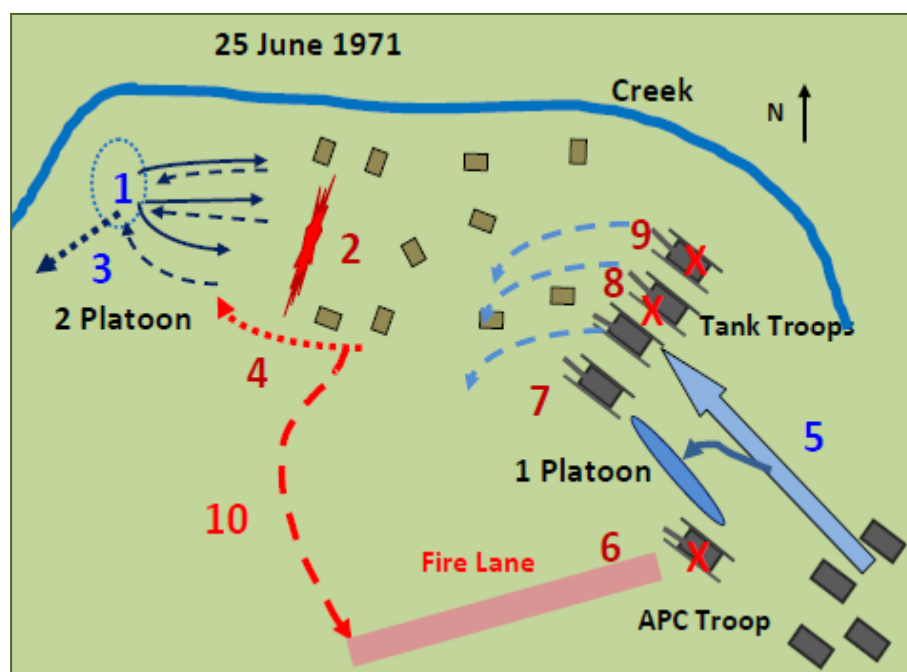
The following day V Company together with C Squadron 1 Armd (*Maj PW Bourke*) were involved in a typical bunker action' starting with a quiet reconnaissance, followed by a bruising and bloody battle (4).



About 11am on 25 June, 2 Platoon V Company (*Lt GFS Campbell*) discovered 'bunker sign' and after establishing a 'pack base' commenced to cautiously move forward (1). A few minutes later an enemy sentry moved towards the Platoon and was shot while MGs engaged the sound of voices; the Platoon immediately drew heavy RPG, MG, rifle and claymore fire across its front (2). Two men were wounded and as the Platoon withdrew under the cover of a Light Fire Team to evacuate the casualties (3) the enemy attempted to follow (4), causing one more wounded. A MG Number 2 (*Pte T Parekura*) was instrumental in fighting a rearguard action and assisting the Light Fire Team by marking his position with smoke. After evacuating the casualties the Platoon then withdrew further to the west to allow artillery to engage the bunker position while an assault from the east was planned.

Shortly after 2pm, HQ C Squadron, 3 Troop and 5 Troop met at a rendezvous on Route 2 (see RV on previous map) and shortly after joined 1 Platoon V Company (*Lt NJ Fry*) at a Forming Up Place (FUP) prior to assaulting the bunkers commencing at 2.45 pm. As the New Zealanders had not had any training with tanks the Squadron Commander also gave a briefing on what was required.

The enemy, having been alerted by 2 Platoon and forewarned of an attack by artillery preparation, was probably expecting infantry in the van and it would have come as some surprise when the attack was led by 5 Centurion Main Battle Tanks (5). 1 Platoon followed behind the tanks and 1 Troop A Squadron



3 Cavalry (*Capt RM Earle*) behind 1 Platoon.

The enemy was quick to respond engaging the left hand tank down a fire lane with RPGs (6) seriously wounding both the Tank Commander (*Cpl AM Anderson*) and the Operator (*Tpr PG Barwick*); they were recovered by a 1 Platoon Section 2IC (*LCpl JL Adams*) who rushed forward under fire and onto the stricken tank to do so.

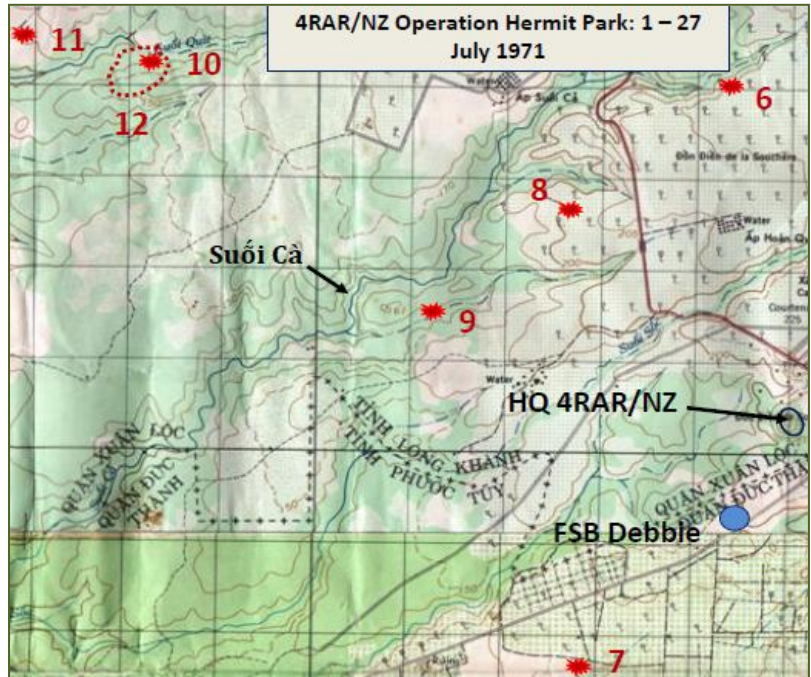
The Troop Leader (*2Lt B Cameron*) moved his tank to the fire lane firing canister which silenced the enemy.

The remaining tanks then

moved forward and to the left as heavy fire was received from that flank (7); 1 Platoon moved in behind the left hand tank and for some 15 minutes exchanged heavy fire with the enemy. Almost immediately the Troop Commander's tank was hit with an RPG (8) on the underside of the main barrel above the Driver's hatch seriously wounding him (*Tpr PS Cadge*) who nevertheless attempted to assist the remainder of the crew who he thought were in danger. He was retrieved to the rear of the tank by the Troop Leader who climbed out of the tank to do so. As he did, the tank on his right flank (*Cpl S Hanuszewicz who served with 1RAR in 1965/66*) gave support with canister but was hit a few minutes later by several RPGs (9) including one which bent the barrel near the muzzle. A solid anti-tank round was then fired removing the damaged end and destroying a bunker; the tank then resumed firing canister.

By this stage light was fading and the group broke off contact to prepare the evacuation of the wounded; the enemy attempted to disrupt that at the Dustoff Pad but were seen of by APCs. That night the enemy withdrew (10) from a recently renovated bunker system which had been occupied by a company of 274 VC Regt

In early July, operations moved further north with *1 Battalion 274 VC Regt* as the target. Companies were rotated to Nui Dat as the Task Force Ready Reaction Force and for rest and retraining. To support the operations a new Fire Support Base (FSB) was established at FSB Debbie. Earlier, on 21 June, 1 Troop A Squadron 3 Cavalry (*Capt RM Earle*), under Operational Control of 4RAR/NZ, had on a dark night in heavy rain, ambushed some thirty enemy (6) killing about half of them and capturing four ; they were identified as a supply group from *Sub Region 4*.



1 Troop A Squadron was in the action again when at about 7pm on 1 July, it was moving to a night ambush and sighted an enemy squad (7) which it engaged, killing two and capturing one. The enemy were a *1/274 Regt* resupply party.

On 13 July, B Company (*Maj RR Hogarth*) was patrolling south west down the axis of the Suối Cà when it had two contacts: the first late in the afternoon when a sentry (*Pte G Brown*) forward of the Company Headquarters perimeter sighted enemy movement and engaged with a 7.62 Automatic Rifle firing a 30 round magazine (8). One enemy soldier was killed and another wounded.

A few hours later 6 Platoon (*2Lt DN McDaniel*) ambushed a small group (9) wounding and capturing one. The Platoon attempted to evacuate the wounded enemy soldier by Dustoff aircraft however, the enemy caused confusion by also using a strobe light to attract the helicopter and as a consequence the man died.

On 19 Jul, orders were given to focus the Battalion's attention on locating *274 VC Regt Headquarters*, commencing the following day.

On 21 July, 6 Platoon was patrolling along the axis of an enemy track when four enemy approached the tail of the Platoon (10); the 'tail end charlie' (*Pte N Kirke*) calmly fired a number of aimed shots at the enemy and when they dispersed fired a magazine killing or wounding all of them. The enemy were subsequently identified as being from *274 VC Regt's Signals Company*.

The following day, 7 Platoon (*Lt PS Andrews*) was ambushing a track junction when three enemy entered the killing ground and were engaged by claymores (11); all were killed and identified as being from *274 VC Regt*.

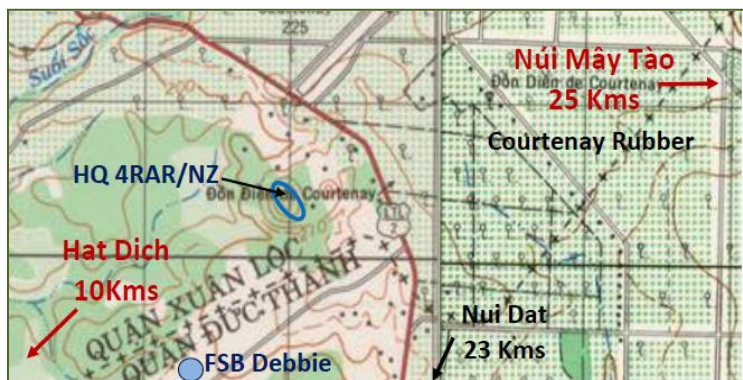
During the next couple of days B Company located a number of bunker systems recently vacated and caches some containing communications equipment (12). All provided evidence that *274 VC Regt Headquarters* had been located in the area and its forced withdrawal making life even more difficult for command and control of this Main Force Unit.

On 27 July, orders were issued for *Operation Iron Fox* to commence on 28 July 1971.

The following awards were made for the action on 25 June 1971, in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- **Military Cross** 2Lt B Cameron, OC 5 Tp, C Sqn.
- **Military Medal:** LCpl JL Adams, RNZIR, Sect 2IC 1 Pl.
- **Mentioned In Dispatches:** Cpl AM Anderson and Tpr PS Cadge C Sqn; Pte T Parekura, RNZIR, 2 Pl.

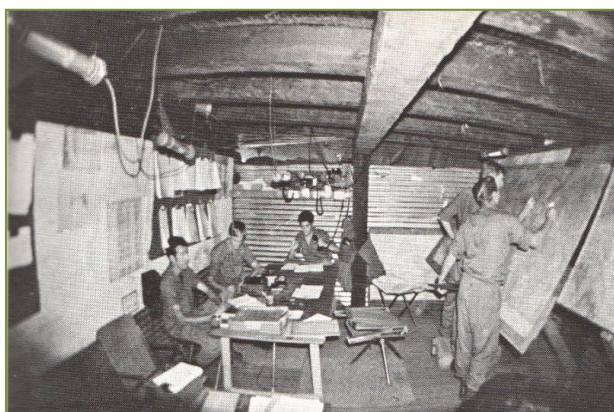
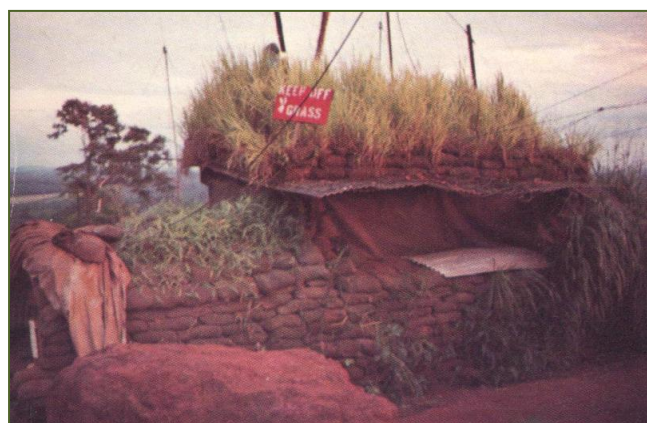
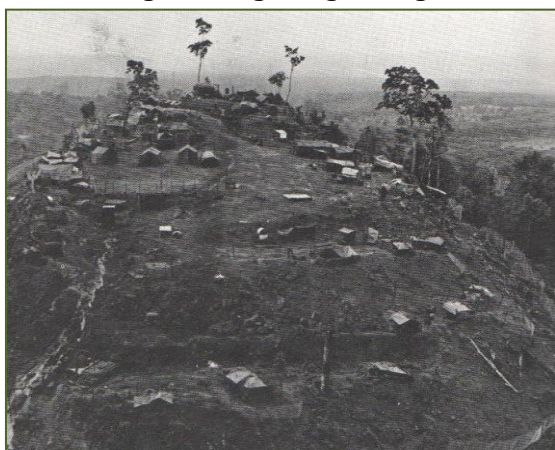
The 4RAR/NZ Base on Courtenay Hill



At the end of *Operation Overlord* (14 June), 4RAR/NZ progressively occupied a 250 metre hill overlooking the Courtenay Rubber Plantation and thus known as Courtenay Hill. Battalion Headquarters Command Post and Support Company were to remain there for four months ie, until early October 1971.

The hill was located in an important area for the enemy, ie about midway between two main bases – the *Hat Dich* and *May Tao* base areas.

The photograph on the right was taken looking west to east with 4RAR/NZ Headquarters on the hill (foreground), the Courtenay Rubber Plantation in the middle distance and in the far distance, the shadowy form of the Núi Mây Tào. Below is a shot of the 'north face' of the feature which being basically rock required tons of soil to be trucked up and sandbagged for command bunkers and strong points – see photograph to the lower right with grass growing on the roof.



Left is a view inside the Command Post with the Master Operations Map on the right.

Photographs courtesy of the 4RAR Association

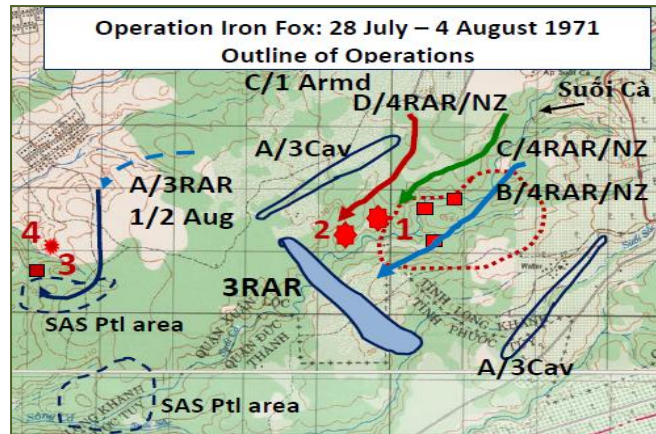
Operation Iron Fox: 28 July -4 August 1971

On Operation Iron Fox both 3RAR and 4RAR/NZ were committed to another hunt for 274 VC Regt including the Headquarters. 3RAR and A Squadron 3 Cavalry were initially to provide the blocking force while 4RAR/NZ patrolled south west with C Company (*Maj RE Boxhall*) north of the Suối Cà, B Company (*Maj RR Hogarth*) to the south of the river and D Company (*Maj JH Taylor*) in reserve with C Squadron tanks.

