
THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY AND THE VIETNAM WAR 1962–1972

**THE 2002 CHIEF OF ARMY'S MILITARY
HISTORY CONFERENCE**

**Edited by
Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey**

Army History Unit



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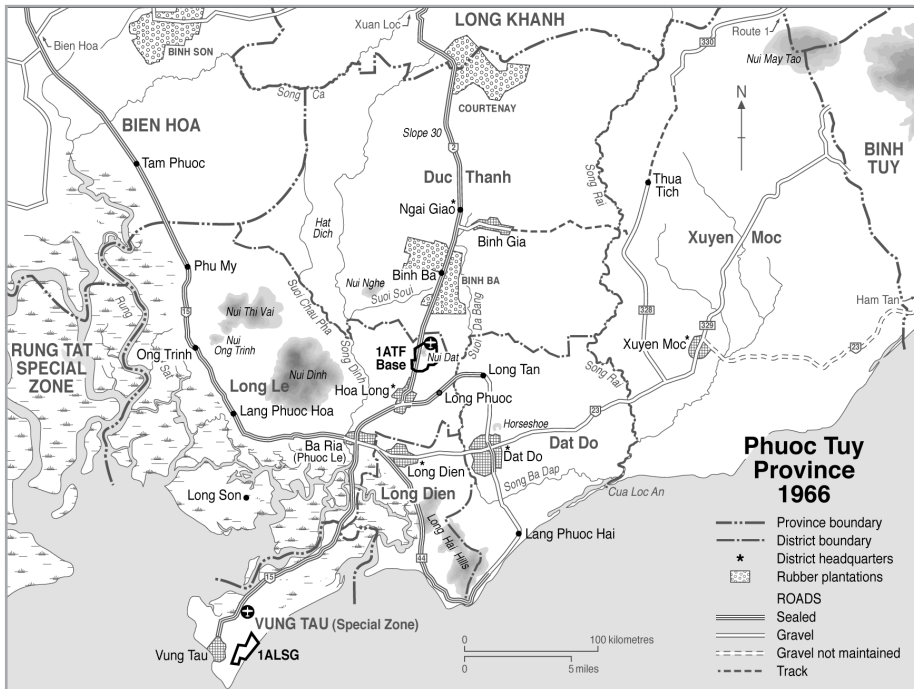
Cover Photograph: VIETNAM 1967—Members of 'A' Company, 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC)
(The ANZAC Battalion comprising 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and a Component from the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment), wade through deep water to cross a paddy field south-east of the Australian Task Force Base at Nui Dat. The Patrol, along the coastal strip of Phuoc Tuy Province, was part of a move by the Battalion to prevent Viet Cong reinforcements, supplies and equipment entering the Province by sea.
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Frontispiece map reproduced by permission from John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, vol. vii in *The Australian Centenary History of Defence* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001)

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Contents

Preface	vii
Contributors	x
Introduction <i>Lieutenant General Peter Leahy</i>	xvii
The Vietnam Syndrome: A Brief History <i>Roger Spiller</i>	1
Conversations at the Top <i>Edward J. Drea</i>	16
The Higher Direction of the Army in the Vietnam War <i>David Horner</i>	33
The Training of the Australian Army Units for Active Service in Vietnam: 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment <i>Michael O'Brien</i>	58
Training for Service in South Vietnam 1966–1967: 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment <i>Noel Charlesworth</i>	68
Preparing Armoured Units for Overseas Service <i>John Coates</i>	74
The Development of Australian Army Tactical Doctrine During the Vietnam War <i>Richard Bushby</i>	96
Doctrine, Training and Combat with 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, 1965–1966 <i>Clive Williams</i>	116
Australian Task Force Operations in South Vietnam 1966–1971 <i>Ian Kuring</i>	126

CONTENTS

Fighting Against Time: The South Vietnamese Army on the Road to Self-Sufficiency <i>Dale Andradé</i>	138
The Making of Tigers: South Korea's Military Experience in the Vietnam War <i>Kil J. Yi</i>	152
New Zealand's Commitment of Infantry Companies in South Vietnam 1967 <i>Ian McGibbon</i>	180
Meeting the Challenge of Training and Preparing Elements of 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, for Service in South Vietnam 1967–1971 <i>Rob Williams</i>	199
ANZAC Battalions: Australian Experiences and Perspectives <i>Bob Sayce</i>	209
The Role and Impact of Civil Affairs in South Vietnam 1965–1971 <i>Barry Smith</i>	229
The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam <i>John Hartley</i>	240
Advisors and Optimism: The Kennedy Administration and US Military Assistance Command Vietnam <i>Charles Morrissey</i>	248
Becoming the 3rd XV: The Citizen Military Forces and the Vietnam War <i>Dayton McCarthy</i>	263
The Australian Army and the Vietnam War in Retrospect <i>Alan Ryan</i>	279
How History Works: Afterthoughts <i>Peter Edwards</i>	302

Preface

Vietnam was Australia's longest war, and among its most controversial and divisive. The brunt of the ten year Australian commitment was borne by the Army, in terms of the forces committed and the casualties incurred. The Army became the focus of public opposition to government policies and of discontent among those eligible for call-up under the National Service scheme, a political price with ramifications felt for years after the war's end. On the other hand, the Army matured professionally during the Vietnam War, was stretched organisationally and institutionally and rose to the challenge successfully. As a generalisation, the United States went into the Vietnam War with a superb Army which the war very nearly destroyed; the Australian Army was enhanced by the Vietnam experience.

Much of the popular perception of the war is driven by the products of Hollywood, and to a slightly lesser extent by American historical, fictional and memoir literature. Neither *Rambo* nor *China Beach* has much, if anything, to say to the Australian experience of the war. (They may not have much to say to the reality of American experience, either). The popular notion that it is the victors who write the history is fundamentally belied by the case of the Vietnam War: the war is writ overwhelmingly in and on American terms. The United States has never been especially good at recognising the fact, much less the role, played by its allies in the conflicts of the twentieth century; in popular culture significant events acquire significance only when they are appropriated to American actors (the film *U-571*, in which British success in capturing Enigma codes at sea is reallocated to the US Navy, is a case in point). A collection of essays allegedly providing 'international perspectives' on the war manages, in the section devoted to the allies of the United States, to ignore entirely the contributions made by Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines while providing coverage of Japan, NATO and the Middle East.¹ Of serious study of the Republic of [South] Vietnam, or of its army—ARVN—there is virtually no sign.

The Vietnam War was not a single, undifferentiated entity. Individual experience in Vietnam was a function of where you were and when you were there. The US Marines in northern I Corps fought a very different, and much more nearly conventional, war than

1. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (eds), *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

PREFACE

did the largely South Vietnamese units combatting local force guerrillas in the Delta. For Americans, the ‘big unit’ war associated with Westmoreland between 1965-1968 differed from the emphases on pacification and Vietnamisation overseen by his successor, Abrams, in the period 1969-1973. Marines working in the Combined Action Platoon program in the earlier period and advisors working with the ARVN during the North Vietnamese offensive at Easter 1972 would both dissent from that characterisation. So too with the forces contributed to the Free World Military Assistance Forces. While all the governments concerned used the force contributions they made to create leverage with Washington, these forces themselves had very different wars. And all were different again from that experienced by the South Vietnamese, for many of whom the operational tour was not one year, but ten.

Writing on the war in Australia has gone through several manifestations and the literature remains uneven in both quality and coverage. There is no single, comprehensive history of anti-Vietnam War activism or the Moratorium movement of 1970-71; veterans’ issues have been treated partially and writing in this area tends to be stronger on advocacy than analysis; there is as yet no systematic study of the soldier and his experience across the course of the war of the kind undertaken in the United States, or as exists elsewhere in Australian historiography for the two world wars.² Two traditions within the writing of Australian military history are well represented in the literature, however: the unit history, and the official history. The latter in particular, conceptualised to deal with Australia’s involvement in postwar Southeast Asian conflicts in Malaya and Borneo as well as in South Vietnam, helps to provide an important context for the study of Australia’s involvement in the war, one which precisely reflects the Army’s own experiences in the course of the 1950s and 1960s.

The essays in this volume were originally presented at the annual Chief of Army’s military history conference in Canberra in October 2002. Coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the first commitment of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam and the 30th anniversary of the withdrawal of the final elements of the Australian force, it concerned itself not only with the ‘in-country’ experience in its various forms, but with the way in which the Army was trained and prepared for operations, the higher-level policy which governed the deployment, and the interaction with and incorporation of infantry companies from the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment into the Royal Australian Regiment (ANZAC) battalions. The wider context of the war received appropriate emphasis as well, with consideration given to the interaction between the Australian government and the Johnson administration in Washington, and the experiences of the Republic of Korea (ROK) expeditionary force, and of the ARVN, on

2. A comprehensive bibliography of Australian writing on the Vietnam War may be found in Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey and Peter Pierce, *Australia’s Vietnam War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 185-210.

PREFACE

whose behalf and alongside whom Australians, Americans, Koreans, Thais and others fought and bled. Two aspects of the war and its impact on the Army are addressed here, although to date they have featured hardly at all in writing on the war: the impact on the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), denied a role and relegated to 'Third XV' status in the defence of Australia; and the institutional and policy consequences for the Army in the aftermath of withdrawal and the ultimate defeat of Western interests in 1975.

The Vietnam War remains a living force in American public life, as some of the discussion about the possible war on Iraq in recent months makes clear. In Australia the war has much more clearly been consigned to 'history'. That does not, and should not, mean that it is of interest only to military history buffs and old soldiers reliving their past. The Australian Army was called on to function at a level and at a sustained intensity in a manner not seen since the Second World War. Many of the issues of training, doctrine, manpower, command and inter-allied relations are live ones still, and would be instantly recognisable to those who led the Australian contribution to INTERFET in East Timor in 1999-2000. Despite the fact of defeat in Indochina and the frustration of American power, the Australian Army rose to the challenges thrown at it by the Vietnam commitment and generally met them successfully. How it did so, and the costs incurred in doing so, are worth careful study as the Army is again faced with the defence of Australian interests in an increasingly unstable and unpredictable international order.

A volume such as this would not be possible without the willing cooperation of many individuals. As always, Roger Lee and his staff at the Army History Unit were responsible for the overall organisation of the conference, and we thank them for their sustained efforts. Our speakers responded graciously to our requests for written versions of their papers (some of which have been considerably expanded for inclusion on this volume) to be available in what might seem in academic circles to be indecent haste. Dr Peter Edwards kindly allowed us to adapt his after-dinner speech for inclusion here. In the production of the volume we have been greatly helped by the willing cooperation of Margaret McNally, Jeff Doyle, and Kurt Fountain. We could not have got to the point of publication without their assistance, and we are very grateful for it. It is seven years since we first began to work with (then) Colonel Peter Leahy in helping to plan the program for and subsequent publication of the proceedings of the Chief of Army's military history conference. It gives us special pleasure to acknowledge his continuing support, as Chief of Army, for history in the Army and the wider community.

Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey

Contributors

Dale Andradé is writing the US Army's official history of combat operations in Vietnam between 1969 and 1973. He is the author of three books on the war: *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (1990); *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam* (2000, with co-author Kenneth Conboy); and *America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 Easter Offensive* (2002), as well as numerous articles on Vietnam, counter-terrorism and special operations.

Captain Richard Bushby is a graduate of the Australian Defence Force Academy (1995) and the Royal Military College, Duntroon (1996), and completed an Honours degree in history at ADFA in 1997. A revised version of his thesis was published as *'Educating an Army': Australian Army Doctrinal Development and the Operational Experience in South Vietnam 1965-72* (1998). After several regimental postings, including service with 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, as a platoon commander with INTERFET in East Timor, he became a Tactics and Strategic Studies instructor at RMC in January 2002.

Brigadier Noel Charlesworth graduated to Infantry from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1948. He served in Korea in 1950 and again in 1951-52, and in Papua New Guinea with the Pacific Islands Regiment, 1961-63. He commanded 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, in South Vietnam in 1967-68, and was the Australian Exchange Officer on staff at the Staff College, Camberley, in 1969-70. He commanded the 3rd Brigade in Townsville, 1974-75, and was Army Attaché in Washington, DC, in 1976-78. After an appointment as Chief of Staff, Field Force Command, he retired from the Army in 1981.

Lieutenant General John Coates retired as Chief of the General Staff in 1992 after 40 years in the Australian Army. He graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1955, and later served as Commandant of the College. After serving on exchange with the American and British Armies, he commanded a Cavalry (Armoured Personnel Carrier) Squadron in South Vietnam in 1970-71. A graduate of the University of Western Australia and of the Australian National University, he is the author of three books: *Suppressing Insurgency* (1993); *Bravery above Blunder: The 9th Division in New Guinea in 1943-44* (1999); and, as vol. VII of *The Australian Centenary History of Defence* (of

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which he was joint editor), *An Atlas of Australia's Wars* (2001). As an Honorary Visiting Fellow in the School of History at the Australian Defence Force Academy, he continues his exploration of various aspects of Australian military history.

Peter Dennis is Professor of History at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He is a graduate of the University of Adelaide and Duke University, North Carolina, and has taught at the Royal Military College of Canada, the University of Western Ontario, the Faculty of Military Studies, Duntroon, and the National University of Singapore. His publications include, as joint author, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (1995) and *Emergency and Confrontation: Australian Military Operations in Malaya and Borneo 1950-1966* (1996). He was joint editor, with John Coates, of the seven-volume *Australian Centenary History of Defence* (2001).

Edward J. Drea works for the Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, DC, where he is writing the history of the office from 1965 to 1969. He is a graduate of Canisius College, Buffalo, New York, Sophia University, Tokyo, and the University of Kansas. He has taught at the US Command and General Staff College and the US Army War College, and served as Chief of the Research and Analysis Division, US Army Center of Military History. He is the author of *MacArthur's ULTRA: Codebreaking in the War against Japan* (1992) and *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army* (1998), as well as numerous articles on the Pacific War.

Peter Edwards is the Official Historian of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts 1948-1975, and the author of two of the volumes in the series. He is currently a Visiting Professor in the School of Politics at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, and is writing a biography of Sir Arthur Tange.

Jeffrey Grey is Associate Professor of History at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. A graduate of the Australian National University and the University of New South Wales, he is the author of a number of books on Australian military history including, most recently, *A Military History of Australia* (2nd edn, 1999); *The Australian Army* (2001), vol. I in *The Australian Centenary History of Defence*; and, with Jeff Doyle and Peter Pierce, *Australia's Vietnam War* (2002). In 2000-02 he was Major General Matthew C. Horner Professor of Military Theory at the US Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia.

