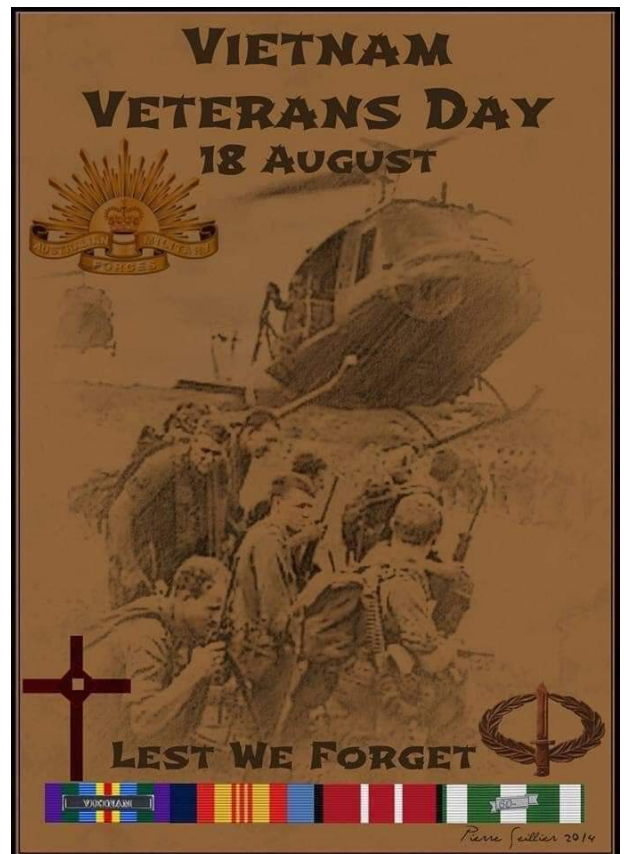


Vietnam Vets Day.

Vietnam Vets Day, which was formally known as Long Tan Day (It was changed in 1987, by the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, after the long overdue Welcome Home Parade), was a very sombre affair this year, due of course to the Covid-19 scourge that is roaring throughout the world. Vietnam Vets Day is held each year on the 18th August, on the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan.

The Battle of Long Tan was a significant moment in Australia's war in Vietnam. On the 18th August 1966, in a rubber plantation near the village of Long Tan, Australian soldiers fought one of their fiercest battles of the war. The men of Delta Company, 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, faced a force of some 2000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. The battle was fought in wet and muddy conditions during a heavy tropical downpour.

By the end of the day, 17 Australians had been killed in action and 25 were wounded, one of whom died a few days later. This was the largest number of casualties in a single operation since the Australian Task Force had established its base at nearby Nui Dat the previous April.



On this day, Australians commemorate all the battles fought by its Troops in Vietnam, from large-scale operations to platoon and section-level encounters. We remember the sailors of the Royal Australian Navy who supported land operations and members of the Royal Australian Air Force who served in combat and transport roles.

Almost 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam, with 521 losing their lives in the war and some 3,000 wounded. The Vietnam War was the longest conflict in which Australians were involved in the 20th Century. The first Australians to arrive in South Vietnam in 1962 were members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. Australian forces would continue to serve in the war until 1972.

Although most events were cancelled, some were held, although on a much smaller basis. One such event was held at Cotton Tree on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.



The Sunshine Coast chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Association, which is based in Maroochydore, and which holds the event at the Cotton Tree Cenotaph every year, decided to hold a small ceremony in honour of the men and women who took part in the conflict.

We went along.



Cotton Tree Cenotaph.



Master of ceremonies for the day was Laurie Drinkwater. Laurie is the Patron of the Vietnam Vets Association, Sunshine Coast and served in Vietnam with 6 Battalion from June 1966 to June 1967.



As usual, the wonderful Vietnamese community were well represented, once again organised by Thai and Diamond Dang.



Being the gentlemen that we are, John McDougal and I took it upon ourselves to stay close and make sure no harm came to these lovely grandmas.



Harry Smith and Diamond Dang.

Harry, an old Hobart lad, was the OC of D Company, 6th RAR, during the Battle of Long Tan.

On the 18th August, after heavy mortar shelling of the Australian base at Nui Dat the previous night, companies from 6RAR were sent out to locate the Vietnamese units involved. Smith led the 105 soldiers of D Coy and the 3 man NZ Artillery Party out on patrol, but at 3:15pm, while patrolling a rubber plantation at Long Tan that afternoon, they encountered a reinforced regiment-sized Vietnamese force (the Viet Cong 275th Regiment, supported by the North Vietnamese Army 806 Battalion and D440 and D445 Battalions) attempting to advance on the base.