A number of bunker systems were found indicating the enemy was about and early in the afternoon of 29 July, 7 Platoon (*Lt PS Andrews*) was following a track across a deep re-entrant when the forward section spotted a bunker; the platoon started to investigate it when an enemy soldier emerged from the bunker and was shot, followed by two more who were also shot (1). Enemy in depth bunkers responded with small arms, claymore mines in trees and RPGs wounding three Australians. The Platoon had a number of equipment difficulties: half the M79 grenades failed to explode, two GPMG M60s had mechanical failures and a number of artillery rounds failed to detonate because of delay fuzes impacting on soft ground; nevertheless, the Platoon was able to withdraw when the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt GJ Chad*), despite being wounded, moved forward to engage the enemy with rifle grenades and to direct artillery.

D Company and the tanks were ordered to move up to C Company to assist and the following day it secured the bunker system. D Company then became the northern patrol company with C Company going to reserve. At about 3 pm on 30 July D Company was moving with two platoons forward when the left forward platoon, 10 Platoon (*2Lt KM Byrne*), was engaged by a large number of enemy in a bunker system (2). 12 Platoon (*2Lt GD Spinkston*) and Company Headquarters moved to 10 Platoon and were joined by a Troop of Tanks (*2Lt B Cameron*); 10 Platoon had taken casualties and was pinned down as RPG fire intensified and also from an enemy GPMG M60 which served to confuse the Australians. C Company was moved to support D Company as it manoeuvred its platoons in fire and movement to close with the enemy; 10 and 12 Platoons directed tank main armament to systematically destroy the bunkers with canister, armour piercing and HE rounds – just as 1 Troop C Squadron (*Lt GM McCormack*) had done three years earlier when supporting D and C Companies 1RAR. At this stage the Company Medic (*Cpl MJ O'Sullivan*) and a Stretcher Bearer (*Pte BM Pengilly*) moved forward the wounded however, Pte Pengilly was killed by a burst of MG fire; despite the enemy fire Cpl O'Sullivan continued to treat the wounded. Some twenty enemy were killed or wounded from a company of 1/274 VC Regt which had occupied 23 bunkers.

When the operation commenced, two SAS Patrols were inserted to the west as cut-offs and on 1 August the northern patrol (*Sgt PM Richards*) located an occupied bunker system and contacted a sentry (3). While the Patrol engaged the position with artillery, A Company 3RAR (*Maj JJ Doyle*) was inserted by helicopter and then moved by APC to a RV with C Squadron tanks and a guide from the SAS patrol. On 2 August the company group advanced into the bunker system which had been abandoned the previous night by the 274 VC Regt Medical Company. 3 Platoon (*Lt NR Murray*) was tasked to follow a track running north from the bunkers and in the late afternoon was setting an ambush when a sentry saw enemy movement (4); he warned the gun group which engaged the enemy at close range through a well prepared fire lane, killing one.



The following awards were made for Op Iron Fox, in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

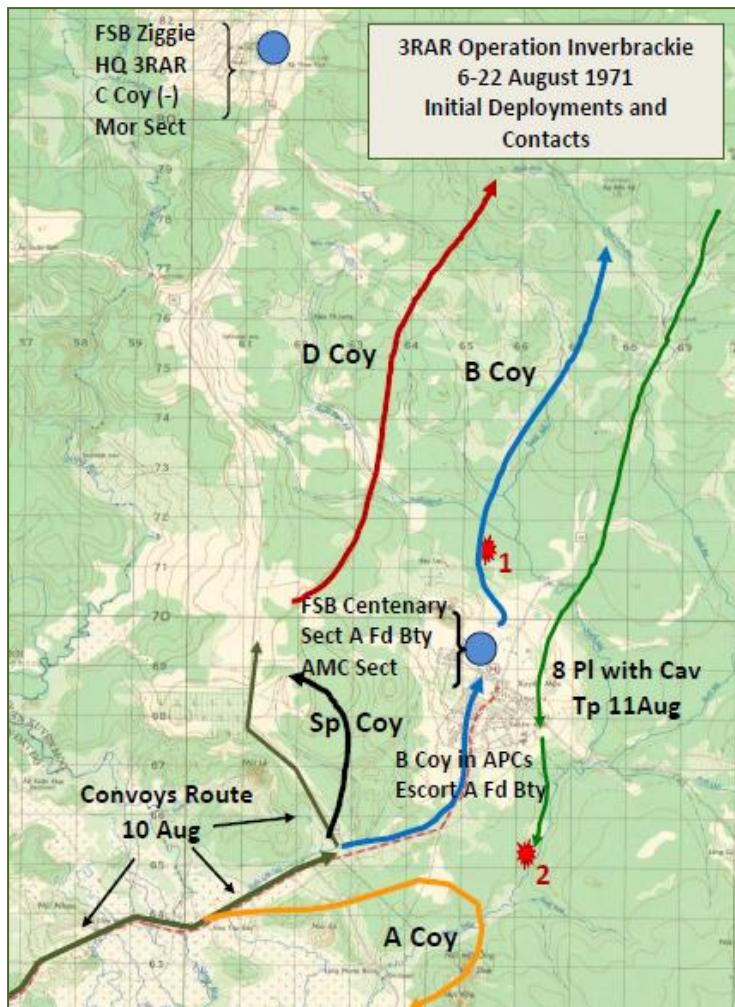
- **Military Cross:** Maj JH Taylor, OC D Coy, 4RAR/NZ (see 29/30 July).
- **Military Medal:** Cpl MJ O'Sullivan, Coy Medic D Coy, 4RAR/NZ (see 30 July).
- **Mentioned In Dispatches:** 2Lt KM Byrne, OC 10 Pl, 4RAR/NZ (see 30 July); Sgt GJ Chad, Pl Sgt 7 Pl, 4RAR/NZ (see 29 July).

Operation Inverbrackie: 10 – 22 August 1971

The operation was designed to search, in conjunction with Regional Forces, for VC Guerrilla Units operating located in the vicinity of Xuyen Moc and further afield, for elements of D445 VC Battalion.

On 10 August, four Companies, including Support Company (Maj GL Morgan) moved by APC (B and D Companies) and TCV (A and Support Companies) to their patrol areas which on 10 August would be in civilian access areas. In addition, 8 Platoon (Lt PE Green) deployed by helicopter from FSB Ziggie to become under Operational Control of A Squadron 3 Cavalry (Maj TFH Walker) which then deployed some 10 Kms north east of Xuyen Moc.

About 11 am on 10 August B Company (Maj IJ Cahill) was patrolling as three separate platoons, when 6 Platoon (2Lt JE O'Connell) discovered a foot pad and as it was being investigated enemy were seen;



however, before the Platoon could deploy more enemy appeared and contact was made (1). The Platoon then received heavy fire from several locations across its front suggesting the enemy was in a bunker system. As Company Headquarters and 4 Platoon (Lt JC Burns) moved to assist 6 Platoon, a marker balloon was erected to allow Light Fire Team attacks to suppress the aggressive enemy –no guesses who they were!

The Cavalry with 8 Platoon moved to sweep through the position from the west however, the enemy had withdrawn from a 6 bunker system.

On 11 August 8 Platoon redeployed to patrol to the south of Xuyen Moc and mid afternoon on the following day as the point section (Cpl RL Petty) entered thick bush it was engaged with a burst from an automatic weapon (2). The forward section did a contact drill, the Platoon closed up and commenced to move by fire and movement when the left hand MG was hit by a RPG, badly wounding the Section Commander (Cpl RL Petty) the Forward Scout (Pte SP Wilson) and the MG Number One (DR Hill). The first two were unconscious and lying some 30 metres in front of the Platoon thus preventing close

support from Helicopter Gunships.

During a lull in enemy fire the Platoon Commander (Lt PE Green) moved forward and retrieved the wounded one by one as the enemy attempted to move around the Platoon's flanks. A Light Fire Team then engaged the enemy position and after about two hours of contact the enemy withdrew.

In the latter part of the operation all rifle companies were deployed to the north east to hunt for D445 VC Battalion but once again it evaded contact

For his courageous action on 12 June, Lt PE Green was awarded the Medal for Gallantry.

Mirrors and Strings with AFVs

Early in 1971 the Government directed that 1,000 troops be withdrawn from Vietnam in the second half of the year. In an attempt to prepare a sensible plan, staff in Canberra proposed the 1,000 should be support (logistics) troops; however, logistic units were already under manned and despite vigorous objections by HQ 1ATF, HQ AFV consequently recommended that the Army component of the 1,000 be the Armoured Squadron and its support workshop.

In a futile attempt to bridge the huge capability gap caused by the loss of the Main Battle Tanks it was decided that a number of Fire Support Vehicles be sent to Nui Dat.

The Vehicle (below left) was a M113A1 APC fitted with the turret from the Alvis Saladin armoured car



(below right). It was introduced in the mid-1960s following the withdrawal of the Saladins and was armed with a 76mm gun, a .30 calibre coaxial machine gun and a .30 calibre machine gun mounted on the roof of the vehicle's turret



The Cavalry Officers who were to operate the vehicle in 1 ATF had serious reservations on its capability including poor mobility, vulnerability to anti armoured weapons, especially the RPG-7 and importantly, the vehicle had not been proven operationally anywhere. In effect the vehicles could not be employed in any meaningful role in support of the battalions and were clearly no substitute for tanks. This however, didn't stop the government from informing the Australian public that although the tanks were leaving they were being replaced by other capabilities.

3RAR and 4RAR/NZ Get an Early Minute

In early 1971 Defence Chiefs in Canberra had pressed for the withdrawal of 3RAR in February 1972 and 4RAR/NZ three months later. In July 1971 however, the Government was sent into political overdrive when it was surprised by the announcement that the US President would be visiting Beijing. The timetable for the withdrawal was then brought forward with the aim of having all "troops home by Christmas" including 3RAR in early October and 4RAR/NZ in early December.

Last Operations

While 3RAR was on *Operation Inverbrackie*, 4RAR/NZ had been maintaining a strong presence in the enemy's resupply and courier routes in the north of the Province either side of Route 2. *Operation North Ward* lasted from 5 August to 18 September during which time the Battalion had a number of minor contacts that made serious inroads into the enemy's supply system, especially procurement and porter elements. The area abounded with small farming hamlets providing an important source of food and a number of links to them operated by Rear Service (supply) units were cut as a result of the operation.

In early September it was apparent the *Headquarters and 3rd Battalion, 33 NVA Regt* were either in or moving to establish new base areas in the north of Phuoc Tuy Province and HQ 1ATF (*Brig BA McDonald*) concerned this potent force could pose a serious threat to the Task Force Base during the withdrawal, mounted an operation to counter that possibility – *Operation Ivanhoe*, involving both 3RAR and 4RAR/NZ.

Chapter XV Last Operations

The Fighting Fourth was the Final Combatant: Operation Ivanhoe: 19 September- 2 October 1971

Operation Ivanhoe was to be the last operation in which the Regiment had contact with the enemy in Vietnam and when casualties, both dead and wounded would occur. The concept for the operation was for three 4RAR/NZ companies to deploy south of the Courtenay Rubber Plantation and to search south and east toward suspected enemy base areas; as the Battalion had two companies at Nui Dat, one on rest and one as the TF Ready Reaction Force, D Company 3RAR was placed under operational control of 4RAR/NZ. Similarly, 3RAR deployed three companies west of the Song Rai between likely enemy locations and Long Khanh Province where the US 3 Brigade was positioned. Fire Support Bases were established at FSB Debbie and FSB Maree while HQ 4RAR/NZ remained at Courtenay Hill and HQ 3RAR relocated from operations near Xuan Loc to Nui Dat.

HQ 1ATF had mounted the operation to search for *HQ 33 NVA Regt and 3/33 NVA Battalion*; what was not known is that *2/33 NVA Battalion* had also entered the Province as security for the Headquarters thus freeing *3/33 NVA* to conduct operations in the style *1/33 NVA Battalion* had done in June 1969.

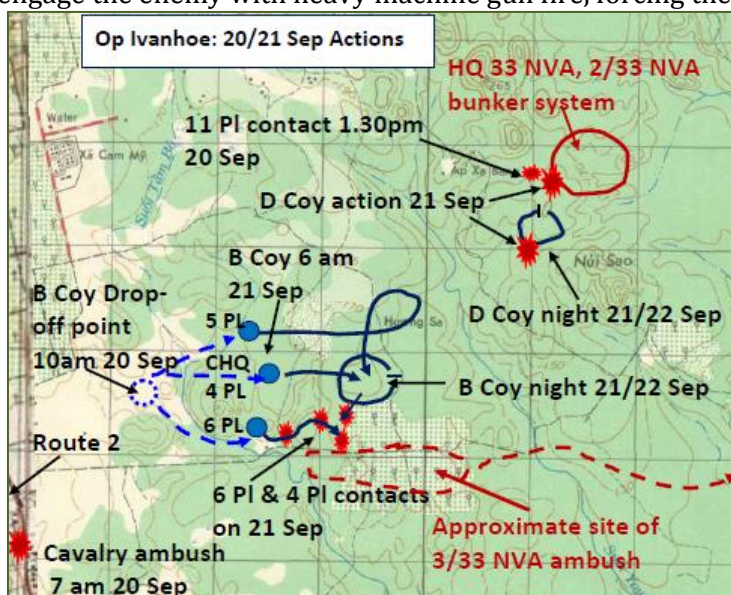
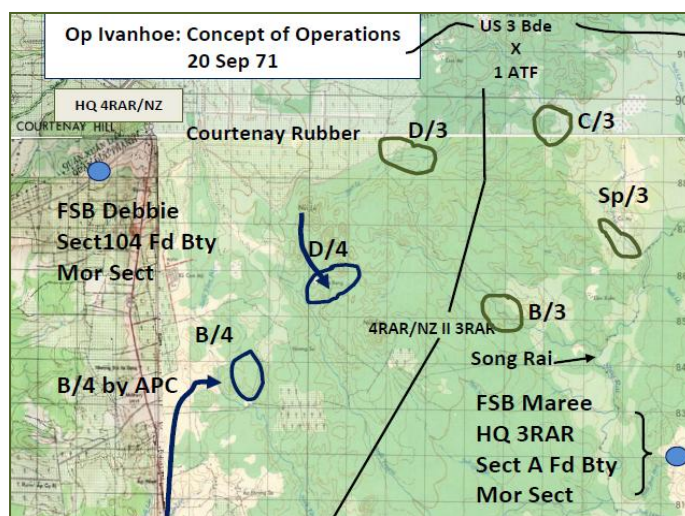
The first indication that there was serious opposition in the area was on 20 September when an APC Section (*2Lt PC Lawrence*) travelling north on Route 2 was ambushed by a probable NVA company. The lead carrier was engaged with RPGs which fortuitously missed, thus enabling the section to close and engage the enemy with heavy machine gun fire, forcing them to withdraw.