CONTRIBUTORS

Major General John Hartley is a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon (1965), the University of Queensland, the US Army War College, the Army Command and Staff College and the Joint Services Staff College. He served twice in Vietnam, as a platoon commander and as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Army, and was wounded three times. As a general officer he headed Army's Training Command, served as the Director of the Defence Intelligence Organisation, was Deputy Chief of Army, and Land Commander Australia. He retired in early 2000. He has contributed articles on defence-related issues to the Brisbane *Courier Mail* and the *Asia Pacific Defence Reporter*.

David Horner is the Professor of Australian Defence History in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. A graduate of both the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and the Australian Army's Command and Staff College, he served as an infantry platoon commander in Vietnam, and had various regimental and staff appointments until he retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel in 1990. He is the author or editor of 24 books on Australian military history, strategy and defence, including *Crisis of Command* (1978), *High Command* (1982), *SAS: Phantoms of the Jungle* (1989), *Inside the War Cabinet* (1996), *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (1998), *Defence Supremo* (2000) and *Making the Australian Defence Force* (2001), vol. IV in *The Australian Centenary History of Defence*. He is the editor of the Australian Army's military history series, and has been a history consultant for various television programs. As an Army Reserve colonel, from 1999 to 2002 he was the first Head of the Australian Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre.

Warrant Officer Class Two Ian Kuring joined the Australian Army in 1965 and served in the Citizen Military Forces in 1965-67, before becoming a member of the Regular Army in April 1967, with postings to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra (1967-68 and 1971-75), 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, in Townsville and South Vietnam (1969-70), and the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (1970-71). Since 1985, his military service has been largely related to military history with postings as curator of the Infantry Museum at Singleton (1985-90 and 2000-01), and the Army History Unit in Canberra (1993-95 and 2001-02). He has written essays on military small arms for *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (1995) and was a contributor to *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*, vol. VI in 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence' (2001). He is currently completing a book on the history of Australian infantry that will be published in 2003.

Lieutenant General Peter Leahy graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1974, and was posted to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He held a number of regimental appointments, including service with the British Army in Hong Kong. From 1987 to 1990 he was posted as the Australian Exchange Officer at the United States Army

CONTRIBUTORS

Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, where he instructed in Joint and Combined Operations and Counter Revolutionary Warfare and completed a Master of Military Arts and Science Degree. For his service as an instructor at the Command and General Staff College he was awarded the United States Army Meritorious Service Medal. In 1993 he was the Military Assistant to the Chief of the General Staff and during 1994 and 1995 he was Director of Army Research. Most recently he has been the Deputy Chief of Army immediately prior to assuming his post as is Chief of Army. In 1997 he was promoted to Brigadier and posted as Commander of the 3rd Brigade, the Australian Defence Force's Ready Deployment Force, and in April 1999 he was appointed Chief of Staff at Headquarters Australian Theatre. He is a graduate of the Australian Army Command and Staff College, the United States Army Command and General Staff College, the British Higher Command and Staff Course and is a Fellow of the Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies. On 28 June 2002 he was promoted to Lieutenant General and assumed the appointment of Chief of Army.

Dayton McCarthy was educated at Toowoomba Grammar School, Emmanuel College, University of Queensland, and University College, University of New South Wales, where he obtained his PhD in 1997. He is the Club Vice Captain of the Coogee Surf Life Saving Club and a Staff Cadet in the Sydney University Regiment. Currently he is a manager at the Coogee Bay Hotel. His first book, *The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Forces, 1947-1874*, will be published by Oxford University Press in February 2003.

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Charles Morrisey is a civilian defence analyst in the Department of National Defence, Ottawa. He worked in the Directorate of Defence Analysis, Director General Strategic Planning, from July 1998 to July 2002 working on such projects as the Revolution in Military Affairs, Joint Experimentation, Capability Based Planning, and Asymmetric Threats. In late July 2002 he joined the Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Assistant

CONTRIBUTORS

Deputy Minister, Policy, as the North America desk officer. In this capacity his responsibilities include evaluating and analysing US defence initiatives and programs in relation to Canada's defence and security needs. A graduate of the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton (BA Hons), Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario (MA), he obtained his PhD from Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA, with a dissertation titled 'From in Country to in the Pentagon: United States Military Policy and the Training of the South Vietnamese Army'.

Major General Michael O'Brien graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1968. He was assigned Infantry and posted to 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. He performed the duties of Intelligence Officer and platoon commander during the battalion's second tour of duty in South Vietnam in 1970-71, and he wrote an account of the battalion's activities, *Conscripts and Regulars: with the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam 1967—1968 & 1970—1971* (1995). His later career included postings to instructional, logistic and acquisitions areas. He retired as Support Commander—Army in 2001. He balances his ownership of a second-hand bookshop with defence consultancy and voluntary work in service welfare, military museum and credit union fields.

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Colonel Bob Sayce is a graduate of the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, the Australian Staff College and the Joint Services Staff College. He served as a platoon commander in 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion during 1968-69 and he returned with the battalion to Vietnam again in 1971 as the Intelligence Officer. He subsequently held appointments at Portsea and with the Pacific Islands Regiment, as well as a series of staff positions. In 1996 he was appointed Military Advisor to the Court of St James, London, he was an occasional guest lecturer at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, represented Australia as an official observer on a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Committee and undertook an operational visit to Bosnia. He retired from the Army in 1999.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Clive Williams served with 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, from January 1965 to July 1966. In 1998, he was awarded the Medal for Gallantry for an action with his platoon in November 1965. After leaving the Army in 1981 he pursued a civilian career in Defence Intelligence until 2001. He is now a member of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, where he is Director of Terrorism Studies, specialising in terrorism and politically motivated violence.

Major General Rob Williams was educated at Nelson College, Royal Military College, Duntroon, Royal Military College of Science (UK), Staff College Camberley (UK), Joint Services Staff College, Canberra, and the Royal College of Defence Studies, UK. He served in the New Zealand Army from 1948 to 1984, serving as Chief of General Staff between 1981-84. Since retiring from the Army he has held several positions, including Chairman of Operation 'Raleigh' NZ, Chief Executive of the Order of St John NZ and Chief Executive of the Auckland Division of the Cancer Society. He was awarded an MBE for services as a Brigade Major, 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Group and a CB for Services as Chief of General Staff.

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Introduction

Lieutenant General Peter Leahy

Thirty years ago, the Australian Army withdrew from Vietnam. While it had not been defeated on the battlefield, the Army had not achieved a strategic victory. It withdrew from a country in which its professional reputation as a fighting army was acknowledged and respected by all sides and returned to a country which appeared not to value its professionalism or appreciate its achievements.

This contradiction of reputation has for too long coloured the way in which Australians, both soldiers and citizens, approach any examination of the war in Vietnam. For too long, our understanding of the war, particularly the tactical and operational lessons to be derived from it, has been distorted by the political and emotional baggage we have brought with us from those years. The community has recently moved beyond the divisions caused by the war and welcomed the Vietnam Veterans home. The military history community needs to do likewise—to move on from the emotional and intellectual dogmas of the war years and approach study and analysis of the war with openness and objectivity. A number of veterans have been producing good books on their experiences and the rest of the official history is not far away. I hope that these initiatives, together with events like this conference, will kick-start a new wave of objective studies of Australia's involvement in the war.

The Army today has much to learn from the Vietnam years. It resembles much more closely the type of operations we have been conducting since 1998 than do the operations of the Divisions and Corps of the two World Wars. (I do recognise that in the current world climate, this fact could easily be reversed!) Counter revolutionary warfare, counter insurgency warfare, low intensity conflict: the names may change but the method of fighting them does not. Clear, identifiable and valuable lessons on tactics and operations of enduring value to Army can still be extracted from past operations in this type of conflict. If we are prepared to make this effort. Could the Infantry section patrolling the border at Maliana today learn anything useful from the experiences of a patrol in the Long Hai hills? I contend that it could. Has the Army incorporated this knowledge in the training regime of the contemporary army? Again, I contend that it has—but I accept that it could exploit this knowledge much more.

INTRODUCTION

Army understands this. Recent initiatives point to the importance Army places on mining previous experiences for useful product to improve our efficiency on the modern battlefield. The new centre for Army lessons at Puckapunyal has already begun a comprehensive program of analysis of present and past conflicts. The Land Warfare Studies Centre has been at the forefront of using analysis of past conflicts to underpin judgements on the likely shape of future warfare. And, of course, this conference is part of that process as well.

It is a matter of some pride for me, personally, that after initiating the first Military History Conference eight years ago while head of the Directorate of Army Research and Analysis, the idea has grown into the major event it now is. I understand it is the largest conference of its type in Australia and, from the excellence of the published proceedings, in a class of its own for intellectual rigour and breadth of inquiry. The conference has built up an impressive body of knowledge of direct relevance to the Australian Army and how it does its business. This year's conference clearly maintains the standard.

Vietnam was a topic chosen with some care. It was a war of the fighting soldier. Platoon commanders could influence the outcome of the war. Superior Infantry skills were prerequisites both for survival and success on the battlefield. At a time when most of the world was preoccupied with the probable clash of armoured corps in North West Europe, Vietnam was largely an infantry war, and Australia's Army, which has a strong infantry tradition, appeared to find its niche in this type of warfare. What was it about the way the Australian Task Force conducted operations that fostered this perception? What did the Australian Army 'do right' in Vietnam that made it effective? Could it have improved, both in the preparation for and in the conduct of operations? That is what this conference will uncover.

Previous conferences have had their focus on the Army at the highest level—as a strategic entity, as an allied element in a much larger force or as a collection of colonial force elements in a war of Empire. This conference is much more inwardly focussed. It will examine the Army itself—how it prepared for operations, how it learned from its experience and where it could have improved. Because of the links I mentioned earlier between Vietnam operations and those the Army is currently conducting, I believe much will come out of our discussions here that will be valuable to our soldiers in the field now. If, as a result of our deliberations, we improve but one thing, and thereby save one future soldier from injury or death, it will have been worth our effort.

The Vietnam Syndrome: A Brief History

Roger Spiller

This essay addresses the origins, evolution and consequences of the so-called Vietnam Syndrome, especially as it has influenced American military operations since the end of the war. The attacks on New York and Washington slightly more than a year ago, and indeed, events since then, have made this subject rather less abstract than it might have been otherwise.

The United States was in shock for some time after the attacks of September 11, and what would be known as ‘the war on terrorism’ was still in its first light. Our enemies had not yet shown themselves. No war had been declared in the constitutional way. No strategies had been revealed. But the scent of vengefulness hung in the air. The public seemed to assume that the United States would reply to these attacks, but no one was inclined to look very much beyond the immediate moment. When, later on, the war was announced—not declared—and given a name, it became clear that Washington planned more than a limited retaliation. Without specifying the strategic aims of the war—no Fourteen Points or Four Freedoms this time—leading American officials were quick to warn their fellow citizens that the war would last a good long time. That seemed to be a pretty good guess when we were taking so long to find an enemy. Clearly, a cruise missile strike would not assuage public anger.

As the initial shock dissipated, and as the mass media broadcast guesses about the next military step, a certain question was never very far from the surface. Are the American people up to it? Can the Americans meet the demands of a new, protracted and very unconventional struggle? Later on, will the Americans support the war as enthusiastically as they seem to support it now, or will that support slowly lose its edge?

The common point of reference for all these questions was the war in Vietnam, a war fought so long ago that it seems almost ancient now. But the influence of this war on the present opinion is assumed to be such that one might be forgiven for thinking the United States had hidden behind its oceanic walls ever since. Grenada, Panama, Beirut, Central America, the Balkans, Somalia, and even the Gulf War—none of these campaigns seem to have excited the significance of the war in Vietnam. Only the

memory of Vietnam is assumed to have had this kind of staying power, this capacity to influence our contemporary national policies. Are the American people up to it? This is a question that would not have been asked—indeed, was not asked—before the war in Vietnam.¹ This question, the body of assumptions upon which it is founded, and the effect the answer is supposed to exercise over American statecraft and American public sentiment are often referred to simply as the Vietnam Syndrome. I want to suggest that the Vietnam Syndrome has long outlived any real influence or usefulness it might have had once.

As with other such phrases, the Vietnam Syndrome has persisted because it has a certain elasticity. In its broadest sense, the Vietnam Syndrome signifies the supposed reluctance of the people of the United States to support the employment of their armed forces in the service of their nation's foreign policy. An important, more recently fixed codicil of this loose collection of attitudes has to do with the time and cost of a given military action if it cannot be avoided: military action must be prompt, decisive and as nearly cost-free as possible. The syndrome requires that few or preferably no casualties be taken. If those conditions are not met, the American public will insist on a prompt cessation of operations and an immediate withdrawal, without reference to its effect on American foreign policy. These notions constitute what might be regarded as the irreducible minimum of the Vietnam Syndrome. Of course, the phrase can be injected with a very wide range of additional meanings, depending on the argument it is meant to serve at the moment. Any attempt at a precise definition rather defeats the purpose; the Vietnam Syndrome is not meant to serve as a thought, but as a substitute for thought.

Among the claims to memory the twentieth century might make on the future, one seems to me to have been an extraordinary facility for cant, for the cheap, essentially meaningless political slogan. And it is their emptiness, their lack of meaning, that paradoxically make them especially pernicious. I am not alone in thinking so. Almost half a century ago, George Orwell warned that modern 'prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a pre-fabricated hen-house'.²

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1. The United States' earlier wars had certainly provoked controversy and resistance, but on those occasions public resistance had a different shape. Only during our civil war and during our brief involvement in the Great War were there any significant resistance movements, and none of these was strong enough to affect American national strategy or military policy in any substantive way. Put another way, until the war in Vietnam, American anti-war movements were fringe movements.
 2. George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. IV: *In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*, Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds) (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), 129. George Ball, Undersecretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies and an important figure in early planning for the war, found it necessary to write an opinion piece in *The New York Times*, deploring the development of a new 'stab in the back' thesis for the defeat in Vietnam. See George Ball, 'Block that Vietnam Myth', *The New York Times*, 30 September 1990, 4. The date is significant: debates on the American intervention in the Gulf were then underway.

The United States got a jump on the new century with ‘Remember the Maine’, an exhortation to war against Spain inspired by what seems to have been a battleship’s defective boiler rather than the act of sabotage it was believed to be at the time. No matter. In the Great War, we hear the French call out at Verdun, ‘they shall not pass’, *ils ne passeront pas*. Both of these entries fall under the general category of war cries. They call frankly for retribution and little else. Once the urge is satisfied, they imply, everyone ought to go home. They make no contribution to political science.

The first great and particularly awful slogan of the century was *der Dolchstoss*, or the ‘stab in the back’. Often cast as an explanation of how Germany would have won the Great War if spineless politicians and weak-kneed civilians had only stuck it out, as German armies were supposedly doing in the trenches. *Der Dolchstoss* was infinitely expandable. The phrase was suffused with just the right mixture of failure, regret, guilt, betrayal, vengefulness, spite, envy, self-righteousness and, yes, even hatred—all these emotions and more. Furthermore, the phrase ‘had legs’, it persisted in the political and public language. Hitler and his fellow criminals found the ‘stab in the back’ myth very useful indeed when their turn to make their own contribution to national mythology came around during the 1930s.