A monsoon struck at the same time, but Smith organised his forces to successfully hold off the assault, while coordinating support from Australian, New Zealand, and United States artillery units back at Nui Dat.

D Coy was reinforced at 6:55 pm by a B Company Platoon then A Company in APCs, the Vietnamese having started to withdraw.

Under Smith's command, D

Coy had fended off a numerically superior force, with at least 245 Vietnamese confirmed as killed, and another 500 believed wounded. 800 enemy killed or died from wounds were listed in records found in 1969. 9 Delta Company men were given gallantry awards, but many of these had been



downgraded from the original nomination: Harry's leadership of his men during the fierce fighting saw him recommended for the Distinguished Service Order, but he instead received the Military Cross.

On the 14th August 2008, after years of campaigning for better recognition of Long Tan veterans, Harry Smith's Military Cross was upgraded to the Star of Gallantry (the Australian honours system replacement for the Commonwealth Distinguished Service Order). On the same day, two others who fought at Long Tan had their bravery awards upgraded to correspond to the original nominations. On the 9th March 2011 at the Maryborough Military and Colonial Museum, Harry was presented with the Star of Gallantry by local MP Paul Neville. Many of the Long Tan veterans were in attendance for the ceremony.

The ceremony at Cotton Tree was short, was only attended by a few Vets and a dozen or so well wishers from the public.



Thai Dang addressed those present, thanking Australians for their sacrifice in coming to the aid of his fellow people all those years ago. He assured all that their efforts and their help will never be forgotten.

Hard work pays off in the future; laziness pays off now.



Harry Smith recounted that terrible day back in 1966 when his group of men were attacked by a huge force of North Vietnamese in a rubber plantation at Long Tan.





He then laid a wreath in remembrance of his fallen mates.



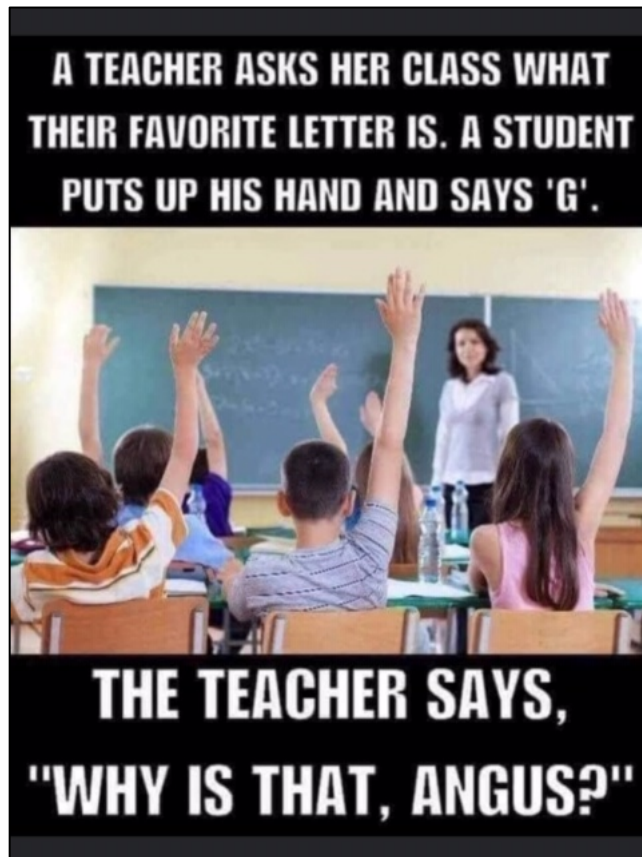
Michael Howe, the President of the Vietnam Vets Association, Sunshine Coast, laid a wreath.



Thai and Diamond laid a wreath.



A former soldier of the South Vietnamese Army laid a wreath.



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Kate Jardine played the Last Post after which those present conducted a minute's silence, following which she played the Rouse.

During this ceremony, her trusty dog sat at attention.



The ceremony was then declared closed, as usual, the lovely grandmas were in demand for a final photo, then most walked along the [RIVER](#) and headed for the Maroochydore RSL for a thirst quencher.



Prior to everyone leaving, the very generous Thai and Diamond then presented everyone with a thank you "Cheap Charlie" coffee mug.



In other areas of Brisbane, small groups gathered to remember fallen mates, Gary Olsen, the 2 Squadron, Queensland, Treasurer, laid a wreath at the Cleveland Cenotaph.



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