Later that morning, B Company (*Maj RR Hogarth*) deployed from Nui Dat by APC to a drop-off point some 2 kilometres north east of the Cavalry ambush. It had been intended to move in APCs a further 2 kilometres east however, because of the vegetation the Company Commander wisely decided to dismount earlier. Just as well really, because *3/33 NVA* had established an ambush position specifically for a reaction force deploying in response to the earlier ambush of the Cavalry Section ([see map](#)).

Early that afternoon, a contact by 11 Platoon (*2Lt GJ McKay*) with an enemy platoon gave further evidence that well trained and led NVA troops were about. The Platoon engaged and killed an enemy forward scout and the enemy immediately deployed returning sustained fire before withdrawing in an orderly fashion.

Bearing in mind that 4RAR/NZ was without armoured (tank) support and there was no medium or heavy artillery readily available to neutralize occupied bunkers, the events of 20 September were a portent of what was to occur through the whole day and night of 21 September. That day would become known colloquially as the Battle of Nui Le.

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Battle of Nui Le: 21 September 1971

Patrolling started from near the 11 Platoon contact the previous day (1) with 11 Platoon (2Lt GJ McKay) and 12 Platoon (2Lt GD Spinkston) following a track system 12 Platoon had propped and a recce group gone forward when about 9am it was engaged by RPGs from a bunker system (2); a Machine Gunner was killed (Pte J Duff) and several wounded including the Platoon Commander. A Rifleman (Pte CJ Kemp) moved to Pte Duff and attempted to retrieve his body. The Company Commander (Maj JH Taylor) began to concentrate the Company at a winch point (3) however, 11 Platoon was held up by enemy probes from the bunker system which air observation reported was extensive; indeed as it turned there were some 25 bunkers in four interconnected groups (see map). Though of course, this was not known at the time.

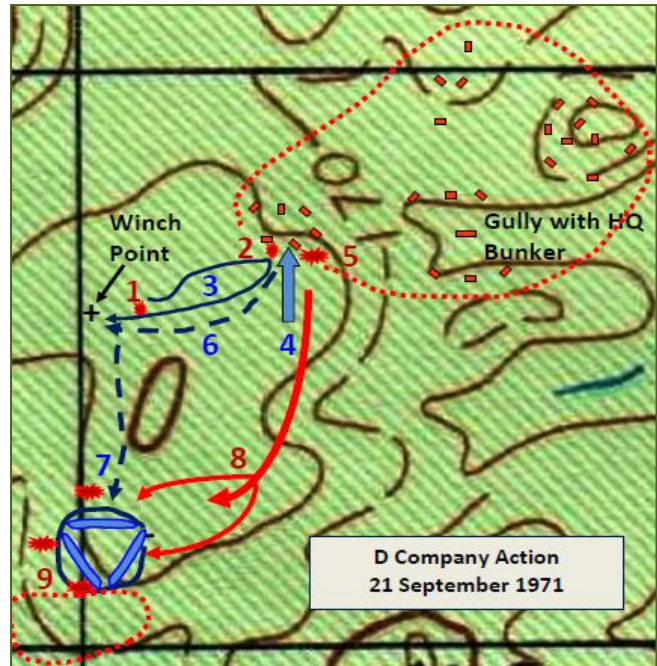
A massive amount of close air support descended in waves over the enemy position some of which received ground fire including from a number of positions further afield indicating that a serious enemy force was in the area. Besides Light Fire Teams the Company was supported by ground attack aircraft with bombs and napalm and US Army Hunter Killer Teams (see End Notes paragraph 27).

By about mid afternoon pilots were reporting that large numbers of enemy were withdrawing to the north and the assessment at the time was, that if the enemy had left, D Company should assault into the system. The problem was of course, that although it could be expected the enemy would withdraw from heavy bombardment, when a Headquarters was involved they inevitably left stay behind groups to ensure the Headquarters escaped. This book has described a number of operations where that situation occurred, eg *Crimp* (1RAR January 1966), *Bribie* (February 1967), *Federal* (April 1969), *Lavarack* (June 1969) and *Overlord* (June 1971), the last two involving 33NVA Regt.

At about 4.30 pm the Company advanced in assault formation (4) with 12 Platoon on the left, Company Tactical HQ in the centre and 11 Platoon on the right with platoons moving in 25 metre bounds. After moving about 50 metres the Company received heavy fire from the front and flanks with 11 Platoon now in the van taking heavy casualties (5). The Company had unwittingly advanced across a series of skilfully sited fire lanes leading from mutually supporting bunkers. The enemy as usual targeted the Machine Gunners, killing three (Pte BC Beilken, Pte RJ Sprigg and Pte KM Kingston-Powles) and fatally wounding another (Pte RJ Niblett). A Rifleman (Pte KG Casson) crawled forward to see if he could assist the casualties, then retrieved an M60 MG and moved out of the fire lane. On 11 Platoon's left flank the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt DK Jenkin) despite being wounded skilfully engaged the enemy allowing that part of the Platoon to withdraw. Meanwhile on the right flank the Platoon Commander (2Lt GJ McKay) had moved forward to the stricken Section, retrieved a M60 MG and used it to cover the withdrawal of the Section and subsequently the Platoon.

The Company rejoined 10 Platoon (2Lt KM Byrne) at the winch point (6); after extracting the wounded, but not the dead who were too close to the bunkers to risk further casualties retrieving them. After receiving one of many ammunition resupplies by the Direct Support Possum (2Lt MJ Sonneveld) it then moved some 400 metres south to a defensive position (7). The enemy followed the Company (8) and about 6.30 pm a fierce fire fight occurred on the perimeter. As luck would have it the Company had also deployed against another bunker system (9) which also engaged the south west Platoon (11Platoon).

By this stage (about 7pm) the Company was surrounded except to the south-east and any movement or talking drew enemy fire thus making it impossible for the Company Commander to speak to the Forward Observer (Lt GV Gilbert). This problem was compounded by the fact that communications

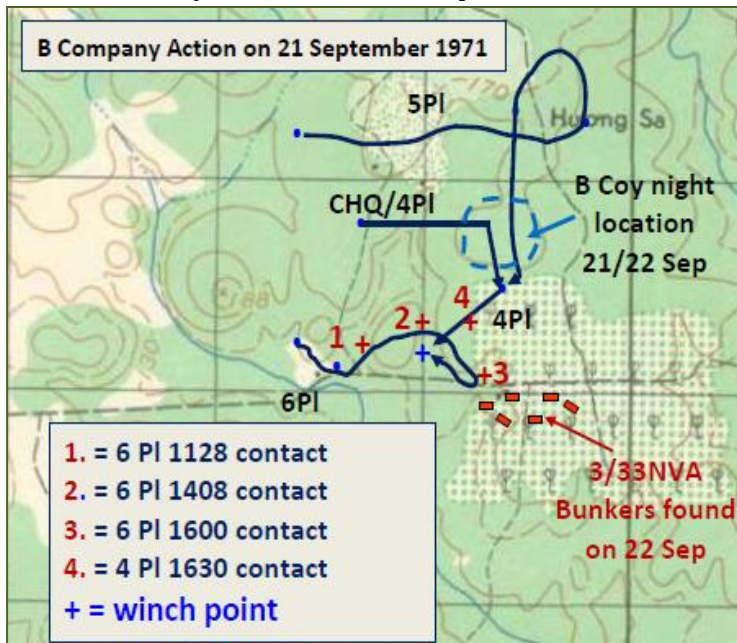


were poor with a 161 Recce Flight aircraft having to provide a relay; and, more importantly, because of the amount of tactical aircraft in the area (arranged independently by HQ 1ATF) the artillery support so desperately needed was, to the frustration of the Battery Commander (*Maj KF Towning*), unnecessarily delayed. Eventually artillery was adjusted to danger close (100 metres) on all cardinal points and as it became darker the enemy fire became less accurate though at about 9pm a single burst seriously wounded the 11 Platoon Commander who of course could not be evacuated until the following day. The 4RAR/NZ Regimental Medical Officer (*Capt PR Trevillian*) prescribed treatment for 2Lt McKay over the Battalion Command Net to prevent him from bleeding to death and he survived the night.

The following day the Company was reinforced by V Company (*Maj BRH Monks*); together they occupied the bunker system and recovered the dead men and other equipment none of which had been touched by the enemy. For D Company it had been a close fought thing and like D Company 6RAR five years earlier, but for splendid artillery support, could easily have been overrun.

B Company Action 21 September

Meanwhile B Company (*Maj RR Hogarth*) about 3 kilometres to the south-west of D Company was also having its problems. Late in the morning 6 Platoon (*2Lt DN McDaniel*) was following a telephone cable and had stopped for a short halt when two enemy who appeared to be checking the cable were engaged by a sentry killing one. The Platoon continued to follow the cable and early in the afternoon contacted one more enemy soldier. At about 4pm the Platoon had sent a recce group forward to locate a night



defensive position when it saw enemy in numbers to the north, south-east and east. The group engaged the enemy before withdrawing to the Platoon and as it did enemy 60mm mortar fire was received wounding 15 men including the Platoon Commander and a number of NCOs. One Section Commander (*Cpl D Melrose*) despite his wounds took command of the Platoon and by engaging the enemy with an M79 grenade launcher was able to stabilise the situation.

4 Platoon (*Lt IJ Ballantyne*) was dispatched from Company Headquarters to assist 6 Platoon and contacted several small groups of enemy. Both platoons formed a defensive position around a winch point while artillery and helicopter gunships covered their movement. By

about 6.30pm twelve of the 15 wounded were winched to Dustoff aircraft and the Company concentrated in a night defensive position.

The following day an enemy bunker system was discovered adjacent to the 6 Platoon contact which subsequent intelligence revealed had been part of a battalion ambush position occupied by 3/33 NVA Battalion. It had been there for three days and when 33 Regt HQ and 2/33 NVA Battalion were contacted (by D Company and a great deal of air support) it was ordered to withdraw and as it did was contacted by B Company.

Over the next few days 4RAR/NZ and D Company 3RAR supported by aerial reconnaissance discovered a number of well prepared bunker systems, sign of large numbers of enemy movement and evidence, including bodies that substantial casualties had been inflicted on the enemy. The extent of enemy base preparations indicated that on the eve of 1ATF's departure semi-permanent facilities were being prepared from which to mount operations in Phuoc Tuy Province. Operation Ivanhoe had prevented that, at least temporarily.

The following awards were made for the 21 September Actions, in some cases in conjunction with other operations:

- Military Cross: 2Lt GJ McKay, OC 11 Pl; Maj JH Taylor, OC D Coy.
- Distinguished Flying Cross: 2Lt MJ Sonneveld, 161 Recce Flt.
- Medal for Gallantry: Pte KG Casson, 11 Pl.
- Mentioned In Dispatches: Sgt DJ Jenkin, PL Sgt 11 Pl; Pte CJ Kemp, 12 Pl; Cpl D Melrose Sect Comd 6Pl.

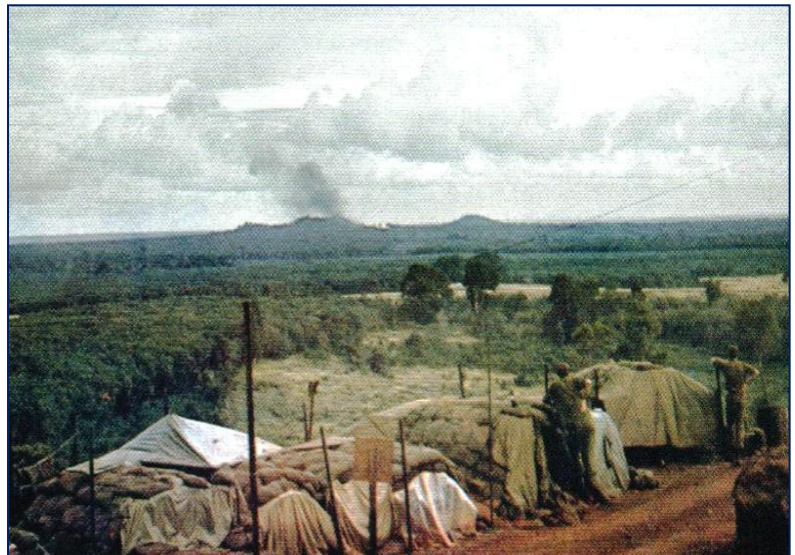


Gunner RW Eddington, Number 2 on a M2A2 105mm Howitzer of 104 Field Battery firing in support of D Company on 21 September 1971.

Photograph courtesy of Bob Eddington

Grandstand view from Courtenay Hill as a napalm strike goes in on the Nui Le feature.

Photograph courtesy 4RAR Association and Adrian Garton



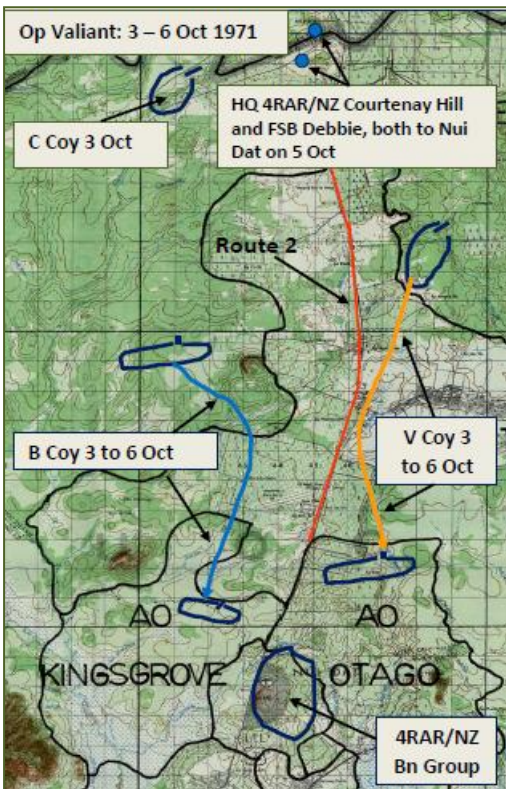
The Task Force Leaves

After Operation Ivanhoe, 3RAR regrouped at Nui Dat on 1 October 1971 to prepare for its return to Australia. On 6 October the Main Body embarked on *HMAS Sydney* to sail via Fremantle to Port Adelaide where she arrived on 16 October.

On 3 October 4RAR/NZ commenced **Operation Valiant**, a 1ATF operation aimed at redeploying the Battalion from the northern border region (where it had been for four months) back to Nui Dat.