Taking the prize for concision, deployment of meaning, and a very long public life, ‘Munich’ will always come to mind, recalling Prime Minister Chamberlain’s ‘appeasement’ of Hitler over Czechoslovakia in 1938. History has flogged Chamberlain ever since, and never again will Munich be known only as the principal city of Bavaria. Like the ‘stab in the back’ slogan, ‘Munich’ has staying power, and indeed the so-called lessons of Munich have been brandished several times lately—most recently over the direction US policy should take toward Iraq.

Comparing the Munich Syndrome with the Vietnam Syndrome is instructive. Munich is used against those who do not act. The Vietnam Syndrome describes those who act too much, are disappointed by what their action produces, and then refuse to act more.³ Munich is a metaphor for an event with known, and largely agreed upon, consequences. The Vietnam Syndrome has greater scope; it spans an entire decade. Munich works as a cautionary lesson—don’t be intimidated or fooled by bullies—but the Vietnam Syndrome offers a kind of sad description for which few solutions seem to be available. Indeed, the use of the word syndrome imparts a medical tone, as if to suggest a disease. And that is not quite an accident.

3. Arnold R. Isaacs is among the many others who have made this comparison. Isaacs points out that North Vietnam’s Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, was ‘haunted by a Munich analogy’ as well, vowing never again to allow themselves to be misled because of unwise diplomatic concessions. Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 67. See also Jeffrey Record, ‘Perils of Reasoning by Historical Analogy: Munich, Vietnam and American Use of Force’, *Air War College Occasional Paper No. 4* (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, March 1998).

The Vietnam Syndrome began its life in the 1960s as a diagnosis. In medical terminology, a syndrome is a collection of symptoms whose patterns suggest a particular illness. These symptoms may be transient, or temporary, and respond to proper medical treatment. A syndrome that persists or takes on a chronic state is defined as a disorder, and as such might be managed over the long term rather than cured.

The exact origins of the diagnosis are not entirely clear. One guess has the term originating as a kind of medical shorthand during the late 1960s among psychiatrists and psychologists of the United States' Veterans' Administration hospitals.⁴ The public debut of the Vietnam Syndrome was in *The New York Times* for 6 May 1972, in an 'op-ed' piece by one Dr Chaim Shatan. Shatan was a director of psychoanalytic training at New York University. As a practising psychoanalyst, Shatan had become interested in the nature, causes and treatment of severe psychological shock, especially as these cases presented themselves among victims of Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust.

By the late 1960s, Shatan was also an opponent of the war in Vietnam. At a university anti-war rally, several Vietnam veterans approached Shatan, asking for his help. They complained of difficulty readjusting to civilian life after their combat tours. They did not expect a sympathetic hearing at the Veterans' Administration Hospitals. They did not ask for therapy; they said they were 'hurting' and just wanted to talk. So was born what came to be known as the 'rap group', really only a collective therapy session by a new name.⁵

Before long, Dr Shatan was joined by another psychiatrist who was also interested in the nature and long-term effects of psychic trauma. Robert Jay Lifton taught at Yale and had served as a psychiatrist with the US Air Force during the Korean War. Like Shatan, he also had come to oppose the Vietnam War. His research interests at the time focused on the psychological trauma experienced by the survivors of the atomic attack on Hiroshima. To Shatan and Lifton, the victims of the Holocaust and of Hiroshima were special. The psychic traumas these patients had suffered so transcended the 'normal range of human experiences' that their shock was capable of producing profound reactions. To Lifton, such patients made up a 'special contemporary group' whose experiences had created 'special regenerative insight'. Before long, Shatan and Lifton were beginning to think of the veterans in their rap groups in the same light as victims of Hiroshima and the Holocaust.⁶

4. Ben Shepard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 357, offers this impressive list of symptoms: apathy, cynicism, alienation, depression, mistrust and expectation of betrayal, inability to concentrate, insomnia, nightmares, restlessness, uprootedness and impatience.

5. Chaim Shatan, 'Post-Vietnam Syndrome', *The New York Times*, 6 May 1972, 35.

6. See Shepard's excellent discussion on the ideas of Shatan and Lifton in *A War of Nerves*, 356-67. Lifton's earlier work, *Death in Life*, is quoted here. A much less generous interpretation of Lifton's work appears in B. G. Burkett and Glenn Whitley's *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of its Heroes and its History* (Dallas, Texas: Verity Press, 1998), 141-61.

To these analysts, it seemed possible to think of the veterans as new and different sorts of patients, those whose psychological illness was the result of the stresses they experienced in war. Furthermore, these analysts found it possible to argue that a war whose origins, conduct, and expected outcome were so controversial that it would engender more psychological casualties than wars of a more straightforward kind.⁷ None of this was correct, but during the 1970s some facts appear to have been inconvenient in American public discourse.⁸

One symptom of the post-Vietnam syndrome was advertised as new and dangerous: these traumatic reactions were delayed, not showing themselves for months or even years after the traumatic event. Further, these reactions could supposedly occur without warning, at any time. *The New York Times* published a story in 1975 of a case in which a Vietnam veteran was convicted of murdering his wife. The veteran's defence was that he had been startled awake by a combat flashback and had instinctively pulled the gun from under his pillow and defended himself. An unsympathetic jury gave him life in prison. Citing statistics gathered during what he called a 'comprehensive series of stories' in *Penthouse* magazine, the journalist Tom Wicker informed the readers of his column in *The New York Times* that as many as 500,000 of the 2.5 million Vietnam veterans had attempted suicide, conveying the impression that every vet was deranged.⁹ News like this routinely appeared during the 1970s, and Hollywood discovered Rambo as well.

Throughout the decade, the American public was engaged in highly complex negotiations with the memory of the war in Vietnam. The process by which the Vietnam veteran became a metaphor for the nation as a whole began very soon after President Nixon ordered the withdrawal of American forces. In January, 1970, Lifton and several other prominent psychiatrists were called to testify before the Senate on the care and treatment of wounded Vietnam veterans. Lifton devoted his testimony to the 'psychological predicament of the Vietnam Veteran'. Although Lifton did not employ

7. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Oversight of Medical Care of Veterans Wounded in Vietnam, Hearings* before the Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs, 91st Cong., 2nd Sess.; 27 January 1970: 498-9. (Hereinafter cited as 'Lifton Testimony'.) Lifton drew precisely this corollary in testimony before the Senate.

8. Several contemporary studies are summarised in Burkett and Whitley, *Stolen Valor*, 141-51. Wars have long known psychological casualties. Modern military medicine had itself hardly come of age before taking notice of such casualties. From the Russo-Japanese War onward, the medical services of most advanced armies struggled to understand psychological distress due to combat. The psychological casualties produced by the Vietnam War were not inordinately high; by one count, those amounted to roughly half of those produced by World War II American troops—a fact reported once more in 1975 by David Lamb, 'Vietnam Veterans Melting into Society', *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1975. See also Captain R. L. Richards' precocious article, 'Mental and Nervous Diseases in the Russo-Japanese War', *The Military Surgeon* XXVI (1910), 177-93. For a brief introduction to this subject, see my 'Shell Shock', *American Heritage* 41: 4 (May/June, 1991), 75-87.

9. Tom Wicker, 'The Vietnam Disease', *The New York Times*, 27 May 1975, 29.

the term, ‘post-Vietnam syndrome’, his testimony leaves little doubt that he considered his patients’ complaints quite real, uniquely created by combat experiences.¹⁰

The finer technical points of Lifton’s testimony are of less significance here than his broader argument; it was, simply put, that the United States itself was suffering from a collective kind of post-Vietnam syndrome, composed of symptoms that mimicked those of his individual patients—guilt, resentment and alienation. ‘The Vietnam Veteran serves as a psychological crucible of the entire country’s doubts and misgivings about the war’, Lifton told the Senators.¹¹

This was not the first occasion a medical diagnosis had slipped past the boundaries of its scientific origins to enter common language. In Great Britain after the First World War, ‘shell shock’, although repudiated by the physician who coined the term, became a very public diagnosis, freighted with any number of extra-scientific connotations. After that war, leading British psychologists observed, just as did Robert Lifton, that although the term with which each became associated was medically useless, the terms had nevertheless captured the public’s imagination.¹² However, not even shell shock rose quite to the level of national cliché, as the post-Vietnam syndrome would.

To finish this skein of the story, debates were to continue in medical circles for the rest of the decade over the legitimacy of the post-Vietnam syndrome. The debates were more or less resolved in 1980 with a new third edition of the psychiatric profession’s diagnostic guide, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or DSM-III. After an intense public lobbying campaign by Shatan, Lifton, and others, DSM-III included a category of illness now designated ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’, or PTSD.¹³ A new chapter in the history of modern psychiatric disease classifications had been written. Well before then, however, the Vietnam Syndrome had made good its escape from the medical world and had been enlisted for non-scientific duty.

By 1970, public opinion polls showed a majority of Americans favouring withdrawal from Vietnam. Indeed, popular support for Richard Nixon’s presidential administration was partly contingent upon US withdrawal from Vietnam. Richard J. Barnet found it possible to write in 1970, without reservation: ‘it is safe to say that there is no one in the United States who is *for* the Vietnam war ... Although the war is far from over,

10. Robert Jay Lifton, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans; neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

11. Lifton Testimony, 496, 507.

12. Great Britain, Parliament, *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell Shock”* (London: HMSO, 1922), A-2. The most extensive examination of the concept of shell shock, conducted by the ‘Southard Committee’, concluded that ‘shell shock’ was ‘a grievous misnomer’ but ‘is the popular or vulgar term in general use’ and that therefore the term had to be employed in public discourse.

13. Spiller, ‘Shell Shock’, 75-87.

the “lessons” of Vietnam are filling volumes. The whole direction of American foreign policy for the next generation will depend upon which lessons are accepted as the new orthodoxy.’¹⁴

When this was written, the United States had already started its slow retreat. President Nixon would not be able to make good on his campaign promise to abolish conscription for another year. The war was still running, and it would continue to run, past the last American troops who left in April, 1973, and on to that day in late April, 1975, when NVA tanks crashed through the gates at the Presidential Palace in Saigon. On that day, the last Americans were killed in Vietnam: two Marine corporals, Charles McMahon, 22, and Darwin Judge, 19. The war had sunk from view in America. Contrary to Professor Barnett’s view, not many people seemed very interested in the lessons of the war.

‘To the surprise of many observers’, historian George Herring wrote several years later, ‘the traumatic climax of the Vietnam War in 1975 did not provoke a great national debate on what had gone wrong. Quite the contrary, the first postwar years were marked by a conspicuous silence on the subject, as though the war had not happened.’¹⁵ Indeed, the American people had already delivered their verdict on this war. In 1971, public opinion polls showed slightly more than 60 per cent of Americans favouring the withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam. Four years later, during the week Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese, 53 per cent of those polled still thought the United States should ‘help governments that might be overthrown by communist-backed forces’.¹⁶ Opinion had settled into what seemed to be a permanent divide: slightly more than half of all Americans supported their government’s foreign policies, even if those policies meant using military force.¹⁷ So it was not the use of military force in general that had fallen from favour; it was the unsuccessful use of military force.

That was public opinion. Elite political opinion was a good deal more wary of military commitments abroad. Congressional opposition to the war manifested itself most forcefully through votes on defence budgets. In 1970, defence expenditures consumed about 40 per cent of all government expenditures. By 1976 (the vote was for FY 1977), that outlay had dropped to about 24 per cent, a smaller proportion than any budget since

14. Richard J. Barnett, ‘The Security of Empire’, in Robert W. Gregg and Charles W. Kegley, Jr (eds), *After Vietnam: The Future of American Foreign Policy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1971), 32.

15. George C. Herring, ‘American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate’, *Military Affairs* 46: 2 (April, 1982), 57.

16. The Gallup Organization, *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion 1937-1997* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources CD-ROM, 2000), 468, 2316-17.

17. Indeed, only 26 per cent of those polled in May, 1970, would approve using US troops to defend Berlin. This *Time*-Lewis Harris Poll is quoted in Allison, May and Yarmolinsky, ‘Limits to Intervention’, in Gregg and Kegley (eds), *After Vietnam*, 49-68.

before the Second World War.¹⁸ Rather than fighting a futile delaying action against public and congressional sentiment, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird tried to manage the inevitable reductions. His ambition was to posture the defence establishment for a rebuilding program several years hence, when the disappointments of the war might be muted.¹⁹

What public commentators were fond of calling the ‘process of national healing’ had to compete with the Watergate Scandals at home and a world that continued to make demands on official American attention. The Nixon Administration had already promulgated what was called the ‘Nixon Doctrine’, calling for a retreat from foreign obligations. This was just as well, for Congress passed the Church Amendment in 1973, forbidding any more Americans in combat in Southeast Asia. That was followed a year later by the War Powers Act, in which Congress asserted its constitutional powers by severely limiting presidential authority to employ military force abroad. The United States drew back from the global activism that President Kennedy had proclaimed so famously in his inaugural address.²⁰ Historians since have argued that, by contrast, the five years after the fall of Saigon constituted ‘the greatest deviation of U.S. policy from the basic ... containment strategy of the past 35 years’.²¹

Any war that takes as long to end as this one did defies those who like their history neat. How public figures interpreted the lessons of this war depended importantly on preconceptions. What we would recognise today as an objective view of the war—its origins, its conduct, and its outcome—was nowhere to be seen. This view would necessarily have included not only an appreciation for events as they transpired, but also a clear-eyed reading of American public sentiment. Neither of those seemed to be in good supply.

Richard Nixon did more than any other single public figure to redefine the Vietnam Syndrome from diagnosis to political slogan. Five years after resigning from office during the Watergate scandals, Nixon published *The Real War*, in which he used ‘the Vietnam Syndrome’ as a title for one of his chapters. Here, he wrote:

Unless the United States shakes the false lessons of Vietnam and puts ‘the Vietnam Syndrome’ behind it, we will forfeit the security of our allies and eventually our

18. The force structure of all the services declined accordingly. From 1970 to 1974, the Air Force was reduced by 59 squadrons; the Army was reduced from 23 to 16 divisions; the Navy lost 481 ships. These figures, authorisations for FY 1977, are conveniently summarised in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 322-3.

19. So remembered Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 32.

20. The phrase is Gaddis’s, in *Strategies of Containment*, 205.

21. Douglas Pike and Benjamin Ward, ‘Losing and Winning Abroad: Korea and Vietnam as Successes’, *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer, 1987), 77-85.

own. This is the real lesson of Vietnam—not that we should abandon power, but that unless we learn to use it effectively to defend our interests, the tables of history will be turned against us and all we believe in.²²

By one count, the United States employed its armed forces abroad in support of its foreign policy objectives more than 215 times between 1945 and 1976. This accounting does not include the Korean or Vietnam wars.²³ By this standard, American military operations declined between the end of Vietnam and the beginning of the ‘eighties, when Nixon wrote this. The Soviets did indeed intervene in Angola’s civil war during this period, but so did the United States until Congress learned of the covert operations we were conducting. It is also true that President Carter and his administration were hesitant to react to the seizure of hostages at the embassy in Teheran, and that the United States’ covert attempt to rescue them misfired badly. Nor, at virtually the same time, was the United States capable of preventing the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan. Even at this remove, one wonders how the United States could have found a way to keep the Soviets at home. How, in this light, might one see the United States’ reaction—or more exactly, lack of reaction—to the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia? These foreign policy reverses said more about official hesitancy and poor planning than a strategic retreat induced by a national malaise.²⁴ The Carter administration may have conceived its policies, thinking that it was reflecting the wishes of the American people; if so, it was going to pay for such miscalculation after the fact, by losing the next election.

This was by no means the first time policymakers had projected their illusions onto American public opinion as rationale for policy, nor would it be the last. The new presidential administration of Ronald Reagan came to office in 1980 on a promise, among others, to ‘restore the military strength of the United States as quickly as possible’. For this task the new president selected Caspar W. Weinberger to serve as Secretary of Defense and George W. Shultz to serve as the new Secretary of State.

These two worldly, experienced and strong-willed men had very different views of American military power. Shultz was very much the activist. To Shultz, every international problem was in some respect an American problem, and calculated

22. Richard Nixon, *The Real War* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), 122-3.

23. Barry M. Blechman, Stephen S. Kaplan, et al., *Force without War: U. S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1978), 38, and *passim*.

24. One might even compare this emergency with the seizure of the intelligence-gathering vessel USS *Pueblo* by the North Koreans in January, 1968. That incident coincided with the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam. The United States was decisively engaged in fighting there, of course, but it might be difficult to argue that the United States was reluctant to exercise its power elsewhere in the world. The ultimate safety of the crew was a good and sufficient reason to talk a way out of the incident, as indeed occurred.

international engagement was Shultz's answer to the Carter administration's timidity. Not that Weinberger was a pacifist; far from it, but he disliked using military power as an adjunct to diplomacy. The differences between the two cabinet officers turned not on whether military power should be employed, but how, when and to what purpose.

In retrospect, Shultz and Weinberger's views were not so far apart in practice. Shultz was increasingly frustrated by a resurgence of terrorism in the Middle East, terrorism that seemed to benefit by the acquiescence or fearful tolerance of leading powers. He favoured American participation in a multinational peacekeeping force that was deployed into Lebanon in 1982. Weinberger was most interested in rebuilding the armed forces. Contingency operations, peacekeeping or 'nation-building' operations, expeditionary operations could only dissipate American military power as far as he was concerned. Weinberger thought the Beirut expedition was poorly framed, its objectives too vague for practical use. For Weinberger, the attack on the Marine barracks the following year was the inevitable result of sending American troops on 'show-the-flag' missions.

Furthermore, in the Reagan White House a third party often worked at cross-purposes to both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State—the National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane. Weinberger was especially critical of McFarlane and his staff, all of whom he thought were 'even more militant' than the staff at the State Department. To Weinberger, the NSC Staff spent 'most of their time thinking up ever more wild adventures for our troops'.²⁵ All of them seemed to regard their fellow citizens as unreliable, or at least as holding opinions so variable as to make any foreign policy initiative a risky proposition. To McFarlane and one of his most energetic staffers, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, that meant covert operations. Their own covert operations.

Both Shultz and Weinberger would eventually take their arguments to the public. In October, 1984, Shultz delivered an address in Manhattan in which he argued that the United States must 'prevent and deter future terrorist acts ... The public must understand before the fact that occasions will come when their government must act before each and every fact is known—and the decisions cannot be tied to the opinion polls.'²⁶ The cycle between national decision and national action was too fast to accommodate democratic participation, Shultz seemed to be arguing; you have to leave it up to me.

Weinberger answered Shultz the following month, in a speech before the National Press Club that he called 'The Uses of National Power'.²⁷ He proposed six 'tests' for the United States to pass before committing American troops to combat. The speech

25. Caspar W. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 159.

26. George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 648.

27. The text of this speech forms the Appendix of Weinberger's *Fighting for Peace*, 433-45.

quickly and famously became known as the ‘Weinberger Doctrine’, and because it has been variously interpreted and somewhat distorted over the past decade and a half, Weinberger’s ‘tests’ are worth repeating:

1. Our vital interests must be at stake.
2. The issues involved are so important for the future of the United States and our allies that we are prepared to commit enough forces to win.
3. We have clearly defined political and military objectives, which we must secure.
4. We have sized our forces to achieve our objectives.
5. We have some reasonable assurance of the support of the American people.
6. US forces are committed to combat only as a last resort.²⁸

To George Shultz, the Weinberger Doctrine was anathema. ‘This was the Vietnam syndrome in spades, and a complete abdication of the duties of leadership’, he wrote in his memoirs. Ignoring the salient fact that in the American system of government, cabinet officers do not unilaterally promulgate fighting doctrines or indeed doctrines of any sort, Shultz speculated that Weinberger had been co-opted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The JCS, Shultz thought, held a ‘deep philosophical opposition to using our military for counterterrorist operations’.²⁹

However, if one were to inventory American expeditionary operations in the last two decades of the twentieth century, one might conclude that the United States was recovering handily from any syndrome it might have suffered. In addition to the Carter Administration’s attempt to rescue hostages in Iran in 1980, the Marines had been sent into Lebanon in 1983. Two days after a truck bomb destroyed the Marine barracks in Beirut, killing more than 240 people, the United States invaded the Caribbean island of Grenada, a dagger pointed at the heart of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1986, the United States launched strikes against Libya in reprisal for terrorist actions in Europe. In the following year, the United States agreed to flag all tankers in the Persian Gulf during the ‘tanker war’ between Iran and Iraq. And, as the decade drew to a close, the United States invaded Panama, overthrew the government, and installed another. All the while, the United States was covertly supporting the Afghan revolt against Soviet occupation. Not one of these operations adhered strictly to the Weinberger Doctrine’s six tests; indeed, several of them directly violated Weinberger’s principle requiring an unambiguous objective. Such accountings are always somewhat subjective, of course, but it seems to me the United States was not exactly quiescent during this period.³⁰

28. *Ibid.*, 402.

29. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 649-50.

30. Record, ‘Perils of Reasoning by Historical Analogy’, 13, 18.

The next, perhaps the last, variant of the Vietnam Syndrome appeared in the form of what has been called the Powell Doctrine. Colin Powell had served as one of Secretary Weinberger's military assistants before rising, eventually, to official fame as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War. Indeed, Powell was with Weinberger when the secretary delivered his speech at the press club. Although Powell's doctrine and Weinberger's are often spoken of as though they are the same, Powell's views as chairman evolved away from Weinberger's dogma and toward Shultz's flexibility.³¹ Powell's first major operation as Chairman of the JCS was the invasion of Panama. How he depicts that operation in his memoirs is telling: 'The lessons I absorbed from Panama confirmed all my convictions over the preceding twenty years, since the days of doubt over Vietnam. Have a clear political objective and stick to it. Use all the force necessary, and do not apologize for going in big if that is what it takes.' All these lessons have to do with how to employ military force, not whether to use military force. This variant, like the original, also assumes that the object in war does not change while the war is being fought. So, to Powell, the objective did not much matter so long as it was clear and attainable. The Powell Doctrine did not seem to leave much room for Shultz-style operations, but that did not prove to be the case. Powell was not averse to using the armed forces; he simply wanted the forces to be so powerful, regardless of the mission, that there was no danger of failure.³²

Just before retiring from military service, Powell approved a new joint doctrine that had a great deal more in common with Shultz's views.³³ After the Gulf War, the orthodox American-style operation was in danger of being subsumed under the weight of emphasis on what were being called 'operations other than war'. Indeed, the Gulf War was beginning to look a bit old-fashioned in the middle 1990s. By then, Powell was given to saying that decisive military victories were rare in the modern world, and that the most an armed force could do was to ensure a conflict ended on terms that diplomacy could make favourable. Although he claimed to be guided by the 'lessons' of Vietnam, he had no real reply when he and Madeline Albright, then US ambassador to the UN, were arguing over the intervention in Bosnia. 'What's the point of having this superb military that you are always talking about if we can't use it?' she asked. Powell answered by citing the 'more than two dozen times' American armed forces had been used in the past three years—'for war, peacekeeping, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance'. After his retirement from military life, Powell would write, 'there are times when American lives must be risked and lost. Foreign policy cannot be paralyzed by the prospect of casualties ... To provide a "symbol" or a "presence" is not good enough.'

31. Colin Powell with Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House), 293. When Weinberger gave his speech, Powell remembered being concerned that these fixed tests might 'lead potential enemies to look for loopholes'.

32. *Ibid.*, 420-1.

33. For a different view see Record's excellent analysis in his 'Perils of Reasoning by Historical Analogy',

The only American strategic doctrine in effect might just as well have been phrased this way: circumstances define action.³⁴

One former policymaker who has been keeping watch calculates that ‘the pace of interventions has, if anything, picked up’ in the 1990s.³⁵ After the Gulf War, the US intervened in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda and Kosovo, not to mention actions associated with the aftermath of the Gulf War itself—enforcing ‘no-fly’ zones over Iraq for almost a decade, as well as relief operations in Northern Iraq. President Bush might have been too late with his cheer after the Gulf War that the Vietnam Syndrome had been ‘licked, once and for all’. As a doctrinal basis for international action, the Vietnam Syndrome had been shredded already by the history of the 1980s.

The most persistent symptom of the Vietnam Syndrome has turned on the question of American casualties. This question alone has been made to serve on occasion as a crude measurement of success—sometimes employed as an argument against action, sometimes invoked after the fact in recrimination. As an instrument of statecraft, however, the casualty list is less than effective and sometimes self-defeating. The United States’ withdrawal from Somalia after the killing of eighteen soldiers during the Mogadishu debacle of 1993 is often cited as an example of the fecklessness of American policymakers and public alike—the ‘cut and run’ mentality that supposedly had its origins in 1973. In point of fact, we have seen accusations like this since the very beginning of the twentieth century. After the Boer War, a French general observed that the British Army was suffering what he called ‘Acute Transvaalitis’, which he defined as an abnormal dread of losses on the battlefield.³⁶ He thought of this dread as a ‘ravaging microbe’ that fed upon the ‘floods of sniveling sentimentalism’ then in vogue.³⁷

At the other extreme, however, one can find a case that seems to offer proof of a rather stolid acceptance of the butcher’s bill. That was in the summer of 1990, when classified estimates of casualties in an anticipated war with Iraq were leaked to the press. These numbers were revealed well before the US had committed itself to nothing more than defending Saudi Arabia against further Iraqi aggression. Simulations of an American offensive against prepared Iraqi positions had run out estimates of 30,000 American casualties.

34. Powell, *My American Journey*, 256. See Charles A. Stevenson, ‘The Evolving Clinton Doctrine on the Use of Force’, *Armed Forces & Society* 22: 4 (Summer, 1996), 515-17.

35. Richard Haas, *Interventions: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington: A Carnegie Endowment Book, 1994), 21.

36. See ‘Major Jette’, ‘The Dread of Incurring Losses on the Battle-field and the Essential Elements of the Offensive’, Colonel R. H. Wilson, trans., *Journal of the Military Services Institution of the United States* LI (1912), 330-40, and esp. 340.

37. Joseph C. Arnold, ‘French Tactical Doctrine: 1870-1914’, *Military Affairs* 42: 2 (April, 1978), 61-7, and esp. 63-4.

What happened when these estimates were leaked is telling. Nothing happened. The American public reacted not at all. Strategic planning proceeded at the normal pace, scheduled deployments were executed without pause and lodgments in the operational areas were established at the necessary times and places. No one raised the casualty flag. Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM were conducted more or less as planned. The Vietnam Syndrome was nowhere to be seen, except in the White House, where President Bush was promising the American public, ‘this will not be another Vietnam. This will not be a protracted, drawn-out war.’³⁸

If the Vietnam Syndrome has any life left at all, it is only in public discourse. Even then it is a defective medium for the expression of what are very complex public views. American policymakers no doubt had a catalogue of reasons for withdrawing our troops after the fight in Mogadishu, but if they believed they were accurately reflecting the opinions of most Americans, they were wrong. Opinion polls showed at the time and later a decided public tendency to escalate, not withdraw, when Americans suffered casualties. No ‘Acute Transvaalitis’ here.

This lack of correspondence between the views of the policymaker and the citizen extends to other, broader questions of American foreign policy. Recent studies have shown an American public that is a good deal more amenable to foreign aid than policymakers had long supposed. Most Americans also seem to support international engagement as much as ever. Contrary to official wisdom in the United States and indeed elsewhere around the world, most Americans are not interested in assuming the role of global hegemon. As for the ‘humanitarian operations’ that were supposed to have fallen into disrepute since Mogadishu, the contrary is true. Americans do support such missions, especially if they are under United Nations authority.³⁹ All of this suggests that if we are to understand why some operations work and others do not, why some win support and others do not, we shall have to go well beyond casual guesses about domestic support and the influence of an old war. And yet, even today one would have no trouble at all, finding responsible officials and public intellectuals, using the Vietnam Syndrome as a tool of argument.⁴⁰

38. See Bush’s remark in John Mueller, *Public Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 45.

39. Steven Kull, I. M. Destler, Clay Ramsay, *The Foreign Policy Gap: How Policymakers misread the Public* (College Park, MD: Center for International & Security Studies at the University of Maryland, 1997), iii-iv, and *passim*.

40. See the persistence of this ‘gap’ admirably demonstrated in Ronald Brownstein, ‘Vietnam is No Longer Part of Iraq Equation’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 2002, 1; Charles Moskos, ‘Our Will to Fight Depends on Who is Willing to Die’, in *Wall Street Journal Online*, 20 March 2002; and Henry Kissinger, ‘The Long Shadow of Vietnam’, in *Newsweek.com*, 1 May 2000.

We may now ask ourselves, at a generation's remove, whether the Vietnam Syndrome made any real difference in the conduct of American statecraft? If we could somehow factor out the Vietnam Syndrome for a moment, would the American domestic temper, which is the real engine of our foreign policies, have pointed us in the same directions at about the same time? I think a case might be made that there would have been differences in degree, minor variations, but not in kind. No cliché should ever exercise much influence over a nation's affairs.