The plan was to maintain an appearance that operations in the north were continuing while moving south to Nui Dat with a rifle company either side of Route 2, supported by APCs. D Company was already at Nui Dat as the 1ATF Ready Reaction Force and C Company was airlifted to Nui Dat on 4 October to secure the perimeter of the area 3RAR was about to vacate (the area originally occupied by 5RAR in 1966).

On 5 October 4RAR/NZ Battalion Headquarters moved to Nui Dat and at 8am on 6 October, when Headquarters 3RAR closed, it assumed responsibility for the defence of its new area (see sketch opposite)



3RAR's Final Parade on 5 October 1971. Commander 1 ATF (Brig BA McDonald) passing A Company with CO 3RAR (Lt Col FP Scott) to the left of OC 1 Platoon (Lt DK Shea)
AWM /FOD/71/0506/VN



.....and after the Parade a final helicopter lift to HMAS Sydney for the voyage home.
AWM /FOD/71/0505/VN

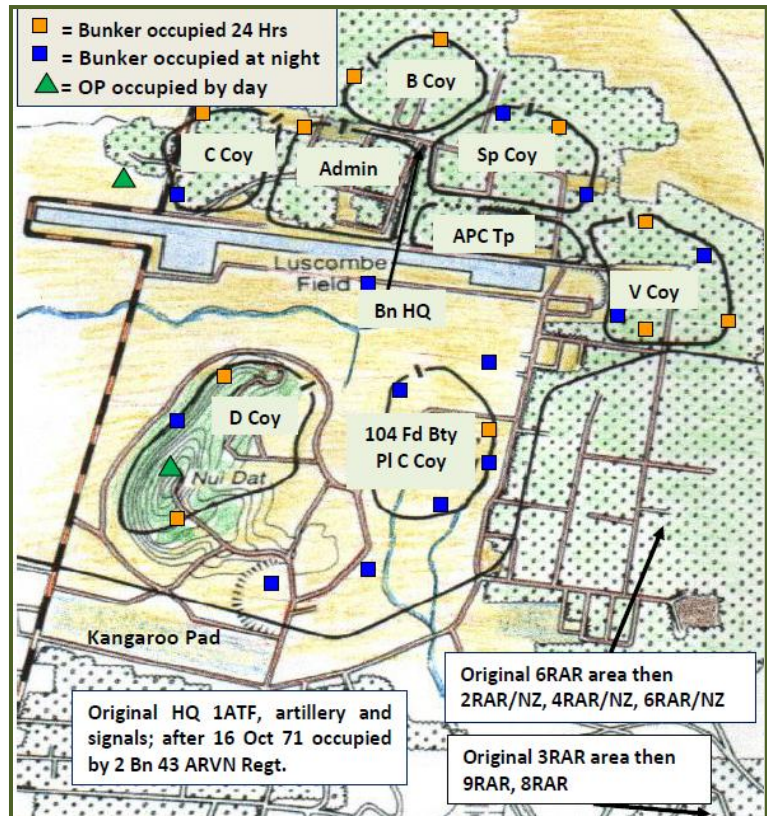
Operation South Ward and 4RAR/NZ is the Last Defender

Operation South Ward was the Task Force withdrawal operation, conducted in two phases: *Phase One* from 6 to 16 October, HQ 1ATF remained at Nui Dat and directed patrolling operations in AOs Kingsgrove and Otago (see map opposite) with 4RAR/NZ responsible for both its old area on the eastern perimeter and its new area on the northern perimeter. *Phase Two* commenced at 6pm on 16 October by which time HQ 1 ATF and all Task Force units had moved to Vung Tau. 4RAR/NZ's mission then became one of maintaining the security of Nui Dat by establishing a Battalion Group defensive position (see sketch), platoon patrols in the Base AO and tasks related to the deception plan to cover the Task Force withdrawal.

The Battalion Group had under command: 1 Troop A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment and a Section of FSVs (Lt CE Stephens), 104 Field Battery (Maj KF Towning), 1 Troop, 1 Field Squadron (Capt E Tomczak). It also had a Direct Support 'Possum' Helicopter (Lt EG Steel, RNZIR who on his first tour was a Platoon Commander in W Company 2RAR/NZ) and signals and logistic detachments.

Patrolling in AOs Kingsgrove and Otago was a minimum of a platoon per company continuously while a minimum of one platoon per company was to be in the base with Company Headquarters. This was a similar intensity to that required of 5RAR and 6RAR in 1966 and the patrol areas were also very similar in size (see Page 22 for Line Alpha); although one battalion was now covering the earlier work of two, the enemy threat was now much lower and of course the defences at Nui Dat had been developed to a sophisticated level.

The concept for the defence of the Base Area was not to maintain a complete outer perimeter but to cover gaps from bunkers which at night would be manned by a section(-). The APC troop was also allotted positions on the perimeter including with FSVs (see page 147).



One of the D Company bunkers on Nui Dat Hill. Each bunker had a GPMG M60 with a tripod and 1000 rounds with the six man picquet having a first line of ammunition. Grenades and M72 Rocket Launchers were held in the Company magazine as was another first line of ammunition. No reading or writing material was allowed and transistor radios were forbidden in the era before mobile telephones and social media! Photograph courtesy of the 4RAR Association

Deception Plan

The 1ATF deception plan to cover the Australian withdrawal from Phuoc Tuy Province was based on a threat assessment that *33NVA Regt* was still recovering from its rapid departure in late September and that it continued to have pressure put on it from US and ARVN forces in Long Khanh Province.

The plan included continuation of a high level of air traffic over the Province including: simulated troop movements, resupply missions and SAS insertions/extractions; regular Caribou (Wallaby) flights to Nui Dat; aerial reconnaissance and associated airstrikes on targets located. Dummy signals traffic was originated on the Task Force Command Net to simulate operations in place.

The most effective screen was however, to prevent enemy surveillance of Nui Dat; this was achieved by the extensive patrolling programme conducted by 4RAR/NZ Battalion Group forward of the Base. Artillery and mortars continued to fire support missions including Harassing and Interdiction (H&I) missions, the majority of which were observed and used for Forward Observer training. Similarly, mortar missions were used to train Mortar Fire Controllers.

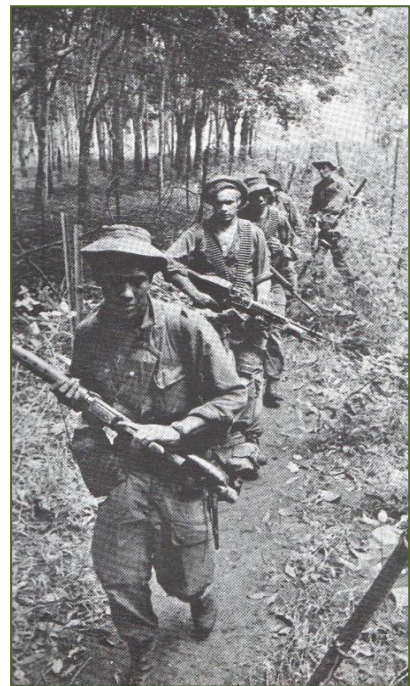
There was only one contact. It occurred on the night of 18 October when a 6 Platoon Fighting Patrol (*Sgt NA Fairley*) was approached in its night position by an enemy patrol. Rules of engagement were tight and the Sentry, cautious to ensure they were in fact enemy challenged rather than engaged. The enemy withdrew and were engaged by a Claymore, 5 rounds of M16 and 10 rounds MG ammunition. These were the last rounds fired in anger by the Regiment in the Vietnam War.

4RAR/NZ Battalion Group Withdraws

The withdrawal was in two basic phases, ie: **(1)** By 6 November all unit heavy and bulk equipment had been moved to Vung Tau and the Battalion Advance Party deployed by Caribou aircraft to Vung Tau that day; **(2)** On 7 November the following occurred:

- By about 6.30am all patrols had recovered to company bases.
- By 7.15 the Battalion Command Post had closed and a Tactical Headquarters (Tac HQ) opened at Nui Dat Hill.
- By 7.30, all claymores were recovered and flares expended; B Company with two sections of APCs, a Section of the Mortar Platoon (in AMCs) and the Assault Pioneer Platoon had deployed to secure the areas occupied by V, C and Support Companies
- At 7.30, V and C Companies commenced to fly-out in Caribou aircraft to Vung Tau. The air move was completed by about 9am by which time a Section of 104 Field Battery had deployed to just south of Baria to cover the withdrawal from Nui Dat of road convoys moving Support and Administrative Companies and attached units.
- Commencing about 11am, Tac HQ, D Company and finally B Company were moved by RAAF Iroquois Helicopters.
- 1 Troop A Squadron and RAAF 'Bushranger' armed helicopters secured the area while the helicopter airlift occurred and the APCs then drove to Vung Tau, picking up the artillery section on the way.

The withdrawal was completed without incident by about 3pm whereupon the Battalion and the Task Force Command Nets closed down and Operation South Ward ended.



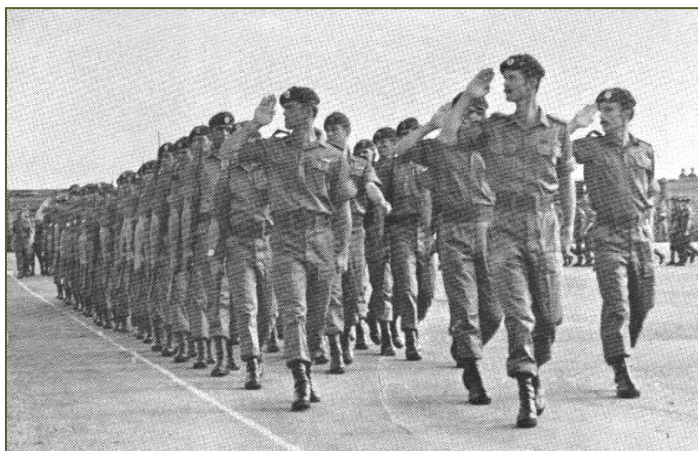
The last patrol at Nui Dat from 6 Platoon returns through the wire. Front to rear: LCpl TC Contor, Pte RJ Foster, Pte JR Hawke, Pte DG Miers and Pte CJ Lucas.
Photograph courtesy of the 4RAR Association

The Final Days

4RAR/NZ spent a month in Vung Tau, preparing for the return to Australia, providing a Ready Reaction Platoon for 1 ATF and conducting promotion courses for Junior NCOs.

A period without much drama save for a reaction on 15 November to a 'Possum' Kiowa Helicopter which was forced to land after taking automatic fire while flying a low-level reconnaissance mission in the Rung Sat. The pilot landed near Route 15 which was secured shortly after by the Ready Reaction Platoon. Coincidentally, the Pilot was the same as 4RAR/NZ's last DS Possum, ie *Lt EG Steel, RNZIR* who was later awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his courage and determination both on this and other occasions.

On 28 November the Battalion held a memorial service and on 1 December its farewell Parade. On 8 December the Battalion less V and D Companies embarked on HMAS Sydney (see [End Notes paragraph 28](#)) arriving in Townsville on 17 December; V Company, RNZIR returned to its Regiment in Singapore by RNZAF aircraft on 9 December.



V Company 4RAR/NZ led by Major BRH Monks, RNZIR march past the saluting dais on 1 December 1971. General CW Abrams, Commander US MACV took the salute.

Photograph courtesy of the 4RAR Association

D Company, 4RAR (*Maj JH Taylor*) was to remain at Vung Tau for a further three months to protect 1 ATF's final withdrawal

of heavy stores and equipment. The Company at full strength, was supported by a section from each the Assault Pioneer and Mortar Platoons; and, under command, 1 Troop B Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment (*Lt CE Stephens*) with an AMC Sect and a Support Troop of 6 FSVs (*Lt PC Lawrence*). The Company was housed in the Badcoe Recreation Centre and was required to maintain one platoon on 15 minutes notice to move, especially to react to a downed aircraft. The Company was also aware it might have to react to an enemy attack on Australian Army Training Team detachments still operating in the southern parts of Phuoc Tuy Province.

As a further contingency to assist in the withdrawal, a rifle company group from 9RAR (Enoggera) was placed on 7 days notice to deploy should a serious threat develop.

D Company spent most of its time between training, including specialist course, sport and stevedoring until finally on 29 February 1972, the Australian presence in Vung Tau closed and D Company embarked on HMAS Sydney for the last voyage.



D Company 4RAR led by Major JH Taylor, on the last parade in Vung Tau.

Photograph courtesy of the 4RAR Association

Chapter XVI: Done and Dusted

Summary

So ended what was probably the largest and most arduous operational commitment the Royal Australian Regiment is ever likely to have; about fifteen 'battalion-years' with some 80% of that time spent in the field searching to close with an elusive enemy, though occasionally the reverse occurred. Operations ranged from the Plain of Reeds near the Cambodian Border in the west to Ham Tan some 200 kilometres to the east; from the Iron Triangle and War Zone D in the north to the Long Hai Hills in the south; an area of some 200,000 square kilometres or roughly the size of Victoria.

This brief history has endeavoured to demonstrate the wide ranging scope of the operations conducted by the battalions over the seven years the Regiment was committed to the Vietnam War. Some 55 operations are described as well as a number of detailed actions to illustrate the tactical concepts that were used, many of which were of course, repetitive.

These operations ranged from:

- 1RAR's initial **forays into War Zone D, the Iron Triangle and the Ho Bo Woods**, ie *Operations Hump* (November 1965) and *Crimp* (January 1966);
- Those by 5RAR and 6RAR that cleared the way to **establish the Task Force** such as in the Nui Thi Vai and Nui Dinh, eg *Operations Vaocluse and Queanbeyan*; and, in the process discovering just how capable the enemy was, particularly *D445 VC Battalion*, first encountered by 6RAR on *Operation Hobart* in July 1966 and later on many occasions by other battalions;
- The **capacity of Main Force NVA units to concentrate** with deadly intent was first demonstrated on 18 August 1966 at the decisive and defining *Battle of Long Tan* ;
- The hazards associated with actions against **Main Force Units in defensive positions** (bunker systems) were established initially in November 1965 by 1RAR on *Operation Hump* and repeated many times after, eg *Operations: Bribie* (6RAR February 1967), *Coburg* (2RAR and 7RAR January 1968) , *Lavarack* (6RAR June 1969), *Camden* (5RAR August 1969), *Overlord* (3RAR June 1971) and *Ivanhoe* (4RAR/NZ);
- The dangers associated with untidy battle procedure when **deploying into Main Force strongholds** were exposed by the attacks on *Fire Support Base Coral* (1RAR May 1968) which also demonstrated the awesome capability of the Centurion Main Battle Tank both in defence and attack;
- **Anti personnel mines** were probably the single most cause for casualties, particularly the M16 variety lifted by the enemy from the ill-fated 1 ATF minefield on Route 44. In February 1967, 5RAR was the first to experience the dangers involved in and around the Long Hail Hills (*Operation Renmark*) while most of 8RAR's casualties on *Operation Hammersley* (January/February 1970) were from mines;
- **Pacification Operations**, so-called, saw the enemy's use of land mines reach savage proportions during *Operations Reynella* (9RAR May/June 1969) , *Esso* (5RAR June/July 1969) and *Mundingburra* (6RAR/NZ July/August 1969);
- **Urban Warfare** which was not on the Vietnam pre-deployment training schedule, occurred with substantial intensity in Baria in *TET 1968* (A Company 3RAR February 1968) and again in *Operation Nowra* (1RAR August 1968);
- Attacking and destroying **major enemy base areas** was seen as productive measure by a number of Task Force Commanders with the major operations being: *Operation Goodwood* in the *Hat Dich* (1RAR, 4RAR/NZ and 9RAR December 1968 – February 1969); *Operation Marsden* (6RAR/NZ December 1969) and *Operation Bondi* (5RAR January/February 1970) were both designed to conquer the *May Tao Base* (Marsden) with a follow-up (Bondi); on both *Operation Pinnaroo* (2RAR/NZ, 3RAR February/April 1968) and *Operation Hammersley* (8RAR February/March 1970) serious damage was done to *Minh Dam Secret Zone* in the Long Hai Hills, albeit temporarily;

- In the latter period of the war, **close ambushing** of the populated areas was very effective in **preventing the enemy access to food supplies**, eg *Operation Birdwood* (7RAR June/July 1970), *Nathan* (2RAR/NZ July/August 1970) and *Cung Chung* (2RAR/NZ, 7RAR, 8RAR August 1970- February 1971);
- The **withdrawal of the Task Force** involved some well executed operations, ie *Operations Valiant and South Ward* (4RAR/NZ, September/November 1971).