Such questions are of course no longer of theoretical interest only. So it is just as well that the power of the Vietnam Syndrome has faded to that of a rhetorical artifact.

As the metaphor is no longer capable of bearing too much intellectual or emotional weight, history has moved along in its unsentimental way. Perhaps this new century has a full supply of its own grand clichés, waiting to be requisitioned—but I hope not. War is too important to be left to history.

Conversations at the Top

Edward J. Drea

Peter Edwards has told the story of the strategic nexus between Australia and the United States during the Vietnam War, and I have neither the intention nor the ability to tell it better. This essay seeks to sketch out the Australian-American relationship at the highest level, in the words of the contemporary participants. The conversations at the top have recurrent themes. First, US Congressional attitudes about America's allies in Vietnam were seldom positive, and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara consistently found himself defending the allied contributions and sacrifices. Second, McNamara was straightforward with his Australian counterparts. Far from misrepresenting conditions in South Vietnam, he rarely spoke to Australian leaders in optimistic terms about the war. Third, human memory of events is fallible, making the original versions more valuable. A case in point is McNamara's successor as Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford's published account of his August 1967 Asian trip to recruit more allied troops for Vietnam. This version, which has become the accepted account, varies from his original, official reports of discussions with his Australian hosts. Finally, and briefly, the Australian-American connection changed after the Tet Offensive of 1968, but indications of the shift were already apparent before the Vietnamese communists' nation-wide attacks. This anecdotal approach will, I think, shed light on how the Americans at least viewed the evolving nature of their ties with Australia during the first half of the Vietnam War era.

Questioning Australia's Commitment

President Lyndon Johnson's desire of 'seeing more flags' in Vietnam alongside the Stars and Stripes is well known.¹ To Johnson's thinking, the more allies of the United States participating in Vietnam the greater the credibility of his Southeast Asia adventure—one that he was constantly wavering over, yet one he expected others to sign up for without delay. Australia did respond in late May 1964 when Canberra, anxious for American

1. Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflict 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992), 297.

support in Southeast Asia, found it in its own best national interests to ingratiate itself to the United States by doubling the size of its training team already in Vietnam. A few months later in July, Minister of External Affairs Paul Hasluck visited the White House where he expressed his view that the conflict was of monumental significance and ‘went so far as to remark that “if South Vietnam goes, that is the end in Southeast Asia”’.² Neither Johnson nor McNamara could have said it any better.

Hasluck and the Australian cabinet’s commitment to the US effort in South Vietnam was little known or appreciated in the United States. As early as mid-1963 the US Congress had already established a pattern regarding Vietnam: They wanted to know who was there except Americans?³ Secretary McNamara had developed a stock reply—the Australians. Congressmen hostile to McNamara, and their numbers increased over time, invariably retorted ‘How many?’ The lawmakers questioned Washington’s inability to secure a broader commitment on the part of America’s allies in this campaign against communist aggression. Their attitude was likely more a commentary on Congressional frustration over burden sharing, i.e., the notion that America’s allies were not bearing their fair share of defence costs, than any anti-war sentiment, but it became a recurrent issue that bedeviled executive and legislative relations throughout the period.

Before Congressional committees, McNamara swallowed his convictions that Australia had enjoyed a free ride on defence into the 1960s to defend Prime Minister Robert G. Menzies’ policy of holding down defence expenditures in order to give priority to economic development. McNamara initially insisted that Menzies’ slim margin in Parliament made it absolutely impossible for him to increase the defence budget. Menzies’ dramatic increases in defence spending after the December 1963 elections served as a rallying cry for McNamara whose Congressional testimony for months afterwards persisted in describing Canberra’s decision as if it were something that had happened only yesterday.

To be fair, McNamara recognised the serious situation Australia faced in Malaysia, and in closed executive sessions of May 1964 before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs pronounced it unwise for Canberra to send substantial forces to South Vietnam if such commitments exposed Malaysia to Indonesian aggression.⁴ Yet McNamara found himself on the horns of a dilemma. As he said June 1964, it was

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2. Memo of Conversation, W. Bundy and P. Hasluck, 16 July 1964, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol. XXVII, *Mainland Southeast Asia; Regional Affairs* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), 4-5 (hereinafter cited as *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII).
 3. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Testimony regarding FY 1964 Budget before Senate Committee on Appropriations (Excerpts), 24 April 1963, Office Secretary of Defense Historical Office (hereinafter cited as *OSD Hist.*).
 4. SecDef Testimony on Foreign Affairs Assistance Act Amendments before House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Excerpts—Executive Session, Not Subsequently Published), 19 May 64, *OSD Hist.*

not wise ... for the United States to be engaged in Vietnam alone. It looks too much like the United States has colonial ambitions in the area. In truth we don't want to be there in any way, but we must stick it out in order to maintain the independence of South Vietnam. We want the help of other countries.⁵

So long as the fighting in Vietnam remained low key, further allied support, though desirable, was not essential. But the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of August 1964 and US reprisal airstrikes against North Vietnam significantly raised the ante. How could McNamara not ask for more Australian troops? As South Vietnam continued to wither under increasing Viet Cong (VC) pressure, McNamara sharpened his rhetoric about Australia's contributions to the war effort.

By November 1964, when Hasluck again visited Washington, the South Vietnamese government was teetering on the brink of collapse. If Hasluck was unable 'to get a sense of the direction of US policy',⁶ it was because President Lyndon Johnson refused to make firm decisions about Vietnam. This should not be construed as American deception, unless it was self-deception. Major policy changes would not be communicated to the American people nor indeed would the sorry state of the South Vietnamese political situation. Rather than a forthright exposition of policy, Johnson cloaked himself and his emerging consensus in half truths, evasions, and selective silence. Paradoxically the administration was especially candid with visiting dignitaries from Canberra.

When McNamara met with Defence Minister Shane Paltridge in Washington in early February 1965, just two days after the punishing Viet Cong attack on US forces based at Pleiku, he did not paint a happy picture of South Vietnam. '[T]hings are going downhill both politically and militarily', he told his guest. Either the United States had to change something or 'we will probably be out in a year'. Anticipating further escalation, McNamara thought it would be a major disaster if the US were pushed out of Vietnam and stressed that the Australians and other allies would have to be 'in it with us' to ensure the support of the American people for wider military action. Paltridge repeatedly responded that Australia was ready and willing to plan for and participate in what he called 'Phase II' operations in Vietnam. Apparently exceeding his instructions from External Affairs Minister Hasluck, he further suggested Australia would make available a battalion, although noting Australia's problems of expanding its own forces vis-à-vis the Indonesia emergency.⁷ A few weeks later McNamara, during classified testimony on 24 February, assured members of the Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations that 'within the last three or four weeks', the Australian defence minister

5. Memo of Conversation (Excerpts) McNamara with Franz Joseph Strauss, 8 June 1964, OSD Hist.

6. Edwards, *Crisis*, 336.

7. Memo of Conversation, McNamara and Paltridge, 9 February 1965, OSD Hist.; Edwards, *Crisis*, 344.

had stated without qualification that Australia would participate in Vietnam and asked for the opportunity to join with the US in joint military planning.⁸

With the ROLLING THUNDER air campaign underway against North Vietnam and US Marines committed to South Vietnam on 8 March 1965, Secretary McNamara told US business leaders in early May that Prime Minister Menzies finally had support in Parliament to expand his defence program and assured his audience that the Australians were 'doing everything that we could reasonably expect of them'.⁹ These were the two impressions of Australia that McNamara wanted to convey to Congress and the American public; namely Australia was standing beside the United States in Vietnam and Australia was doing all it could in support of the war. He never really succeeded.

When McNamara met Menzies in Washington, DC, on 8 June 1965, the two talked surprisingly little about Vietnam, perhaps because the visit coincided with the lull between the major decisions of February to commit US ground troops and the July decision to escalate the war. Menzies was convinced that the other side 'will not negotiate as long as they are winning', that Australia was at a critical point of their defence expansion being short of instructors in the training base; and that the military expansion had been 'extraordinarily well received by the Australian public'. The majority of their discussion involved issues like the F-111 program and the United Kingdom's possible withdrawal of its forces east of Suez.¹⁰ Near the end of June, Hasluck visited Washington to sound out McNamara on the type and number of additional forces required for Vietnam.

McNamara foresaw at a minimum twenty manoeuvre battalions would be needed (nine US plus one Australian battalion were already in South Vietnam and six more US battalions were en route). Yet he was unsure if that number would be enough to 'prove to the Viet Cong that we can win until we see how the summer campaign shaped up'. Were these ground forces a temporary measure until the South Vietnamese army got stronger, asked Hasluck? While McNamara answered affirmatively, in the next breath he said that he did not believe the army of South Vietnam could become stronger because of high desertion and casualty rates. As for bombing of the North, McNamara explained that the administration had never felt it would lead to a settlement. That could only come if the bombing were coupled with actions in the South to convince the communists that they would not win the war.

Hasluck questioned whether this estimate foreshadowed additional requests for Australian troops, and McNamara reaffirmed the requirement did exist for more ground troops in South Vietnam, likely within two months. Australia's forces were already

8. SecDef Testimony on the Authorization Bill and the Budget for FY 1966 before the Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations (Excerpts), 24 February 1965, OSD Hist.

9. SecDef Background Briefing for Industry, 10 May 1965, OSD Hist.

10. Memo, SecDef Conversation with Australian PM Menzies, et al., 8 June 1965, OSD Hist.

stretched, Hasluck explained, and sending a second battalion on short notice would increase the difficulties of rotation of forces and of maintaining sufficient reserves. With Menzies due back in Washington the week of 4 July, the external affairs minister really wanted to know if he should warn his prime minister to expect hard questions about additional forces for Vietnam. Although it was too early to make a formal request, McNamara 'reiterated that we needed troops now and we needed them badly, to which Mr. Hasluck replied that the Secretary knew this was the worst period for Australia'.¹¹

In late July, in the midst of the week of major US decisions on Vietnam, Johnson cabled Menzies a review of the current situation in South Vietnam, indicated a likely increase in US forces there, stated US determination to use diplomatic efforts to obtain a peaceful settlement, and described Washington's intent to use 'care and restraint' to ensure that the war did not expand. In reply Menzies assured Johnson of Australia's 'continuing support and readiness' to assist the United States defend Vietnam.¹²

Congress was less impressed. On 6 August one representative called the contributions of foreign allies 'woefully inadequate when you consider the burden that we are called on to bear'. McNamara reiterated the stress on the Australian military due to its Malaysia commitment and the rapid expansion of its armed forces. Canberra had, after all, agreed to modify its training schedule and to reduce the rate at which its defence buildup would occur in order to deploy a second combat battalion to South Vietnam likely before the end of the year.¹³ When additional Australian forces did not arrive in Vietnam quickly enough to suit some in Congress, McNamara defended Canberra's policies by explaining that the recent increases to the Australian defence budget necessitated tearing down the combat capability of existing units for use as cadre for the new units of the expanded force. It was then almost impossible for Australia to send another battalion to Vietnam while in the midst of the training upheaval created by the expansion of its ground forces.¹⁴ To keep Congressional critics at bay, McNamara testified that 'within three months another Australian battalion will be sent to Southeast Asia', and reminded his inquisitors that the Australian government was financing all of their operations in Vietnam at their own expense.¹⁵

11. Memo, SecDef Conversation with Australian Minister of External Affairs Hasluck, 29 June 1965, OSD Hist.

12. Memo, Bundy for the President, 26 July 1965, and Tel, Menzies to Johnson, 27 July 1965, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 13-14.

13. SecDef Testimony before House Committee on Armed Services (Executive Session) (Not Subsequently Published), 6 August 1965, OSD Hist.

14. Curiously the same argument did not apply to US Army or Marine Corps units who were undergoing similar strain.

15. SecDef Testimony regarding supplement appropriation of \$12.3 billion for FY 1966 before Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations (Excerpts), 20 January 1966, OSD Hist.

This pattern of Congressional demands that US allies do more in Vietnam seldom varied. In June 1966 Secretary of State Dean Rusk suggested to the president that ‘we should help ourselves by bragging on the Australians and not subject them to the question “why don’t you do more?”’¹⁶ But attitudes persisted. In February 1968, Senator Stuart Symington, a long-time McNamara nemesis, used Defense Department supplied figures to show that whereas 1 in 400 Americans was serving in Vietnam only 1 in 1402 Australians was serving there. Symington found this disproportion ‘speaks for itself, and is sad indeed. Where is the basic premise to our foreign policy—i.e., collective security?’¹⁷ As the stalemated war dragged on, President Johnson and Secretary McNamara would make similar arguments of proportionality to their Australian counterparts.

Misunderstanding, Misperceptions, Miscommunication

On 11 January 1966, Governor Averall Harriman met with Menzies. Harriman was one of a troupe of high-level administration officials dispatched throughout the world by the president during the lengthy December 1965-January 1966 bombing pause to marshal support for the US policy on Vietnam and open negotiations for a settlement. Menzies assured Harriman that the Australian people ‘are prepared for losses and fully support the government’. Canberra was also moving in the direction of increasing its forces in Vietnam.¹⁸ A few weeks later Menzies left office.

While many Australians may have shared the view of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in welcoming Menzies’ retirement after sixteen years in office, there was initial doubt in Washington that Harold Holt, the new Prime Minister, might not be as fully sympathetic to large military expenditures and Vietnam commitments as his predecessor. During discussions in late January 1966 with his British counterpart, McNamara had bluntly told Defence Minister Denis Healey that Holt should understand that the US would not be able to stay on in the Far Pacific unless there was a greater Anglo-Australian effort in the region. Should Holt fail to understand that fact, he might have to face Indonesia all by himself.¹⁹ On 4 March 1966, Holt eased such misgivings when he wrote President Johnson that ‘we understood that an additional battalion would have special value’, and proposed a substantially enlarged Australian contribution of some 4500 men under Australian command. Such a deployment represented the ‘upper limit of our army capacity, having regard for our existing military commitments in Malaysia’.

16. Telegram, Secretary of State to Department of State, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 31.

17. SecDef Testimony regarding Authorization Bill and Appropriations for FY 1969 before the Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations (Excerpts), 1, 2, and 5 February 1968, OSD Hist.

18. Telegram, Harriman to Johnson, 12 January 1966, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 17.

19. Memo, Conversation McNamara and Healey, 28 January 1966, OSD Hist.

The prime minister informed the president that he planned to announce the decision in Parliament on the evening of 8 March and until then was ‘taking steps to ensure that the decision is held in absolute security’.²⁰ Johnson’s return cable thanked Holt for the commitment and praised the ‘clear signal of Australian determination to combat “the threat of Communist aggression against the peoples of Southeast Asia”’.²¹

External Affairs Minister Hasluck returned to Washington in April 1966 for consultations on Vietnam with McNamara. Although the military campaign was going well, the defense secretary admitted that the political front was in danger of collapse. South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky might not survive the continuing Buddhist demonstrations and without him the South Vietnamese military could fragment. Moreover the anti-government demonstrations in South Vietnam confused the American public who asked, ‘Why die for people who can’t discipline themselves?’ Nevertheless the United States had 200,000 men in South Vietnam now and a planned total of 385,000 troops there by end of the year.

McNamara matter-of-factly told Hasluck that Washington would stop the build-up ‘the next day and reverse the flow of the pipeline’ if Australia reversed its commitment. Hasluck reassured him that Canberra was committed to go ahead, but cautioned that it would be ‘politically calamitous if Australia appeared more hawklike and the US more dovelike’. McNamara promised that the US would consult with Australia if there was a change in US policy. Prior consultation and close coordination, in Hasluck’s view, were ‘extremely important’ since Vietnam would be an issue in the December 1966 general election.²² The failure of consultation and coordination soon embarrassed Washington and Canberra.

The bombing of the POL (petroleum-oil-lubricants) storage depots near Haiphong in late June 1966 coincided with Prime Minister Holt’s visit to Washington. A 22 June 1966 National Security Council meeting authorised the attacks for 24 June, and Holt had been informed in Canberra on 23 June of the impending raids.²³ Bad weather and news leaks of the imminent raids appearing in the 24 June edition of the *Wall Street Journal* caused the administration to postpone the mission.²⁴ With the attacks on hold and agents

20. Letter, Holt to Johnson, 4 March 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, XXXVII, 20-21.

21. *Ibid.*, n .2, 19.

22. Memo, Conversation McNamara and Hasluck, 12 April 1966, OSD Hist.

23. Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), 113-14.

24. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol IV, *Vietnam 1966*, n. 4, 452: Memo For Record Deputy Director for Operations, National Military Command Center, ‘News Item by John Scali’, 24 June 1966, and Philip Geyelin, ‘Johnson to Expand North Vietnam Bombing to Include Haiphong’, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1966: both folder 110. POL, box OSD/PA, SE/Asia Records—Weapons, Equipment, POL, OSD Hist.; Telcon, McNamara and Ball, 25 June 1966 12:10 p.m., folder June 1966, box 16, Gibbons June 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereinafter cited as LBJL).

of the Federal Bureau of Investigation searching for the source of the security breach, Under Secretary of State George Ball remarked on a national television news program aired 26 June that 'no decision had been reached to bomb the oil storage depots'.²⁵ On 29 June, the day Holt landed in Washington, US warplanes struck the Haiphong targets.

Holt, alluding to British 'blockbuster' tactics in Berlin and VC tactics against civilians, saw no need to apologise over the civilian casualties because the attacks were matters of military judgment. The more delicate issue between the allies, as far as he was concerned, was one of prior consultation and coordination. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security Affairs John McNaughton, who was McNamara's right-hand man, explained to Holt that Ball's statement was made after the administration had cancelled its earlier decision to bomb on the 24th and before it made the new one to go ahead with the attacks.

Holt was quite understanding and expressed more concern over the behaviour of the press in the whole affair, evidently referring to their irresponsibility in leaking the information about the forthcoming raids in the first place, than with the administration's bungled handling of the follow-up notification. He asked McNamara's advice on how to respond to reporters' questions about 'prior notice' regarding the strikes. McNamara suggested Holt state categorically that he was 'aware' of the raids, but to avoid details or answers to specific questions about the timing of such notice.²⁶ Holt honoured McNamara's request by refusing to tell inquisitive journalists in Washington exactly when he had been consulted about the bombing decision.²⁷ Yet like Macbeth's tangled web of deception, American periphrasis ensnared the Australian prime minister as henceforth the 'adequacy of American consultation', to use Peter Edwards' phrase, became an increasingly sensitive issue with the Australian media, public, and government.²⁸

Throughout 1966, Hasluck and Holt offered above all else the allied support that President Johnson so desperately needed. The prime minister, for example, related how he had 'jumped all over Healey in Canberra' about the lack of British backing for the allied effort in Vietnam. McNamara re-emphasised that the US public and Congressional criticism of administration policy in Vietnam stemmed considerably from the need for more and wider international assistance. Americans, the defense secretary explained, see the attitudes of the English, Japanese, and Indians and 'they wonder if we are not wrong. If not wrong, are we foolish?'²⁹

25. Baltimore *Sun*, 27 June 1966, 2.

26. Memo, SecDef Conversation with Holt et al. (excerpts from Memo of Conversation), 29 June 1966, OSD Hist.

27. Edwards, *Nation at War*, 113.

28. *Ibid.*, 114. As Edwards points out, since late December 1965 the Australian press was complaining that Australia was not being adequately consulted or informed about developments in American policy.

29. Memo of Conversation McNamara and Holt et al., 29 June 1966, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 35.

In September 1966 Hasluck informed Rusk that he hoped there would be more patience on the part of those pushing for negotiations, ‘which he thought might still be premature and without adequate basis’. The Australian minister opposed any bombing halt, and although by no means considering himself a ‘hawk’, believed it would be a ‘serious mistake to let up on efforts to defend South Vietnam’.³⁰ Likewise at the third session of the Manila Conference about a month later, Holt carried the message that Vietnam was a larger battleground where a war was being fought over issues that affected all the free countries of Asia and the Pacific. The ‘shell of security’ provided by the United States enabled other free countries in the region to ‘go about our own affairs, building our economies, strengthening our own defenses’.³¹ The encomium was appropriate for a conference designed to help Johnson drum up support for his Vietnam policies.³²

Holt followed up his words with a commitment to put an additional 1700 or so men in Vietnam, an announcement that McNamara publicised during his March 1967 congressional testimony.³³ Nine hundred and forty of the 1700 servicemen were soldiers sent as individual fillers while the larger question of dispatching a third combat battalion remained under review. It was in these circumstances that Hasluck again visited the Pentagon in April 1967 to hear McNamara’s views on the situation in Vietnam. McNamara allowed that the buildup of allied forces in the South precluded the VC or North Vietnamese Army from taking over South Vietnam. Still the enemy gave no indication of a willingness to negotiate an end to the war, and Hanoi continued to send men and supplies south to match the allied reinforcement. Hasluck volunteered that the Australian government had not been formally asked to provide a third battalion (although certain quarters in Canberra felt it would be more efficient to have three rather than two battalions in South Vietnam) but that it might be willing to entertain such a request. Yet again McNamara offered no optimistic solution to Vietnam. Yet again the Australian government proposed to send more troops to Vietnam.

McNamara also sought Hasluck’s opinions about increasing the pressure on the North by expanding the bombing campaign. This was no idle chatter. Since mid-March 1967, the president had approved an expanded target list to include thermal power plants around Haiphong, and with each passing day McNamara felt that ‘rational control of

30. Memo of Conversation, Hasluck and Rusk, 19 September 1966 (Excerpts), in LTC A.D. Williams, ‘Compilation of Statements of Support of U.S. Policy in Vietnam by Asian Leaders’, 4 November 1967, Notebook, OSD Hist.

31. MFR Prime Minister Holt Speech at 3rd Session, Manila Conference, 24 October 1966 (excerpts) in *ibid.*

32. George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), 139.

33. SecDef Testimony regarding appropriations for FY 1968 before House Committee on Armed Services (Excerpts), 6, 7, 8 March 1967, OSD Hist.

targeting was getting out of his hands'.³⁴ Mindful of Australian sensibilities Hasluck sent a mixed message. On the one hand, he hoped the Americans would fully consult with Australia if they contemplated expanding the bombing because Canberra might not be prepared to support a widening of the air campaign against the North that targeted civilians. McNamara assured him this was not the case. On the other hand, Hasluck expressed opposition to any temporary cease-fire arrangements for negotiations unless there was clear agreement beforehand that the fighting would not be resumed.³⁵

These were likely not the responses McNamara wanted to hear. He was hopeful of ending the bombing as a prelude to talks, not expanding it to force Hanoi to negotiate. He wanted to strike the newly authorised targets in the North post-haste to demonstrate that their destruction would in no way influence the fighting in the South. And most of all he wanted to get out of Vietnam as quickly as possible.³⁶ In fact during the week of 21-28 April, sixteen US warplanes were lost as the bombing of North Vietnamese airfields set off a month-long series of air battles as the North Vietnamese Air Force engaged United States aircraft or risked being destroyed on the ground.

On 1 June 1967 McNamara again met with Holt who in the meantime had learned that General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), was asking for more and more ground forces. In April Westmoreland had indeed requested as many as 200,000 additional troops. McNamara acknowledged that MACV had recommended substantial forces, but no decision had been made, nor was one likely pending his return from a visit to Vietnam scheduled for 18-20 June. When Holt mentioned that Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Admiral US Grant Sharp, had indicated that the bombing had been more effective in recent weeks, McNamara responded this was unquestionably true in terms of destruction, but intelligence reported no evidence of weakened enemy will. Holt professed amazement at how the North could persist in the face of the destruction and punishment.

McNamara further disclosed that the administration would soon be relooking at the issue of mining the port of Haiphong and asked for Holt's views on the subject. The prime minister let McNamara understand that while he felt other actions than mining the harbour ought to be taken first, he did not want to act as a brake on US actions. After all, the Americans were carrying the major load in Vietnam, and the Australians should not obstruct steps the US felt necessary to prosecute the war.³⁷

34. Memo, Rostow for the President, 9 May 1967, folder Walt Rostow—May 1-15, 1967, 1 of 2 (vol. 27), box 16, item #79, NSF Memos to the President, Walt Rostow, LBJL.

35. Memo of Conversation, Hasluck and McNamara et al., 17 April 1967, OSD Hist.

36. See, for example, Draft Presidential Memorandum, SecDef for the President, 'Future Actions in Vietnam', 19 May 1967, folder Vietnam 2EE, box 75, item # 18a, NSF Country File Vietnam, LBJL.

37. Memo, SecDef Conversation with Holt et al. (excerpts) 1 June 1967, OSD Hist.

In a 3 July 1967 letter to Johnson, Holt wrote that the bombing of North Vietnam should continue.³⁸ Johnson in return informed Holt that no decisions would be made until McNamara returned from Vietnam. (The originally scheduled trip of mid-June had been postponed because of the Middle East crisis of June 1967. McNamara went to Saigon on 7 July.) The likelihood, however, was that more would have to be done to offset the reinforcements dispatched from North Vietnam to fight on the southern battlefields. The President stated frankly that if additional troops were needed, ‘we shall need to talk fairly urgently with you and the other troop-contributing nations on whether a substantial part of the need can be met by others’.³⁹

This brings me to General Maxwell Taylor and Clark Clifford’s August 1967 mission to Asia. The contemporaneous Clifford-Taylor report differs in tone from Clifford’s account published in the July 1969 issue of *Foreign Affairs* where he recounted that when asked for more troops, Prime Minister Holt ‘presented a long list of a reasons why Australia was already close to its maximum effort’. This experience, and similar encounters with other Asian leaders during his trip, led Clifford to re-evaluate his hawkish judgments about Vietnam.⁴⁰

Just about two years earlier, on 5 August 1967 at a White House meeting immediately after his return, Clifford told the participants that ‘it would be more difficult for the Australians to turn us down when they are in touch with the President directly’. Johnson personally believed that ‘Holt wanted us to let him suggest these things to the United States rather than our dictating to him’. Relating their all-day Sunday meeting in Canberra, Clifford described the Australians as ‘hard nuts’ who did indeed have a long list of their contributions to Vietnam in hand to greet the Americans. Holt, for example, read from a prepared memorandum detailed facts about budget stringency, increased defence costs, foreign aid generosity and limitations on personal consumption—all designed to show that little Australia was ‘doing its part’ in the world. Clifford and Taylor, however, concluded that they made real progress with Holt when they spoke to him alone about the seriousness of the matter. At that time, Holt jokingly remarked that Taylor was such a good salesman that he was glad he had not brought his wife to the meeting. When asked for two more battalion combat teams (2000–2400 men), Holt was non-committal, but Clifford thought that Canberra would add at least one more manoeuvre battalion. More to the point, the Americans learned that the Australian commander in Vietnam

38. Letter, Holt to Johnson, 3 July 1967 (excerpts) in Williams, Notebook, OSD Hist.

39. Letter, Johnson to Holt, 11 July 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 65.

40. Clark M. Clifford, ‘A Viet Nam Reappraisal’, *Foreign Affairs* 47:4 (July 1969), 607.

41. Notes of the President’s Meeting with Mr. Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor, 5 August 1967, Tom Johnson Notes of Meeting, LBJL; Clifford-Taylor Report to the President, 5 August 1967, fldr Vietnam (July & August 67), box 2, OSD (A) 1967 Defense Files, Acc 330-77-0075, Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD (hereinafter WNRC).

was interested in filling out his contingent to about 9000 troops.⁴¹ These additional men formed the third battalion.

Clifford and Taylor's written version of the meeting was more ambiguous. Although the Australian government saw the outcome in Vietnam deciding who would control Southeast Asia and did not want the US to withdraw from the area, 'it is clear', wrote Clifford, 'that the Government of Australia is not prepared to take any extraordinary measures to increase its participation in the war'. The cabinet was willing to go as far as possible 'without upsetting the "normal" course of Australian life (for example, they now have 68,000 men under arms; in World War II, they had 700,000 men)'. In short, Holt was pursuing the same course of 'guns and butter' policies that the Johnson administration had unsuccessfully adopted in the United States. Holt won the 1966 general election on the Vietnam issue, much as Johnson had in 1964. And like Johnson, Holt made no appeal for public support for the war effort that exceeded a 'normal pattern'.

Clifford concluded that either the Australians did not believe that their vital interests were at stake, or they believed that the United States was so deeply involved that the administration had to carry the war through to a conclusion 'satisfactory to them as well as to us'. To Holt's wish to discuss broader security arrangements before making further troop commitments to Vietnam, the American emissaries countered that the crisis in Vietnam existed now, and should receive clear priority.⁴² The overall impression of the post-Canberra meeting and report is not quite as gloomy a picture as Clifford would later recall. Placed in its overall context, and not just the selective excerpts drawn on by Clifford, the sessions involved hard-nosed bargaining and tough negotiations, but the Americans left convinced that Canberra would deploy more troops to embattled South Vietnam.

Retired General Maxwell Taylor also questioned Clifford's public account. Summing up the mood in allied capitals, Taylor recalled, 'While none of these governments were wildly enthusiastic over the thought of increasing their troop contributions, I certainly got no impression of indifference to the outcome of the war in Vietnam—quite the contrary'. Taylor's only criticism of his hosts was their attitude that any troop contributions they made were insignificant to the outcome of military operations. Such being the case, why should they stir up trouble at home by increasing their forces in Vietnam.⁴³ Put differently, the allies understood that Washington alone determined the fate of South Vietnam and awaited the administration's decisions on escalating the conflict.