Despite many and various impediments, especially in the early years, the battalions accomplished their tasks to a high level of proficiency. It has been said that all battalions did well and some better than others and while it is not the purpose of this book to comment on that, what can be said is that some battalions were given more opportunities to be better prepared than others. Clearly the longer the war went the better prepared battalions could be because of factors such as:

- Second Tour Section Commanders and Platoon Sergeants who had served as privates or junior NCOs on a previous tour had experience that was invaluable both in pre-deployment training and during operations;
- In later years also, Officers on second tours began to fill Field Rank appointments eg Company Commanders;
- The Anzac battalions also had an advantage in that the New Zealand Infantry Regiment's companies had a significant level of experience in close country battlefield skills with the Companies deploying to Vietnam from the RNZIR training base in Malaysia while W Company generally had already been in country for 6 months before joining the fresh battalion;
- Deployment lead time was in some cases far too short for sound planning and preparation, especially in the early days, caused in the main by planning constraints;
- Access to training areas and resources varied depending on whether a battalion was in say Townsville with access to local training areas in High Range and Mt Spec or, Woodside where there was no access to any tropical or sub tropical training areas;
- Obviously the longer the war went knowledge of the enemy was more extensive and distributed in a more coherent form to battalions working up.

The Cost

The cost as would be expected was high. Including men from the RNZIR companies, 354 died of which about two thirds were Diggers and one third Junior Leaders, ie Platoon Commanders, Sergeants and Section Commanders; their names appear in the Honour Roll at the end. That number represents about 70% of the total Army fatal casualties which was the same proportion for the Regiment's 2,000 wounded. These figures of course do not take into account the longer term physical and psychological effects that the war was to have on a high proportion of the approximately 13,000 men who served with the Regiment in Vietnam. In particular the National Servicemen (conscripts selected by a ballot of birthdays to serve in the Army for two years) were victims of the War; not only were they forced to serve, but when that service was done they were basically cut adrift by the Army and returned to a community that had become increasingly hostile to Australia's involvement in the War.

It also needs to be said that these fine young men contributed significantly to the maturity and thus the professionalism of the battalions; in the main, they accepted their situation and became very good soldiers some as Junior Leaders, many as Platoon Commanders who have been mentioned in this book.

All wars have been and will continue to be difficult for Infantrymen. Vietnam was extremely difficult not only because the order of battle was often askew, eg not enough battalions and no armour, but also because of the nature of the enemy. Unlike Korea for instance, where the enemy was essentially conventionally organised and easily identifiable, especially after the Chinese entered the war, in Vietnam it was totally different. The enemy was anywhere and everywhere, moving through remote jungle areas; occupying fortified base camps (bunker systems) in jungle and rugged hill country eg May

Tao, Nui Thi Vai and Long Hais; and, operating in and around the populated areas. It should be said that in Phuoc Tuy Province at least, the bulk of the civilian population was sympathetic to the VC and to a lesser extent the NVA presence. Indeed it should be recognised that despite the many successes achieved by the battalions there was little doubt the enemy always had control of the bulk of the Province's infrastructure. Even while D Company 4RAR was preparing to leave, enemy units were returning to base areas, eg on 19 February 1972, local ARVN forces contacted a large enemy force on Route 23 near Xuyen Moc; afterwards, elements of 274 VC Regiment, D445 VC Battalion and 74 NVA Rocket Regiment were all identified as having been involved in the action.

Conclusion

The Korean War is known as the 'forgotten war' and the Vietnam War as the one that was lost, though arguably it would be more correct to refer to it as the war that couldn't be won. Australia entered the war for specious reasons, ie with an eagerness to join the Americans, virtually inviting them to request our participation in order to curry favour with our primary ANZUS partner. This was hardly a sensible reason for becoming involved in the war and it provided no coherent strategy with which military planners could work.

However, despite the difficulties imposed on the Regiment's involvement in the Vietnam War, all battalions met the challenges and did their job in a thoroughly professional and mainly successful way. There was for example none of the systemic abuse of civilians such as inflicted by the Americans; indeed our former enemy has gone on record to praise the Australians for the respect they gave to the civilian communities.

There is no doubt the Regiment's reputation created first in Korea, then Malaya and Borneo, was significantly enhanced by its performance in the Vietnam War and it became recognised as one of the finest, if not the finest, light Infantry Regiment in the world.



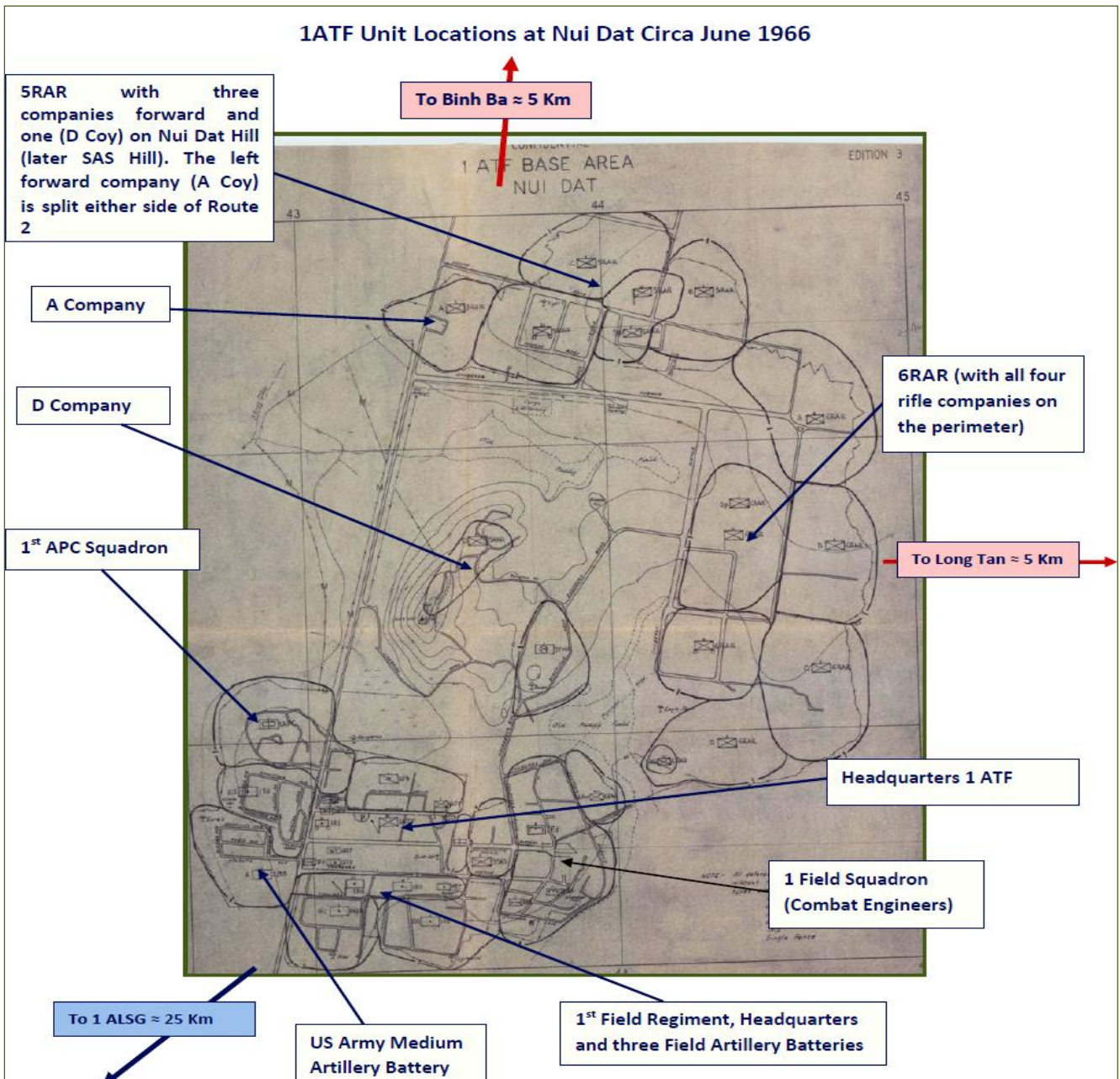
The quintessential patrol photograph of the Vietnam War: Sergeant PJ Buckney, D Company, 8RAR during Operation Atherton, December 1969.

AWM WAR/70/0026/VN and permission of Peter Buckney

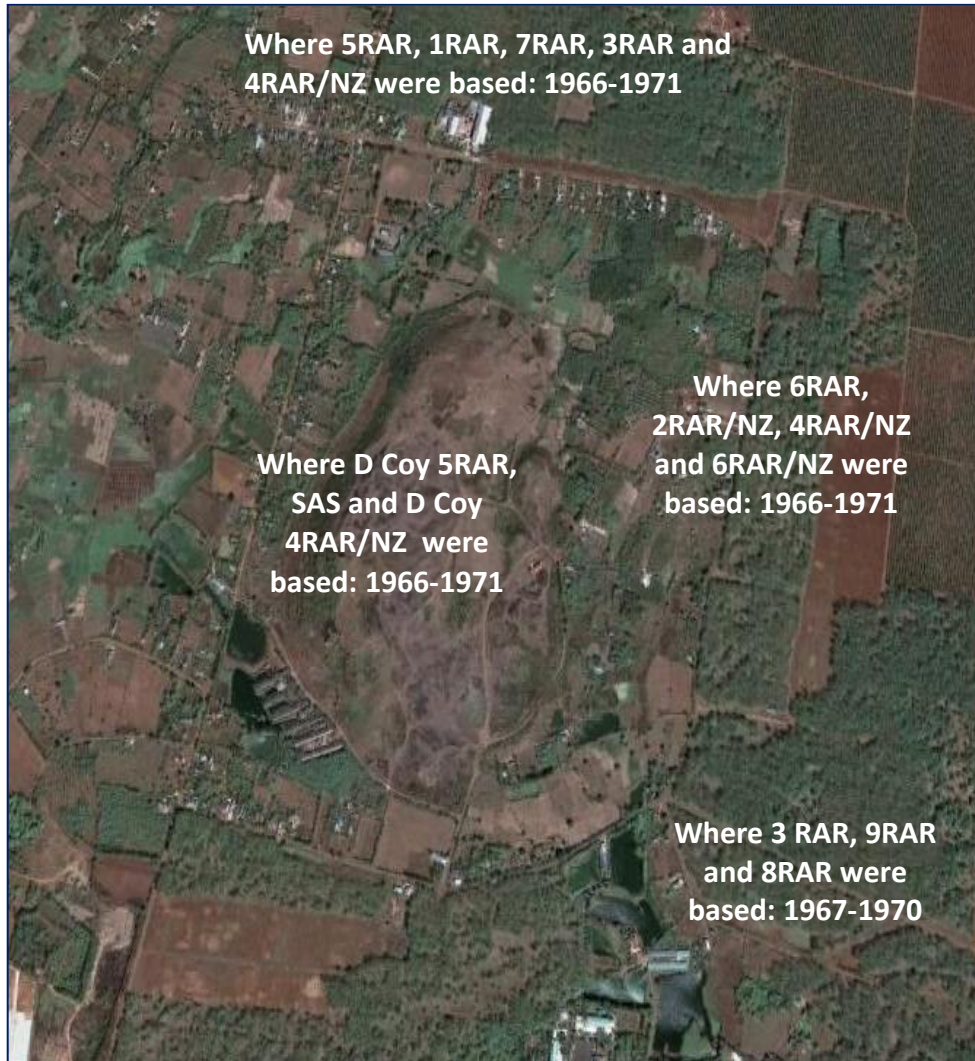
For those that still hear the sounds of the guns

End Notes

1. See Page 23. It should be noted that in June 1966, the enemy with superior numerical strength was operating freely in the vicinity of Binh Ba and Long Tan and the undermanned Task Force was potentially at great peril. One can only speculate why a properly constituted force, ie a full Brigade wasn't deployed from the start rather than the gradual build up to achieve the capability needed in late 1967 when a third Battalion (3RAR) was added and in March 1968 when C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment joined 2RAR and 3RAR on Operation Pinnaroo.



Nui Dat Circa February 2010



2. *See Page 23.* After my tour of duty with 6RAR I was posted to the Officer Training Unit (OTU) Scheyville as the Senior Instructor of the Advanced Field Training Wing. The Wing's primary function was to train National Service Officers as Platoon Commanders in a Company environment. As late as 1971 in the 'Attack Phase' of war the cadets were still being trained using the Malayan Emergency scenario, ie platoon attacks on an enemy 'camp' with one section fire support, one section cutoff and one section assault. Hardly relevant to the Vietnam situation and especially not for bunker systems! After considerable debate and not much high level support I nevertheless rewrote the training package to represent the higher level of conflict that graduates would face in Vietnam, especially in the use of artillery and tactical air support.

3. *See Page 24.* Whereas eventually, individual awards for Long Tan would seem to have been properly settled, the issue of unit awards, eg The Australian Unit Citation remains unresolved at the time of writing. It seems incongruous that the other units and subunits directly involved in the course and outcome of the Battle of Long Tan were also not recognised. The 31 men of the B Company patrol engaged the enemy and caused casualties, as did the men of A Company and the crews of 3 Troop. It is a fact recognised by historians that the guns of I Field Regiment were largely responsible for keeping the enemy at bay and for causing most of its casualties. This was achieved through accurate fire sustained for a long period under very difficult conditions on the gun lines. It seems inconceivable these men were not recognised with the retrospective award in 2010 of the Australian Unit Citation.

4. *See page 28.* Light Fire Team

Right: A RAAF 9 Squadron UH-1H Iroquois Gunship – Call Sign Bushranger 71. Two such aircraft constituted a Light Fire Team



Left: close-up of a Bushranger showing its armament, ie:

- Right front a M-134 (GAU-2B/A) minigun, a six-barelled weapon capable of firing 4800 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition per minute, with devastating effect up to 1000 metres. A flexible ammunition feed chute links the minigun to a stack of ammunition boxes behind the cockpit.
- Centre, in the cargo hold, Door Gunner's twin GPMG M 60 machine guns each with 1000 rounds.
- Below the twin M60s, a seven barrelled rocket launcher with 2.75 inch rockets

AWM P05002.025

5. See Page 35

NUI DAT ... THE HOME OF THE 'BULL 'N' BRA' BOOZER

Long before the SAS, called Nui Dat their own,
The hill was just a feature of bamboo, overgrown;
Until in nineteen sixty six, when Tigers' set the pace,
For Delta company Tiger Five, the hill was our home base.

Led by Major Greenhalgh in the clearing of the hill,
It took a mighty effort, hard work and lots of skill;
A base from which to operate, a self secured zone,
A place to rest a little, a place we could call home.

Yes, this was home sweet home for us when not on operations,
looking down from Nui Dat across the thick plantations;
An Observation Post on top, with a 50 cal, as well,
Sandbag walls and bunkers, we were safe as hell.

Our time in base was limited, for we had a job to do,
Patrols and village clearing, well ... that was only two;
Lying wait in ambush, and many waits were long,
Before there was a sighting and a battle with the Cong.

Operation over and time to rest and chat,
Waiting for the choppers, then home to Nui Dat;
To wait more battle orders and sometimes shed a tear,
Post-mortems of our actions and a very welcome beer.

We had built a little Boozer from bamboo and some tarp,
Lost a lot of precious blood cause bamboo spikes are sharp;
Choice of beer ... well, there were two, Budweiser or a Swan,
The only other option was maybe having none.

At the entrance to our boozer was placed a buck bull's horn,
With a lacey bra from Vung Tau, our Booza's name was born;
"Bull 'n' Bra" we called it and raised our old bush hat,
The "Bull 'n' Bra Booza" ... stood proud on Nui Dat.

Many a story was written and many a tale was told,
'Round the drum that was used for an esky to keep all the
amber stuff cold;
Stories from back home in Aussie and a sing song to take away
pain,
For soon it was put all your gear on and back in the jungle again.

Homes, are not forever and this for us was true,
We sadly had to leave the hill to establish the Horseshoe;
We left a lot of memories on the Hill at Nui Dat,
And the Bull 'n' Bra boozer ... well ... there alone it sat.

The SAS claimed Nui Dat and called the place their own,
While we, the rightful owners found another home;
Renamed SAS Hill forevermore is another battle scar,
Because it's home to Delta Tiger Five, and Home of The Bull n'
Bra.



Above: The Author of the 'Bull n Bra' – Pte MC Lyons D Company 5RAR; and below, outside the Boozer (far right).

With permission of Mal Lyons and the 5RAR Association.



6. *See Page 45.* Over the years of involvement in the war a number of battalions made comments about the effect of spending long periods of time out bush had on both the physical fitness and weapon handling skills of the soldiers. By the end of a battalion's tour the soldiers' physical fitness often slumped to dangerous levels as fatigue affected alertness and thus reaction times. Furthermore, some soldiers may have gone months without firing their weapon, at least not in a way that preserved their marksmanship skills. All too often the short periods that occurred between prolonged operations prevented physical fitness training and weapon training. Junior leaders were then presented with the problem of tired soldiers who were losing confidence in their ability to continue in combat.

7. *See Page 46.* The Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), especially the Soviet RPG 7 illustrated here, was one of the most lethal weapons used by the enemy in Vietnam. Called a B 41 by the VC, it was light weight (one man), of simple and rugged design and very easy to use with a minimum of training. Though designed primarily for use as an anti-tank weapon, the HE Anti Tank (HEAT) shaped charge ammunition proved ideal in close country against infantry. When fired over head it showered lethal shrapnel over a wide area and was particularly effective when fired in salvos from bunker systems. Fifty years on the weapon is still used extensively in a wide range of conflicts.



8. *See Page 46.* The reason the description of Operation Coburg appears biased towards 7RAR is that there were no After Action Reports/Contact Reports available in the 2RAR War Diaries. Indeed, none of the 2RAR operations on its first tour have reports in the digitized version of the Unit War Diaries and clearly someone, for whatever reason, removed them from the files.

9. *See Page 67.* It should be understood that except at the very beginning of a Battalion's tour of duty, Rifle Platoons and therefore Companies, operated at best at about two thirds of their establishment strength. This occurred for a number of reasons including, very occasional lapses in unit administration; the main factor was that unlike many previous conflicts there was no 'coming out of the line' for rest (leave), maintenance or retraining. In Vietnam the Battalions were in a constant state of operations and generally went from one operation to another within a few days and of course there was always a 'Rear Details' to help defend the sprawling 1 ATF base. Even when at Nui Dat, Battalions had companies on Task Force Ready Reaction, TAOR patrolling duties, occupation of the Horseshoe Defence Position, other operational duties such as protection for 'Acorn Operations' and Civil Affairs Unit projects; promotion and specialist weapons courses were also required from time to time eating further into platoon strengths.

10. See Page 75. Claymore Mine.

The M18A1 Claymore mine (pictured) was a directional anti-personnel mine named by its inventor (Norman Macleod) after the great Scottish broad sword. It was developed at the US Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey, in the late 1950's mainly as a counter to massed attacks as had been used by the Chinese in the Korean War.

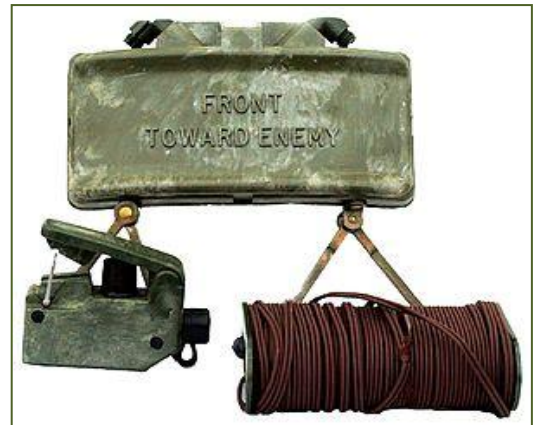
Unlike other land mines the Claymore is command detonated, ie by electric impulse and contained a layer of C4 explosive and a matrix of some 700 3mm steel balls which fired in a 60° fan to about 100 metres but with an optimum range of 50 metres.

The Vietnam War was the first time it was used on active service and with lethal effect by RAR battalions mainly in platoon ambush situations which were usually sprung at night and often in situations when there was poor visibility. Given the extent of the explosive power of the mine there was a danger area behind the mine of some 16 metres, when under cover, and up to a 100 metres on its flanks. The mine was also susceptible to inadvertent detonation from electrical interference including lightning as 9RAR was to tragically experience on Operation Jack. Later in its service a Ferrite Bead was added to the firing circuit as a safeguard.

The idea of multiple detonation of claymores from a single location had obvious advantages particularly as it provided the ambush commander with the ability to site the ambush with the flanks further back from the track without compromising security and the possibility of the enemy discovering the mines before they entered the killing area was minimised. One such device, in this case built by 4 Platoon 5RAR, enabled the Platoon Commander to fire multiple claymores, initially a bank of 8 but with further modification, a bank of 10 (pictured).

Clearly the ability to fire multiple claymores electrically at platoon level was a capability which should have been available from the beginning of the war. Today's Army (2012) does have devices for multi firings and those devices have an inbuilt electrical choke to prevent inadvertent detonation.

The lethality of the claymore was very high and on a number of occasions it was used as pretty much the only weapon in the ambush when of course all platoon weapons should have been sited to engage the killing ground, especially as malfunctions in the claymore's firing circuit often occurred.



11. See Page 5 Although the Official History (AWM) makes no mention of the involvement of Chinese troops in the war (at least not in the last volume), there is considerable evidence to show there was significant Chinese support. In fact tens of thousands of Chinese deployed to Vietnam, primarily in the North to provide high technical support such as Air Defence. It was also known that HQ MR-7 had a radio intercept capability and it is reasonable to assume that the enemy ambushed by 4 Platoon 5RAR on 4th April 1969, were members of that group; it would seem plausible that some of them could have been Chinese.

12. See Page 84. On 25 July 1969, I was driving around the north of Dat Do when a young woman called Mai approached wanting to surrender as a Hoi Chanh. It was quickly established (no water boarding) that she was both a mine lifter and a mine layer and was taken to the minefield on the eastern side of Dat Do where the group was joined by OC 1 Field Squadron (Maj Rex Rowe). She then went into the minefield and demonstrated how she could first neutralize and then lift a mine and then the anti lift grenade (two birds with one stone). She then pointed out where there were two storage bunkers in the minefield which subsequently were shown to have 4 mines in one and 20 mines and 66 M26 Grenades in the other.

A few days later (29 July 1969), I happened to be at the Regional Force Post south of Phuoc Loi when a defector from D445 VC Battalion emerged from the paddy fields between Route 44 and the Long Green (where there was a gap in the minefield). His name was Nguyen Van Nuong (alias Loc) and he was the Company Commander of C2 Company. He immediately gave directions to where his Company was at the western end of the 'Long Green' and as the Battery Commander (Maj John Bertram) was airborne at the time the spot was shelled by 101 Field Battery located at FSB Thrust. When he was asked why he surrendered he said his wife, a member of the C2 Company, was being unfaithful with a number of his former comrades - hell has no fury like a cuckold VC Company Commander!

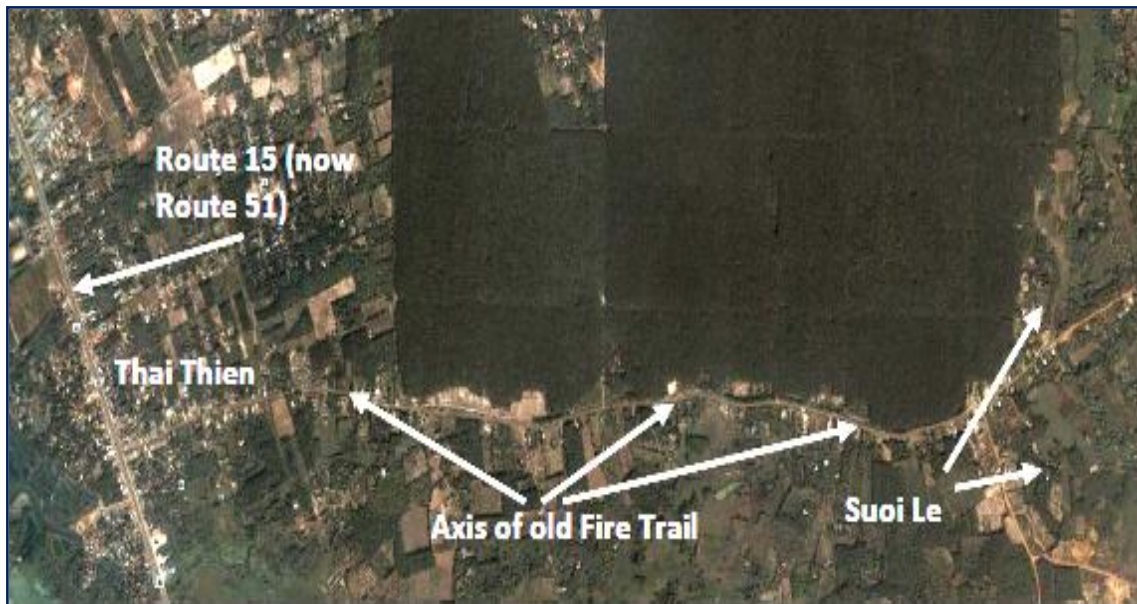
On 12 August, acting on information from the defector, I took an Engineer party to a cemetery south of Dat Do and adjacent to the minefield which at the time was being cleared with APC 'mine killers' with shrapnel flying in all directions. A tomb was located containing 95 M26 grenades however, the mines which had been stored there were gone. Obviously the enemy had realized we were onto it and removed the mines, most likely to the Long Hai Hills. The AWM Official History's account of what occurred at this time and earlier on 25 July, gives all the credit to the men of 1 Field Squadron and I would simply like to say that the courageous Sappers who worked alongside the Battalions deserve all the credit they can get.

13. See Page 87. I had located a house in the eastern extremity of Phuoc Loi which had several barrels of rice and well used sleeping spaces for ten people. The only occupant at the time was a 30 year old woman. I was fairly sure there was a mine cache nearby and was in the process of investigating what looked like a recently constructed bunker when my team of three was fired upon. Discretion being the better part of valour meant we withdrew from the scene and went to Sector HQ in Dat Do to report the find to the District Chief. To my astonishment the District Chief revealed that he knew about the house in Phuoc Loi because the woman who lived there was the wife of the leader of the Ngai Giao Guerrilla Unit and all she was doing in his view was performing her domestic duties as a wife! We then returned to examine the fresh digging in Phuoc Loi and arrived just after a funeral party had detonated a mine there killing and wounding so many people.

14. See Page 87. One of those wounded in the 3 Platoon mine incident on 21 July 1969 was a National Serviceman from Adelaide, Pte Mike Storen. Many years later his sister married John Schumann the leader of the 'Red Gum' Band. One night over a few beers with Mike, John composed the song '*I was only 19. A Walk in the Light Green*' recorded under the Red Gum name in 1983. "Frankie" was a real soldier who was also badly wounded; however, it was not he who

trod on the mine. The song would become the song of remembrance for the tragedy that was the Vietnam War.

15. See Page 89. One effect of the land clearing was that it gave easier access for local people to develop the land for agriculture. As the following contemporary satellite imagery of the area shows, the land was completely revegetated or in the case of the 'fire trails' made into roads and thus an axis for the development of farms, plantations and villages.



16. See Page 90. The problem with scheduling operations in tandem, as had occurred during the Pacification Operations around Route 44 and then in support of land clearing operations, was lessons learnt by one battalion were unlikely to find their way to subsequent battalions in time to be of much use. HQ 1ATF seemed not to have any method of ensuring analysis of enemy tactics was routinely passed on in time for relieving battalions to act on. In part this must have been due to the fact that by 1969 at least, HQ 1ATF had by metamorphosis, become the size of a Divisional or even Corps Headquarters. It certainly didn't have the sharpness of response expected of a Brigade Headquarters despite the best efforts of its hard working staff.