42. Clifford-Taylor, Report to the President, 5 August 1967.

43. Memo, Taylor for Kissinger, 'Clifford-Taylor Visit to Troop Contributing Countries, August 1967', 26 June 1969, folder 621-C A (Clifford-Taylor Mission to SEA—July–August 1967 (67-69), item #4, box 58, Gen Maxwell D. Taylor Papers, National Defense University Library, Washington, DC.

Lastly it is worth noting that by the end of 1967 South Korea had promised six additional infantry battalions; Australia a third battalion to increase its troop strength to 8000 men by June 1968; New Zealand had increased its strength to about 500; and Thailand offered a commitment for six manoeuvre battalions and 12,500 men by June 1969. Only the Philippines had not increased their forces since the previous year.⁴⁴ At the time of their visit to the Asian capitals, there were 54,000 allied troops serving in South Vietnam. By May 1969 that number had risen to over 70,000.⁴⁵ All this suggests that the Clifford-Taylor mission was more productive than Clifford later recollected.

Shortly after the Clifford-Taylor mission, Holt informed Johnson, as the president had forecast, that he would review Australia's position on more troops for Vietnam. National and international considerations such as rising defence costs, requirements for domestic development, high foreign aid outlays, and Britain's planned withdrawal from Malaysia and Singapore still limited Australia's ability to do more.⁴⁶ Johnson replied that he appreciated the 'various factors' and still hoped Holt's cabinet could make an early decision to send a two-battalion combat team. For added leverage, he wrote that he 'could not exaggerate the favorable effect on Congress a prompt decision would have'.⁴⁷

In early October 1967 Walt Rostow suggested Johnson offer Australian Treasurer William McMahon, 'known for favoring considerably stronger measures in Vietnam, including escalation of bombing', an upbeat assessment of the Vietnam situation emphasising that the efforts of the allies might soon prove successful.⁴⁸ Johnson gave McMahon the 'treatment', that unique Johnsonian combination of emotional self-pity, forceful persuasion, and incessant pressure to convince him that Australia must do more in Vietnam. Following the 'treatment' and force of Johnson's formidable Texas personality, McMahon urged Holt by cable to inform Washington confidentially and soon of Canberra's decision to send a third battalion to Vietnam.⁴⁹ Later, during his visit with McNamara, McMahon found himself subjected to similar pressure. The defense secretary was less interested in hearing about Australia's financial woes,⁵⁰ many traceable to a swollen defence budget, than he was in a greater commitment of Australian forces to Vietnam. Congressional and public criticism of the administration over Vietnam, McNamara declared, was in large part because 'none of America's allies were bearing their fair share of the load'.⁵¹

44. SecDef Budget Statement for FY 1969, February 1968, OSD Hist.

45. Memo, Taylor for Kissinger, note 43 above.

46. Memo, W. Rostow for the President, 3 August 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68, XXVII*, 66.

47. Letter, Johnson to Holt, 16 August 1967, *FRUS 1964-68, XXVII*, 67-68.

48. Memo, W. Rostow for the President, 2 October 1967, folder Daily Backup, box 78, 2 October 1967, LBJL.

49. Edwards, *Nation at War*, 154-55.

50. Memo of Conversation McNamara and Hasluck, 10 October 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68, 74*.

51. Cited in Edwards, *Nation at War*, 155.

Between McMahon's 2 October meeting with the president and Minister of External Affairs Hasluck's arrival in Washington on 10 October, Holt secretly informed Johnson of Australia's intention to deploy a third battalion to South Vietnam. The change in atmosphere was palpable. McNamara greeted Hasluck with delight at Canberra's decision and asked when Holt would make the public announcement. Euphoria did not extend to Vietnam where, McNamara admitted, the outlook was much the same as the previous year, although there was 'good progress on the military side'. The bombing campaign was hurting the North, but it did not appear able to compel Hanoi to negotiate an end to the fighting. Neither could the administration unilaterally end the bombing. If there was a bombing pause and North Vietnam did not respond positively, the United States would find it very difficult in the face of world opinion to resume the air attacks. In other words, bombing had become a self-sustaining end in itself regardless of the adverse public perception of the air campaign. Indeed the war, according to McNamara, was becoming increasingly unpopular with the US public, even though there was no need to call up the reserves and the US could afford to underwrite the war 'without significant strains on its economy'. As McNamara saw it, 'the big question' was whether there was 'sufficient patience and firmness at home to see the situation through'.⁵²

A few hours later Hasluck met with Johnson who observed that the US was three times as far from Vietnam as was Australia and was only fifteen times its size. If the US effort was proportional to Australia's then there would be only 100,000 Americans in Vietnam. As a consequence, the president found himself under strong pressure from the Senate and elsewhere to demand that America's allies in the region do more in their own defence.⁵³ It seemed that no matter what Australia did in Vietnam, it was never quite enough to satisfy its American ally.

Vietnam, of course, was not Canberra's only foreign policy concern. Hasluck had probed McNamara about US support for Australia should Canberra decide to keep troops in Malaysia and Singapore after the British departed.⁵⁴ The Office of International Security Affairs (the policy arm of the Secretary of Defense) passed the request on a 'close-hold' basis to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their views on the strategic/military implications of the Australian proposal.⁵⁵ On 8 November 1967 the Chiefs responded that the strategic importance of the Malacca Strait was critical and that US strategic/military interests would be 'adversely affected' if, following the British departure, Australia also pulled out of the area. Nevertheless, the Chiefs neither wished to assume

52. Memo of Conversation, 10 October 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XVII, 74-5.

53. Memo of Conversation, Hasluck and the President, 10 October 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 77.

54. Memo of Conversation, McNamara-Hasluck, 10 October 1968, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 73.

55. Memo, Assistant Director ISA for Chairman, JCS, 13 October 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 79.

UK treaty commitments nor station US troops in the region. In short, the JCS wanted a regional security arrangement anchored by forces from Australia and New Zealand.⁵⁶

The unexpected and untimely death of Prime Minister Holt brought President Johnson to Canberra for the funeral and a separate meeting with the Australian Cabinet on 21 December 1967. Australian leaders assured Johnson that their nation would stand with the US in Vietnam ‘right through to the end’. Johnson in turn promised that the United States would honour its ANZUS commitments and expressed his appreciation ‘to find someone to stand up beside you’.⁵⁷ Addressing the Australian cabinet, he cautioned his audience, ‘We may face dark days ahead’ for the ‘enemy was building his forces in the South’, and two more divisions from the North were moving south.⁵⁸ These remarks, as Edwards notes, hardly square with Johnson’s dramatic account in his memoirs of North Vietnamese ‘kamikaze’ tactics in a planned operation that implies foreknowledge of what came to be known as the Tet Offensive.⁵⁹

Shock waves from the ferocity of the Tet Offensive launched on 30–31 January 1968 reverberated throughout allied capitals. In Canberra at a 2 February press conference Prime Minister John Gorton unilaterally and publicly ruled out any further increases in Australian forces in Vietnam.⁶⁰ One week later, at a White House meeting, Johnson asked if Gorton was ‘singing a different tune from Holt’? Secretary Rusk replied that while Gorton announced that he would send no more troops, his speeches still supported US policy.⁶¹ Gorton’s shifting attitudes and Johnson’s closely held decision, announced publicly on 31 March 1968, to restrict the bombing of North Vietnam and to withdraw as a candidate in the 1968 presidential election further strained relations between the allies. Caught unawares by the dramatic announcements, Gorton sent a ‘vigorous protest’ to the White House insisting there be no repetition of this breakdown in consultation.⁶²

Rusk claimed to have ‘smoothed out any ruffled feathers’ Gorton may have had about timely consultation when the two met in Canberra in April. As the Secretary of State explained matters to the president, Gorton’s unfamiliarity with Johnson’s ways, something other world leaders had gotten used to, was one of several factors behind the Australian leader’s pique. As if somehow the fault was Gorton’s, Rusk reminded Johnson ‘this was his first experience with a change in bombing patterns while it was at

56. Memo, CJCS for SecDef, JCSM-614-67, 8 November 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 84.

57. Memo of Conversation, The President and the Australian Cabinet, 21 December 1967, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 88.

58. *Ibid.*, 89.

59. Cf Edwards, *Nation at War*, 192, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 379.

60. Edwards, *Nation at War*, 196.

61. Notes of Meeting 9 February 1968, folder Meetings with the President January thru April 1968 (2) box 1&2, #60a, Files of Walt W. Rostow, LBJL.

62. Edwards, *Nation at War*, 197.

least your ninth'.⁶³ Oblivious to Gorton's irritation, Rusk also raised the issue of more Australian troops for Vietnam. Gorton replied, 'I have heard what you said', but made no commitment. Rusk still was optimistic, feeling the less said publicly about asking Australia for more troops the better chance Washington had of getting them.⁶⁴

Gorton arrived in Washington in late May 1968 for talks with the president and other senior officials who pressured him for still more troops. On 29 May he met with Clark Clifford, the new Secretary of Defense, who restated the familiar refrain that allied support was essential in order for the president to show Congress and the American public that the US was not alone in sending additional forces to Vietnam. At a time when the United States intended to phase down its military activities gradually as the South Vietnamese increased their own role in the war, any wavering of US allies would, Clifford argued, have an 'exceedingly important' impact in the United States. In such circumstances, the American people would not support 'broadening our responsibility' in Southeast Asia to accommodate Australia's wishes for US guarantees for Canberra's policy toward Malaysia and Singapore. 'They would ask: If Southeast Asia is not important to our allies, why should it be to us?'⁶⁵ One might fairly reverse Clifford's reasoning to ask if the United States was drawing back in Vietnam, why shouldn't its allies do the same?

During October 1968 first-hand reports reached Clifford of Australian concern that the United States might pull out of Vietnam 'before the job is done' and of large numbers of Australian students demonstrating against the war. He exploded. The Australian attitude was typical of the region where 'all are perfectly willing for Uncle Sam to do it all. Australia is not making anything like the contribution she should be making.'⁶⁶ If Clifford's frustration was boiling over, then I suggest that some of this steam ended up in his later *Foreign Affairs* essay.

Throughout 1968 the contradiction between phasing down US military involvement in Vietnam and asking America's allies to remain resolute became increasingly evident. After all, it now appeared that the United States was no longer vitally interested in South Vietnam. Why then should anyone else be?

Conclusions

Short of massive deployments equivalent in percentage terms to those of the United States demanding full-scale mobilisation, nothing Australia could do militarily in

63. Telegram, Rusk to Department of State, 6 April 1968, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 90-91.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Memo of Conversation, Clifford and Gorton, 29 May 1968, *FRUS, 1964-68*, XXVII, 99.

66. SecDef Staff Meeting, 7 October 1968, folder Staff Meeting October-January 13, 1969, box 13, AFPC, Acc 330-77-0062, WNRC.

South Vietnam would fully satisfy Congress, the American public, or the Johnson administration. Washington demanded more and more of its allies as the war escalated and insisted they sustain their commitments when the US began to de-escalate its involvement in Vietnam. Statements and conversations of top level Australian and American leaders repeatedly turn on these issues.

Conversely Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara never tried to get additional troops by misrepresenting the seriousness of conditions in Vietnam to the Australians. His discussions and exchanges with his Australian counterparts were candid, and for that matter so too were the talks among other US and Australian senior leaders. Washington repeatedly told Canberra that Vietnam was a perilous and uncertain enterprise, and Australia responded by sending more and more troops to fight there. At the time, of course, it was inconceivable that the United States might lose the war, and Canberra had to stand beside its larger ally to ensure future American support against Indonesian aggression. Both nations were together in South Vietnam, but for different, largely unrelated, strategic reasons. In truth Vietnam was not the war for either Australia or the United States to fight, although Canberra, at least until the Indonesian counterrevolution, had more at stake than Washington in the stability of Southeast Asia.

Attitudes shifted as the war degenerated into stalemate. Escalation had not produced a war winning strategy. By 1967 it was plain that North Vietnam was not going to quit, so there was no end game, just more of the same. Only the Americans had the power to bring the Vietnam War to an end and their inability to do so left the administration frustrated and the nation more and more divided. As a result, miscommunication between the allies increased, consultation became thinly veiled demands for more troops, and coordination involving major policy changes suffered. More and more the United States appeared to be acting arbitrarily, less and less consulting its allies, except for the steady drumbeat for additional troops. The deterioration of the underpinnings of any coalition—communication, coordination, and consultation—convinced many Americans that the nation's allies were not doing their fair share in South Vietnam. Such an attitude coupled with an unpopular and divisive war relegated Australian military efforts in Vietnam to the background where they were little known or appreciated by Congress, the administration, or the general American public.

The Higher Direction of the Army in the Vietnam War

David Horner

The Australian Army's commitment to the Vietnam War between 1962 and 1972 had much in common with its commitments to previous wars. In the Boer War, the two world wars, Korea, Malaya and Malaysia, Australian Army formations and units came under the operational control of an Allied commander. Australia had little say over the higher strategic direction of the war or indeed over the strategy employed within each theatre of war. The main exception to that pattern was in the Southwest Pacific Area between 1942 and 1944 when the Allied commander-in-chief, General Douglas MacArthur, was based in Australia and discussed his strategic plans with the Australian government, even though ultimate direction came from the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Furthermore, the Commander of the Allied Land Forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey, had a measure of independence in determining how and where the units of the Australian Army would fight.¹

Of course, Australian governments have generally played a key role in deciding the level and nature of Australia's military commitments. It is true that the Australian government was not consulted before its troops were employed in the Gallipoli landing, but in the Second World War the government approved the deployment of its forces to Greece, demanded their relief at Tobruk, denied their diversion to Burma in February 1942 and refused their involvement in Java in 1945.

During the Vietnam War, again Australia had little say over the higher strategic direction of the war, and the Australian Army's formations and units came under the operational control of an Allied commander. But there were several variations in comparison with earlier wars. The first of these concerned the chain of command. In the First and Second World Wars the commanders of the Australian Imperial Force reported to the Minister for Defence. As in the Second World War, the Australian government decided to commit forces to Vietnam after receiving advice from the Chiefs of Staff

1. Another exception was the small expedition to German New Guinea in 1914, when strategic direction was in the hands of the Australian government.

Committee. But from the time of the initial deployment of members of the Australian Army Training Team in 1962, through the expansion of the commitment to a battalion in 1965, until 1966 when the force was expanded further to a task force, the commander of the Australian Army force in Vietnam reported directly to the Chief of the General Staff (CGS). In 1966, when the Australian force in Vietnam became tri-service, the Commander Australian Force Vietnam (COMAFV) then reported directly to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee.² This arrangement had particular ramifications for the Australian Army in Vietnam. Although COMAFV reported to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, he was also commander of the Australian Army component of his force and in that capacity was responsible to the CGS for matters concerning training, doctrine, tactics, logistics and personnel, and these were generally the most pressing issues.