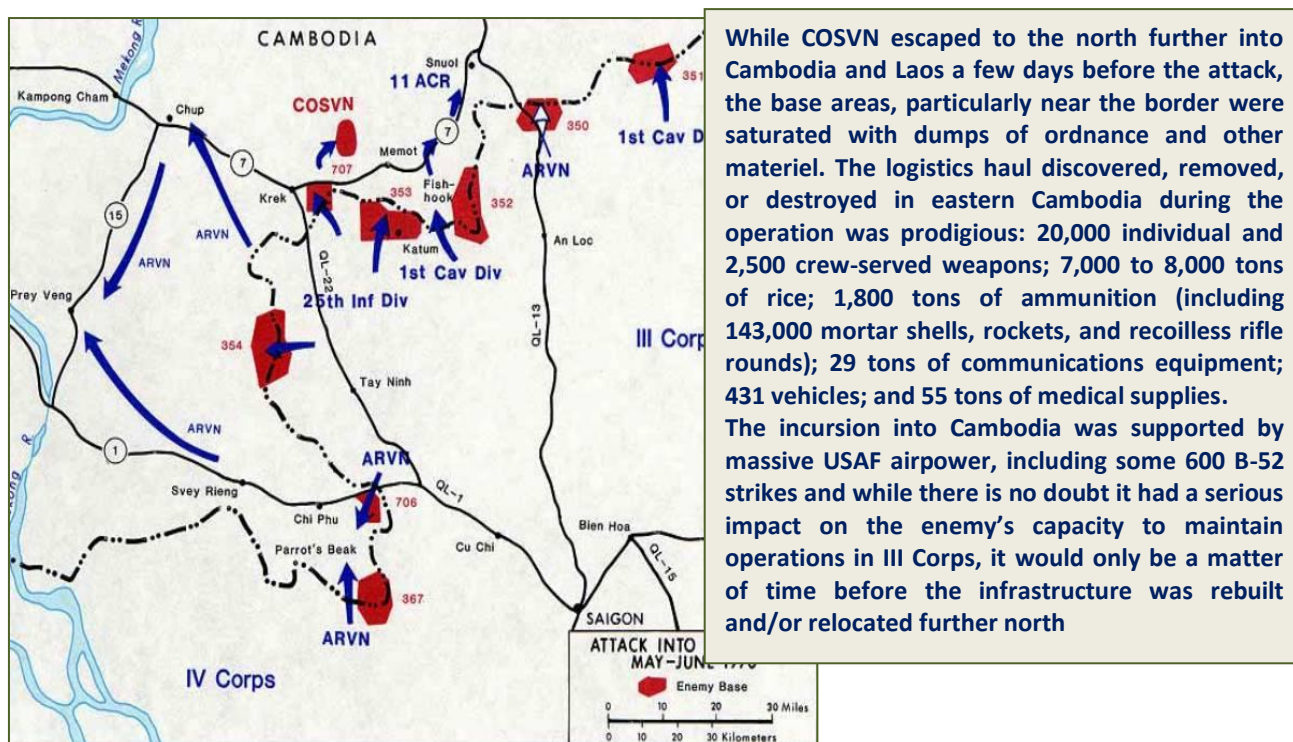
17. See Page 94. The Chinook aircraft had misjudged its first approach to the Pad at FSB Diggers Rest and went around for a second go. As it banked the aircraft toppled to the port side and the momentum of the pallet of mortar ammunition caused it land on top of the aircraft which was now the underneath of the fuselage. The aircraft impacted upside down but just before it toppled, a rear rotor blade snapped and was observed gently whirling its way towards the Mortar Platoon's position; of course as it came closer so did its speed and when it arrived it cut a mortar tube in half! Within minutes eight US Army helicopters arrived on the scene with six of them actually landing on the FSB Pad while the Tracker Platoon and a Platoon from V Company moved to the crash site but had to hold off because of exploding ammunition. A subsequent investigation revealed a coffee (Bakelite) cup had wedged under the controls (foot pedals) causing the aircraft to invert and crash.

18. See Page 99. The problem with mortar firing technology of that time was that Mortar Platoons had only a simple plotting board and range tables which assumed that the targets and weapons were at the same altitude. Thus when mortars at FSB Castle engaged targets in steep re-entrants at much lower levels the firing data produced was actually engaging a non-existent target in mid air! The Direct Support Battery Commander (Maj John Bertram) provided the solution with a line of sight adjustment routinely used by the longer range guns. This adjustment had the effect of reducing the apparent range to the target and the corrected elevation when applied to the mortar sights gave the correct range to the target.

19. See Page 111. The One Time Pad was a type of encryption which if used correctly, was proven to be impossible to decipher. Each character from the 'plain text' (original clear text) was encrypted by the addition of character from a secret random pad (key) of the same length as the plaintext, ie a 'Substitution Cipher', resulting in a 'cipher text'. If the key is random, is never reused in whole or part, and kept secret, the cipher text will be impossible to decrypt or break without knowing the key. One Time Pads were also used by the Australian Army with HF Radios and in Vietnam, by the SAS Regiment. Being a manual system and time consuming, use of One Time Pads was discontinued when portable mechanical ciphers, eg laptop computers, were introduced.

20. See Page 111. The detailed planning for the attack on the enemy's base areas on and over the Cambodian Border was approved by President Nixon on 22 April 1970, ie only a week or so before the main US attack occurred on 1 May 1970. Security constraints imposed by Washington also meant that Formation Commanders were given only a weeks notice and Battalion Commanders only 2 to 3 days. Indeed the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment which in Vietnam

was assigned to the 25th US Infantry Division had been on an operation in the 1ATF TAOR and was redeployed to the Cambodian sector from Nui Dat on 7 May 1970. Battalion Officers were issued with maps of the AO as they boarded C-130 and C-123 aircraft!

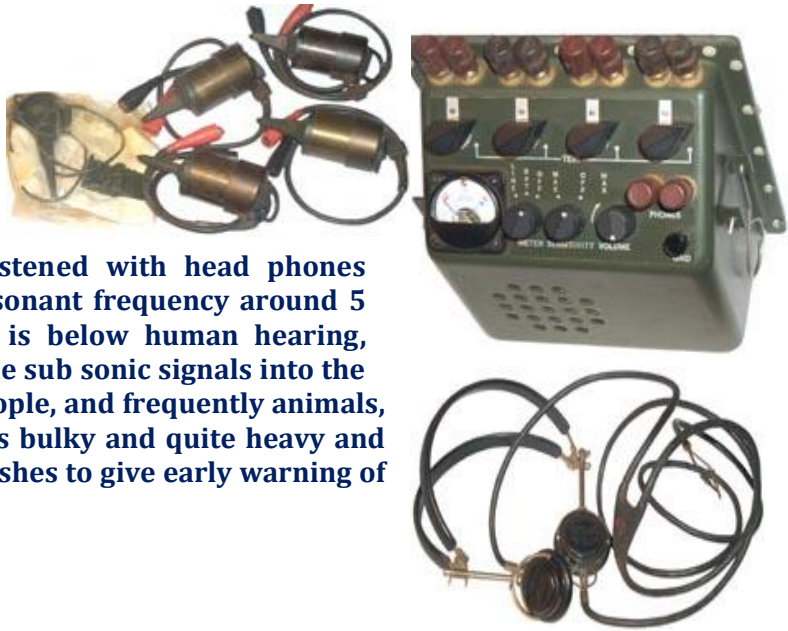


21. See Page 112. What the after action reports didn't say was that the one of the VC killed was a female (not unusual) but that she was a Local Force medic and carrying her six weeks old baby, which was safely evacuated to Vung Tau. Such were the extraordinary risks that many individual enemy took and in this case with a tragic and almost inevitable end. No doubt there would also be long term effects on the 7RAR soldiers involved that night. Such is the gruesome reality of war.

22. See Page 120. We seemed unable to respect the principle of "a balanced force" vis a vis the enemy threat in Vietnam and no doubt the haphazard manner in which Australia became committed to the war had a fair bit to do with that. Sadly such decisions were to get worse and in particular, the decision to wind down the Task Force from three to two and finally a single battalion (4RAR/NZ) and without any armoured (tank) support was to prove costly (see *Operation Ivanhoe*). Conventional wisdom at the time was that it was unlikely the South Vietnamese forces could be adequately prepared and would be no match for the North Vietnamese Army. The security of 1 ATF's TAOR had required three battalions, leaving one to do the job was a huge risk.

23. See Page 124.

The *PSR-1A Intrusion Detector* (pictured) was designed to detect ground vibrations using wires to transmit seismic activity heard by geophones (left) to the terminal box (right) where an operator listened with head phones (bottom). The geophones had a resonant frequency around 5 to 20 Hz which for practical use is below human hearing, however the terminal translated the sub sonic signals into the audio spectrum so movement of people, and frequently animals, could be heard. The equipment was bulky and quite heavy and was mainly used in overnight ambushes to give early warning of approaching enemy.



24. See Page 125. There seemed to be little respect by HQ 1ATF for the fact that an Infantryman had spent 12 months on an arduous and dangerous tour of duty and there was to be no respite in the last few days left in country. From personal experience as the 6RAR/NZ Acting Operations Officer I was flabbergasted and probably at the time outraged, when at 10pm on 8 May 1970 HQ 1ATF ordered that the Battalion provide a Platoon at 6am the next day to accompany Cavalry and Engineers to salvage ammunition and equipment from an abandoned US Fire Support Base near Thai Thien. The Company (A Company) was due to return to Australia by air on 12 May 1970. Naturally my worst fears were realised when at 8 am the next day an APC hit an anti-tank mine wounding six men, three seriously.

25. See Page 136. There were two significant command and control issues identified by the 31 March 1971 action on the Song Rai, ie:

- Communications on the A Company 2RAR/NZ company net were difficult, due in part to a problem with the 1 Platoon radio (antenna) and enemy radio interference; the major problem however, was the number of other more powerful call signs which tended to dominate the net including RAAF Gunships, a Tank Troop, artillery, a US Forward Air Controller and significantly CO 3RAR airborne in the Sioux (Possum) helicopter. The use of the airborne tactical command post in Vietnam was very useful for commanding officers however, there was frequently a downside in that the CO could easily become too closely embroiled in a battle that was essentially the domain of the Company Commander or in some cases the Platoon Commander.
- To say that the 3RAR Command Post at FSB was overloaded is an understatement. At various stages of the action, 3RAR was commanding six rifle companies (including two from 2RAR/NZ), plus Support Company operating as a rifle company and the 2RAR/NZ Anti Tank Platoon. There were also three Fire Support Bases with either mortar or artillery sections at each, a total of two Direct Support Batteries plus three Tank Troops and two APC Troops. This meant the CP Staff had something like 50 subunits whose locations had to be constantly and carefully plotted manually on the master battle map in the CP. In addition there was a significant amount of tactical air support involved and one would have thought that either a Tactical Headquarters from HQ 1ATF or 2RAR/NZ co-located at FSB Beth might have been a good move to relieve the pressure.

26. See Page 139 - Marker Balloons. The use of a marker balloon suspended up through a high jungle canopy (about 45 metres) by 5 Platoon 3RAR on 7 June 1971 may well have been the first time this technique had been used by a battalion in contact in Vietnam. It was certainly successful and in the circumstances of the action it is most unlikely that coloured smoke grenades would have been much use at least not in the short term. It was well known that smoke in thick ulu was very difficult for Gunships to see and of course had to be maintained continuously for the duration of the contact which on 7 June was about 8 hours; with a burning time of about one minute that would have meant a lot of grenades and regular resupply by air; as 3RAR discovered on the 31 March 1971 contact that could be an extremely hazardous exercise!

The balloon used by 5 Platoon on 7 June required water mixed with the fuel (calcium hydride) to inflate the balloon with hydrogen ($\text{CaH}_2 + 2\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{Ca(OH)}_2 + 2\text{H}_2$) The technique had not been practiced (supply shortage) and Sgt Eddie Desfontaines had to read the instructions as he went; bearing in mind the balloon had to mark the forward edge of the platoon and was bright orange, the procedure proved very dangerous.

In addition the process could be very time consuming (not good during a contact) and as 6 Platoon 3RAR discovered during a contact on 10 August 1971, a byproduct of the chemical reaction is Calcium Hydroxide (Ca(OH)_2), also known as slaked lime which *can cause severe skin irritation, chemical burns, blindness or lung damage*. This in fact occurred to a 6 Platoon soldier (Pte Mike Dickson) who was hospitalized because of serious burns he received from coming into contact with the residue.

While the idea of inflating a marker balloon for close air support was an admirable idea it must be said that the solution in 1971 was pretty hairy!

27. See Page 149.

A Hunter Killer Team consisted of an OH-6A Cayuse pictured opposite, which when teamed with the AH-1G Cobra attack helicopter (below) was a lethal weapon platform especially against enemy infantry. The OH-6A would find targets by flying low, "trolling for fire", then marking the target with colored smoke to lead in a Cobra, or "Snake", to attack. The Cayuse could absorb an extensive amount of small arms fire and could be armed with a 7.62mm "Minigun" or a 40mm grenade launcher. In addition, an M60 7.62mm machine gun could be



mounted in the rear starboard door opening



The AH-1G Cobra helicopter had a two man crew seated in a tandem cockpit, stub wings for weapons, and a chin-mounted gun turret. The aircraft was introduced into service in 1967 and to Vietnam during the 1968 TET Offensive. Armed with HE and flechette rockets and 20mm HE rounds it had substantial lethality especially when operating in pairs as they did in the so called 'Pink Teams'.

28. See Page 155 HMAS Sydney (AKA 'The Vung Tau Ferry') - a Majestic Class Light Fleet Aircraft Carrier of 20,000 tons, a speed of about 25 knots and with up to 38 aircraft embarked. She was originally built for the Royal Navy as HMS Terrible, was sold to Australia in 1947 and commissioned as HMAS Sydney in December 1948 serving in the Korean War with two Squadrons of Sea Fury Fighter Bombers and one Squadron of Firefly Fighter Aircraft embarked. She was decommissioned in May 1958 and re-commissioned as a Fast Troop Transport in March 1962. Every Battalion of the Regiment did at least one voyage to or from Vietnam on HMAS Sydney. She was finally decommissioned in November 1973.

The photograph was taken in Vung Tau Harbour before taking 4RAR and 104 Field Battery to Townsville

Photograph courtesy of the 4RAR Association



Vietnam was very much a Platoon Commander/Junior Leader's war and in the immediate aftermath and the years that followed this was not fully recognised. I for one would like to apologise to a number of men who subsequently, I either commanded or worked with and whose efforts in the war I either didn't take the trouble to establish or fully appreciate. In that sense, I acknowledge these very good junior leaders of that time, though sadly some have done their last clearing patrol:

Jim Bourke (1RAR), Shorty Brown (6RAR), Adrian Craig (9RAR), Col Fawcett (1RAR), Bruno Flematti (1RAR), Paul Green (3RAR), Spike Jones (6RAR), Peter Lauder (8RAR), Peter McAuley (9RAR), Peter Michelson (1RAR), Rod O'Leary (3RAR), Moon O'Neill (2RAR/NZ), Pud Ross (7RAR), John Salter (1RAR), Phil Thompson (8RAR), Snow Vautin (9RAR), David Webster (7RAR), Neil Weekes (1RAR), and Mark Maloney (7RAR) who was so very brave on and around 7th February 1968.



Honour Roll

1 RAR

2786017 PTE DE ABBOTT
 2784162 CPL FJ ANNESLEY
 2786313 PTE EJ BAILEY
 1200126 PTE LJ BAXTER
 37867 PTE MA BOURKE
 37010 PTE WT CARROLL
 215214 PTE C CLARK
 2787020 PTE RJ COX
 38012 LCPL RE COXON
 215063 CPL IK DAWSON
 217898 PTE WW DONNELLY
 1732701 LCPL P EVANS
 214479 PTE RE FIELD
 36543 CPL AHT FOTHERINGHAM
 5715657 PTE IJ GIBBS
 37857 PTE PR GILLSON
 215418 PTE EA GRILLS
 39426 PTE RM GRIST
 214329 PTE AR HANSEN
 215745 CPL RB HICKEY
 42774 CPL RN HILLIER
 215217 PTE NW HORNE
 1201350 PTE RD HUGHES
 215637 LCPL JH KALMA
 2786939 2LT TE LANGLANDS
 1731467 LCPL WH MARTIN
 54026 CPL LC McDONNELL
 217514 PTE NA McINERNEY
 39354 PTE RL McNAB
 1200817 PTE GJ MOSS
 2788524 PTE PE MURRAY
 2412151 PTE WL NALDER
 1201338 PTE CR NISBET
 2786748 PTE JA O'BRIEN
 213963 LCPL RHJ PARKER
 2784043 CPL JGS PEARCE
 5411479 PTE DH PENN
 5411305 PTE BO PETERSEN

2787069 LCPL JM RANDS
 22612 LCPL T ROSS
 15985 CPL RD SEIPEL
 3790506 PTE LR SHEPPARD
 2787079 PTE JM SLATTERY
 37003 CPL FJ SMITH
 17665 LCPL T SUTER
 3791291 PTE BM TRIMBLE
 54320 PTE A VAN VALEN
 2787255 PTE AJ WALLIS
 39403 PTE RCA WATSON
 216009 PTE HW WHITE
 311532 CPL JH WHITTON
 5715189 PTE AS WILLIAMS
 213780 PTE MAF WILSON
 1733095 PTE BT YOUNG

2 RAR

1201945 PTE LWH ADAMS
 5714249 PTE RJ BELL
 4410704 PTE RP BINNING
 18161 SGT T BIRNIE
 2785150 PTE WJ BRETT
 4721369 PTE RS CHAPMAN
 2785238 PTE TJ CUTCLIFFE
 1411181 PTE FJ FEWQUANDIE
 61582 CPL TJ GROSE
 16141 PTE NS HARALD
 6708488 PTE FA HYLAND
 1735712 PTE PF KOWALSKI
 2276248 PTE PJ LYONS
 2782440 LCPL PE McDUFF
 2412362 PTE PS McGARRY
 1732186 PTE DW MORRISON
 1735386 PTE DW NEAL
 4718427 PTE DE NELSON
 43058 CPL GL NORLEY
 3790094 PTE NC PETTITT
 43573 PTE SE RADOMI
 4410710 PTE JC RIVETT

4718449 PTE J ROGERS
 1/4209 WOII RS SMITH
 1202729 PTE DL THOMPSON
 2792375 PTE DJ TULLY
 1200750 SGT JW TWOMEY
 1731955 PTE LJ WESTON
 3797671 PTE GI WILLOUGHBY
 3411951 PTE KR WILSON
 4718082 LCPL RM WOOLFORD

3 RAR

3790530 PTE LN BROWN
 2787278 PTE JA CAMPBELL
 14208 SGT RT CARROLL
 4719003 PTE RJ CASTON
 55294 PTE KG COLES
 4411171 PTE AJ COOPER
 2788283 PTE BN DAVIDSON
 4718756 PTE TJ DE VRIES VAN LEEUWEN
 3791033 PTE JW DESNOY
 3789770 PTE JA DOHERTY
 4718368 LCPL RL FISHER
 1731113 2LT J FRASER
 6708763 PTE GR GODDEN
 2787776 PTE KR HOUSTON
 43423 SGT PE LEWIS
 218853 PTE P MANNING
 5714739 PTE GF MATHEWS
 4718855 2LT D PATERSON
 38763 PTE GR POLGLASE
 4719160 LCPL AV QUIGLEY
 1201087 PTE JR RAPP
 1732899 LCPL RW SALZMANN
 3787987 2LT LA TAYLOR
 4718911 PTE WM THOMAS
 2786038 PTE IJ THOMSON
 5715180 LCPL PRP VAN RIJSEWIJK
 235407 LT JW WHEELER
 3790789 PTE JT WORLE

4 RAR

5715206 PTE SJ BARNETT
 5718195 PTE BC BEILKEN
 6708915 PTE KF BREWER
 4718097 LCPL R BURNS
 2786525 PTE RA BYRNE
 38077 CPL P DAWSON
 3799449 PTE J DUFF
 2787716 PTE S GRAHAM
 56226 PTE KM KINGSTON-POWLES
 2787478 PTE RA McGUIRE
 2787512 PTE M MUC
 3798081 PTE RJ NIBLETT
 2787793 PTE MJ NOONAN
 217350 PTE PS O'CONNOR
 5717657 PTE BM PENGILLY
 1733375 PTE VN PETERSEN
 1733037 PTE JS RAMSAY
 2796378 PTE ML RHODES
 5715153 PTE CW ROOST
 55358 PTE KC SHAW
 5718122 PTE RJ SPRIGG
 3791207 PTE JR TINKHAM
 61560 CPL ACF WILKINSON

5 RAR

6709107 PTE DJ BANFIELD
 23916 MAJ DM BOURNE
 36911 LT J CARRUTHERS
 5716427 PTE NJ CASSANO
 5713804 PTE DM CLARK
 218554 PTE RF CONNORS
 15358 CPL BF COUPE
 2782049 PTE P CRAIG
 54865 PTE GH D'ANTOINE
 55537 PTE A DRUMMOND
 3786921 PTE LT FARRREN
 14900 CPL GG GILBERT
 2782127 LCPL GB GREEN
 2789790 PTE PJ JACKSON
 216304 CPL JJ KENNEDY
 16196 PTE RJ KENNEDY
 235328 LT EJ LEE
 1734491 PTE MP LINTON
 2784015 PTE RE LLOYD
 42720 PTE RJ LUBCKE
 3794377 PTE JC McMILLAN
 235136 MAJ MB McQUALTER
 29635 CAPT RB MILLIGAN
 2788085 PTE HL MULLER
 1200083 PTE EH NILSEN
 4717546 PTE EW NOACK
 217961 PTE LJ PETTIT
 218421 PTE GA PIKE
 342916 PTE MD POOLE
 216044 PTE NA PRACY
 4719818 PTE A REMELJEJ
 217479 2LT KP RINKIN
 43496 PTE RW SANDOW
 3793566 PTE BF SMITH
 42252 SGT BL SMITH

135494 LCPL PL SMITH
 313122 PTE JG STEVENS
 3786696 PTE PC SULLIVAN
 218006 CPL HE SUTTOR
 215958 PTE JR SWEETHAM
 2790880 PTE WE TEELING
 2789920 PTE BJ THOMPSON
 5713739 LCPL M TOMAS
 4720253 PTE TC TURNER
 5411605 2LT BG WALKER
 3786976 PTE GFA Warburton
 5716163 PTE AEL WARING
 5713748 LCPL BP WATSON
 5713751 PTE JC WEBSTER
 5715978 PTE JMT WHITE
 217191 LCPL MP WHITE
 15170 CPL NJ WOMAL

6 RAR

55120 PTE RA ALDERSEA
 2781363 PTE PJ ARNOLD
 1730888 PTE WJ ASHTON
 2781899 PTE MJ BIRCHELL
 2782525 PTE DH BRACEWELL
 3794895 PTE AR BROWN
 55613 PTE R BUCHAN
 3794556 PTE RD CLARK
 1730929 PTE GA DRABBLE
 1735143 PTE KA DUFFY
 1730941 PTE KH GANT
 3411673 PTE EF GRANT
 1730947 PTE VR GRICE
 511317 PTE PR HANSEN
 2781944 PTE PR HART
 18256 LCPL TE HENDLE
 214348 LT PA HINES
 15705 CPL FW HOARE
 43893 PTE JM HOUSTON
 1201885 PTE B JAMES
 2781847 LCPL J JEWRY
 6410158 PTE BW KELLY
 1734754 PTE IW KINGSTON
 27758 WOII JW KIRBY
 2782226 PTE GK KNIGHT
 2781704 PTE PA LARGE
 214752 CPL CT LITHGOW
 38801 LT PR MARKS-CHAPMAN
 37175 PTE KF MATHIESON
 1730993 PTE AF McCORMACK
 1730994 PTE DJ McCORMACK
 1731013 PTE WD MITCHELL
 55119 CPL JD NEEDS
 17693 CPL JW NORRIS
 2790170 LCPL RE POWER
 2782783 PTE DRJ POWER
 3787580 PTE AT PURCELL
 38728 PTE AW RICH
 5411599 PTE WM RILEY
 15561 LCPL KM ROONEY
 1731040 PTE DJ SALVERON
 2781465 2LT GC SHARP
 2790070 LCPL GI STANFORD
 38712 PTE DJ THOMAS
 1200265 PTE FB TOPP

3787416 PTE GL TWEEDIE
 216559 PTE MR WALES
 5713981 PTE BD WATERS
 5713988 PTE DR WEBSTER
 3787607 PTE CJ WHISTON

7 RAR

2784699 PTE NG ALLEN
 38110 CPL DR AYLETT
 216920 PTE MW AYRES
 5714453 PTE AEJ BELL
 2412450 PTE EF BROPHY
 62036 PTE GO CASHION
 1731426 PTE JG COX
 5716239 PTE NV CROUCH
 217314 PTE BT CULLEN
 422514 LT RW DAVIES
 2792089 PTE SW DICKSON
 2792150 PTE MR DUFFY
 216906 PTE BE FALLON
 218450 PTE AJ GIBSON
 311620 LCPL E HALKYARD
 38939 PTE BA HARSTAD
 3789232 PTE NVG HAWKER
 213834 CPL JF HAYES
 44897 PTE RE HUGHES
 4720992 PTE GR KAVANAGH
 4720583 PTE SG LARSSON
 3797086 PTE A LLOYD
 2785033 LCPL RC McMILLAN
 3411862 PTE DG MILFORD
 2792729 PTE PJ NAVARRE
 16327 PTE JM O'CONNOR
 2141115 PTE RB PATTEN
 3789447 PTE RG PERRIN
 235354 LT RC POTHOF
 218697 LCPL NT RICHARDSON
 38649 PTE TR SCOTT
 2257880 PTE RK SMITH
 44679 PTE HJ STANCZYK
 3797623 PTE A TALBOT
 216116 PTE PZ TRZECINSKI

8 RAR

214287 SGT AW AHEARN
 43555 SGT DA BAKER
 1200097 CPL JJ BARRETT
 218583 LCPL J BRESSINGTON
 45104 PTE P EARLE
 1734847 LCPL PR GOODY
 55890 PTE EG GOULD
 15400 SGT WJ HOBAN
 2783512 CPL RJ JACKSON
 3795935 PTE LJ MacLENNAN
 5716533 PTE JL McQUAT
 3795712 PTE BJ MUNDAY
 39016 PTE SJ O'DAL
 7154 PTE TEA PESONEN
 3795605 PTE D FOULSON
 3796110 PTE PM RICHTER
 312756 PTE VN WAGSTAFF
 61912 PTE GM WEST

9 RAR

4719565 LCPL RJ ABRAHAM
43326 CPL BAJ ADAMCZYK
2788583 PTE GA ARCHER
134994 PTE BGF BINDER
2275420 LCPL M BINK
1734408 PTE TR BLACK
2184013 CPL DJ BRENNAN
44265 LCPL PA CHANT
42564 SGT JR COCK
38627 LT RT CONVERY
15230 SGT JM DUROUX
218041 PTE BP EDWARDS
3793157 PTE RJ GAFFNEY
2789508 PTE BR GEORGE
43528 CPL AW GRAHAM
3794544 PTE JW HOLLOWAY
1733818 PTE RC KERMODE
39493 PTE RM KEY
39161 2LT GR LOCKE
1201200 LCPL MR McCONACHY
5715701 PTE LH McPHERSON
2788798 PTE TF MEREDITH
39923 PTE RJ MOORE
4717754 CPL HR MUSICKA
39565 PTE G NAGLE
4719545 PTE RA PHILLIPS
4719981 PTE BJ PLANE
1734329 PTE KJ PRIOR
3793403 PTE PF REIDY
312641 PTE B RENNIE
4719367 PTE GJ SCALES
2788912 PTE PC SMITH
2790417 PTE GD SORRENSEN
55431 PTE A SYKES
218491 PTE RJ YULE

RNZIR (including RNZE attachments)

2 RAR

699033 PTE WR AWATERE
482859 PTE T COOPER
41301 LCPL CR FISK
483256 PTE JL GURNICK
463211 PTE HD HIRINI
62954 PTE LC JONES
34659 CPL M MANTON
41081 LCPL ML SUTHERLAND
41576 LT JR WINTON

4 RAR

41383 LCPL DI BENSEMANN
388111 PTE KH HARDING
43349 PTE KR HURMAN
42294 PTE BJ PETERSEN
43032 PTE MJ WICKMAN

6 RAR

209440 SPR JT BARRETT
43134 PTE AV BERMINGHAM
41708 SPR RH BROWN
573233 PTE DC FRITH
38655 CPL JR GATENBY
42742 PTE RA HAWTHORNE
43221 PTE TN HOLLOWS
838605 LT SJ KIDD
43651 PTE TW PAENGA
53924 CPL JW RADFORD
43648 PTE P RAUHIHI
42116 PTE MJ TURNBULL
41530 PTE JS WILLIAMS
43233 PTE DN WRIGHT

Together, Side By Side

*I will always remember the day you came to us
As you arrived in the battalion straight off the bus
Eager young Regs and Nashos with smiles from ear to ear
It was the beginning of a brotherhood always to be held so dear
You were the bank clerks, farmers, teachers and all in between
Then from that day on, you were infantry dressed in jungle green
The training was tough and relentless; you became as one
All wearing the proud Skippy badge and the patch of the rising sun*

*In that Asian war you did your share and even more
The genes of the ANZACS stood out and that was for sure
As diggers there were times you questioned the task
Yet always went forward to complete whatever was asked
You never hesitated regardless of danger and fought side by side
War is brutal, unforgiving; many were wounded and some of you died
At times there was precious leave to rest and dream of another life
With loved ones in a far distant land void of bloody strife*

*Your battle honours on the Colours have been sewn
On Australia's sacred wall are treasured names you have long known
The legacy is there; it's yours to pass on and so very strong
It speaks of duty, love of country, sacrifice, courage and beyond
It's another chapter of our nation's history for all those who follow
To understand such qualities in their time beyond tomorrow
Mark it well; those young men from yesterday are still with you, side by side
On those special days when you, the living, march with justified pride
George Mansford © August 2011*

Lest We Forget



Duty First Onward