Fortunately, the problems created by this apparently divided control were alleviated by the personalities of the commanders involved. From his appointment in January 1963 until May 1966 the CGS was Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton. The first COMAFV was appointed in April 1966, but the following month Wilton took over as Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee. Thus the same man, Wilton, who had been responsible for the Australian Army in Vietnam since January 1963, continued to bear that responsibility until he retired in November 1970. Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly succeeded Wilton as CGS. Wilton and Daly held each other in high regard and worked closely and effectively during the Vietnam War. Daly continued as CGS until May 1971, by which time the main decisions concerning the withdrawal of the force had been made.

Other differences from earlier wars were the length of the commitment, its increasing unpopularity, and greater media coverage. Ultimately, after the Australians withdrew, the North Vietnamese took over the country. On the face of it then, the United States and Australia had failed in Vietnam, thus raising strong questions about the advice given to the Australian government by its military advisors and about the higher direction of the Army during the war.

In an attempt to understand the quality and nature of the higher direction of the Army this essay examines eight decisions or issues that determined the size, shape and purpose of the Australian Army's involvement in Vietnam.

2. Eventually, non-Army units in Vietnam included an Iroquois squadron, a bomber squadron and a Caribou flight from the RAAF, and a clearance diving team, helicopter pilots and a destroyer from the RAN. These elements came under COMAFV. This essay concentrates on the Army commitment, which was for the longest duration and was by far the largest.

The Commitment of the First Battalion

The most important decision was the government's decision in April 1965 to deploy an infantry battalion the following month. The idea of sending an infantry battalion to Vietnam first appeared officially in a paper prepared by the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) in December 1964 following information that the United States was considering sending ground forces to South Vietnam 'together with such ground forces as Australia and New Zealand might be able to provide'.³ The JPC consisted of the Directors of Plans of the three services plus representatives of the Departments of Defence and External Affairs. The key Army representative was Brigadier Ken Mackay, the Director of Military Operations and Plans. On 11 December the JPC advised that Australia had the capability to provide one infantry battalion, a squadron of the Special Air Service Regiment, logistic support elements, about ten extra instructors and naval ships to transport them.⁴

On 14 December 1964 President Lyndon Johnson suggested to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, that Australia provide 200 extra advisors and various naval craft. Two days later the Chiefs of Staff met and advised the government that the introduction of ground forces was 'the only way of achieving a solution to the South Vietnam problem'. They stated that Australia was 'in a position to offer now, if required, an infantry battalion for combat operations in South Vietnam'.⁵ The Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, was an air force officer, and no doubt the CGS, Wilton, played a key part in this decision. He had already visited Vietnam twice. The Director of Military Intelligence, Colonel Zac Isaksson, can clearly recall Wilton asking him whether a commitment to Vietnam was sustainable. Isaksson was convinced that the war was winnable. He thought that there was 'no doubt' that the Joint Intelligence Committee, of which he was a member, gave 'considerable weight' to his opinion, and he still believes that 'given those circumstances again, my advice would be unchanged'.⁶

At this stage the government refrained from committing a battalion, but the issue of Australian involvement was discussed with the Americans at a military conference in Honolulu between 30 March and 1 April 1965. The official historian, Peter Edwards, has shown that Air Chief Marshal Scherger, who represented Australia, went beyond his brief and offered a battalion.⁷ Brigadier Mackay accompanied Scherger and recalled

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3. Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992), 337.
 4. Report by the Joint Planning Committee, 11 December 1964, National Archives of Australia (NAA), A1945/39, 248/4/100.
 5. Minute by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 16 December 1964, loc cit.
 6. Brigadier O.H. Isaksson to author, 15 July 2002; O.H. Isaksson, *Encounters in Asia: A Soldier's Story* (Nathan, Qld: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1997), 54.
 7. Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 358-60.

that Scherger discussed with him in detail why a battalion was the most appropriate force to send to Vietnam.⁸ And Bill Major, a senior Army public servant, observed that the Army was very keen for Mackay to report favourably.⁹ Ian McNeill, in the official history, emphasises another shortcoming from this meeting. Scherger was required to discuss the general concept of operations for the ground troops in Vietnam, but he found that the Americans had not thought through an overall strategy. As McNeill commented: ‘If Australia were to have any say in how [the political] aim might be achieved before it committed its troops, this was the opportunity ... Instead Scherger was given a preferred area of deployment for an Australian battalion and a role expressed blankly as “counter-insurgency” operations.’¹⁰

On return from Honolulu, Scherger reported to the Defence Committee which recommended the commitment of a battalion. Then on 7 April the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of Cabinet considered and approved the recommendation. Next month both Wilton and Mackay were present for a Cabinet meeting to confirm the deployment of the battalion.

The Roles of the First Battalion

The roles of the first battalion to be deployed to Vietnam (First Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment—1RAR) were determined in May 1965. In early May, Brigadier Mackay visited Vietnam where he found that the Americans planned to incorporate 1RAR into the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa airfield, near to Saigon. He signed a working arrangement with the US authorities there. When he returned to Australia the Defence Committee approved 1RAR’s roles. The roles set out in the directives to the Commander of the Australian Army Force Vietnam (Brigadier O.D. Jackson) and the commanding officer of 1RAR, were:

- a. security of a base area;
- b. deeper patrolling and offensive operations as ordered;
- c. reaction operations as ordered in conjunction with ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) forces; and
- d. contingency planning.

When General Wilton visited Vietnam in late June, in negotiations with the Americans he ensured that the brigade commander would consult the commanding officer of 1RAR before the battalion was deployed on any operation, and that the battalion would have a degree of autonomy during operations.

8. Major General K. Mackay to author, 10 October 1985.

9. Mr K.W. Major (First Assistant Secretary, Department of the Army) to author, 7 April 1986.

10. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 64.

Early in July the Americans began planning to form a general reserve in Vietnam that could be deployed anywhere in the country and would include 1RAR. Wilton opposed the inclusion of 1RAR, believing that it might be involved in 'a succession of hazardous operations which would inevitably result in heavy casualties'.¹¹ The US commander, General Westmoreland, understood that 1RAR was restricted to operations within 35 kilometres of Bien Hoa, and he therefore sought to change this arrangement by seeking assistance from his superiors in Washington. In response, Wilton told Jackson that 1RAR could operate beyond 35 kilometres but could go no further than provinces adjacent to Bien Hoa. Wilton discussed the role of 1RAR with Westmoreland when he visited Vietnam in September, and eventually on 1 October Wilton informed Jackson that 1RAR was 'available for operations more distant from Bien Hoa'.¹²

The importance of this episode lies in what it reveals about the attitude of the Australian government, and particularly of the CGS, Wilton, who was determined to limit Australian casualties and not expose Australian troops to capricious American operations. Furthermore, Wilton and the Australians had a different philosophy from the Americans. Wilton believed that the Americans favoured a direct approach, using plentiful firepower to kill as many enemy soldiers as possible. Such an approach might result occasionally in heavy Allied casualties, and Australia could not afford to take the risk that its battalion might be the one that took the casualties. In any case, the Australians favoured a more methodical approach to counter-revolutionary warfare (as the Australian Army called it).

An Independent Task Force

As the Australian Army had a different concept for conducting counter-revolutionary warfare it was logical that as soon as 1RAR arrived in Vietnam, Wilton and his advisers began considering how the force could be built up to an independent task force. As Wilton put it:

Although for military tactical reasons we really had to be under operational control of the US command, I preferred not to be brigaded in an American position. I wanted to have as much independence within the force limitations as I could so I could keep a closer eye on it.¹³

11. Letter, CGS to Army Minister, 6 July 1965, Australian War Memorial (AWM) 121, 161/A/4, and NAA, A1945, 248/4/124.

12. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 121.

13. Army Historical Programme, Interview with General Sir John Wilton, 9, 13, 14 September 1976, 21, AWM 107.

By July 1965 planning was well under way. The American high command in Vietnam indicated that it would welcome such a proposal and when Brigadier Mackay visited Vietnam in early August 1965 he asked the Americans to reserve Phuoc Tuy Province for the Australian task force.¹⁴

A few days later the government directed that the Army not undertake any planning to deploy a task force.¹⁵ In any case, the Army, which had been authorised to raise eight battalions, would not have formed sufficient new battalions to sustain a task force until well into 1966. Of the battalions manned by regular soldiers, 1RAR was already in Vietnam, 3RAR was in Borneo where it was on operations against Indonesia, and 4RAR was scheduled to relieve 3RAR in October–November 1965, the latter battalion then being split to form another battalion, 7RAR. National Servicemen were just beginning to arrive in the other battalions. Therefore, 2RAR, 5RAR and 6RAR would not be ready for operations until at least March 1966, and 3RAR, 7RAR and 8RAR would not be ready until later. While a battalion remained on operations in Borneo the Army would have insufficient battalions to maintain a task force of any more than two battalions.

The government did not permit Defence to resume planning for a two-battalion task force until January 1966, by which time the US government was asking Australia for an increase to its commitment. After recommendations from the Defence Committee, on 2 March 1966 the Cabinet approved the deployment of a task force that would include a flight of eight RAAF Iroquois helicopters.

The initiative for expanding the force to a task force therefore came from the Army, which saw sound military reasons for it in terms of establishing an independent force, not for the diplomatic or strategic advantage of increasing the commitment. Much of the initiative came directly from the CGS, Wilton. As he said later, ‘When we sent our first battalion up, it was the most we could do in terms of the size of the force. We’d always, I think, known in the backs of our minds that when our manpower and other resources permitted this would have to be increased.’¹⁶ The official history states that the ‘self-imposed constraints within which Australia considered further military commitment revealed an ambivalence in the attitude taken towards the war’.¹⁷

14. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Major General K. Mackay, 8 March 1972, 12, AWM 107; McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 182–4.

15. Secretary, Department of Defence, to CGS, 18 August 1965, AWM 121, 161/A/5.

16. Wilton interview, 13.

17. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 205.

The Location and Roles of the Task Force

On 12 March 1966, just four days after the Prime Minister, Harold Holt, announced that the task force was going to be deployed to Vietnam, Wilton and several senior staff officers visited Vietnam to decide on the location and roles for the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF). Wilton selected Phuoc Tuy Province for several reasons.

- it had not been under government control for several years and was likely that it would be an area of significant military activity;
- it was far removed from the borders of Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam;
- it had good access by sea and air;
- it was an area with which the Australian force could be readily identified;
- it was an area where it seemed feasible to separate the enemy from the population; and
- in terrain, it was not unlike that in which the Australian Army had trained and fought before.¹⁸

But there was another reason that was probably more important than most of the stated reasons. With the port of Vung Tau on a nearby and isolated peninsula, the Australian force could be evacuated or reinforced by Australian national resources should the situation in the province deteriorate markedly. Major General Alan Stretton, who as a lieutenant colonel accompanied Wilton during the visit, thought that ‘Wilton showed remarkable military judgement and that there would have been a greater loss of life if the Australian force had been allocated to any other province.’¹⁹

In discussions with General Westmoreland, Wilton established the roles for 1ATF. First, 1ATF was to secure and dominate the assigned tactical area of responsibility in Phuoc Tuy Province. Second, it was to conduct operations related to the security of the highway linking Vung Tau and Saigon as required. Third, it was to conduct other operations in the province. Fourth, it was to conduct operations anywhere in the III Corps Tactical Zone and also to conduct operations anywhere in the adjacent province of Binh Tuy, which was in the II Corps Tactical Zone, as agreed between Westmoreland and COMAFV. Thus Australia placed certain limits on the operations to be conducted by 1ATF. The task force came under the operational control of the commander of the US Army’s II Field Force, Vietnam (IIFV), which controlled operations in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

18. Major Ian McNeill, ‘An Outline of the Australian Military Involvement in Vietnam, July 1962-December 1972’, *Defence Force Journal*, September/October 1980, 45. McNeill based this information on papers prepared for the 1971 CGS Exercise.

19. Alan Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm* (Sydney: Collins, 1978), 182.

Wilton's decision to locate 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province has not been seriously questioned, but the decision taken by Brigadier Jackson, and confirmed by Wilton, to base 1ATF at Nui Dat in the centre of the province has been criticised. Stretton thought it was one of the 'cardinal blunders' made by the Australian commanders in Vietnam.²⁰ The huge complex that was eventually developed had to be defended, thus reducing the numbers of troops that could be deployed on operations. If the troops had been located at Vung Tau fewer would have been needed to defend the base. Wilton rejected this argument. He wanted the troops based away from a populated area. Placing the base in the centre of the province posed a continuing threat to Viet Cong operations. And importantly, if the troops had been at Vung Tau the American high command might have wished to deploy them away from the province on the sort of deep operations that, from the beginning, he had wanted to avoid. Ian McNeill has shown that senior North Vietnamese and Viet Cong officers agreed that the location of 1ATF at Nui Dat presented a great obstacle to their operations.²¹ Notwithstanding these views, the CGS, Daly, thought 'with the advantage of hindsight' that 'it would have been a better proposition to develop Vung Tau as the Task Force base. In any future operation such as that I think it would be most unwise to set up two permanent bases.'²²

The decisions about the location of 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province and at Nui Dat within the province reveal more about the approach of the Army's high commanders. They were determined not to place the lives of Australians at risk in more adventurous American operations. Wilton put it succinctly:

Quite frankly, those US divisions were flung around the place with great abandon, and became a bit of a meat grinder; they had tremendous casualties. Our task force was so good that I think they were tempted to put it into every crisis. If we hadn't been assigned an area of responsibility we would have been in the mobile reserve being shuttled all over Vietnam at a moment's notice. My God, we would have had lots of casualties ... I wouldn't be in that one!²³

Wilton also wanted to ensure that 1ATF had the best possible opportunity to conduct operations according to Australian tactical doctrine. In pursuing the latter aim the Australian commanders were hamstrung by the limited resources available to them. Wilton could not recommend the deployment of a three-battalion task force because it just could not be sustained in 1966. He was willing to deploy a two-battalion task

20. *Ibid.*, 213.

21. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 200.

22. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, 22 November 1974 and 4 June 1975, 22, AWM 107.

23. Wilton interview, 26, AWM 107.

force because, as he said, 'I reckoned our two battalion task force was worth any US three-battalion brigade!'²⁴

One alternative would have been for the Australians to take over Phuoc Tuy Province completely. That is, Australia would have provided all the advisers to the South Vietnamese forces and other government authorities in the area. Major General Tim Vincent, COMAFV throughout most of 1967, has claimed that Westmoreland offered this opportunity to the Australians in June 1967. Vincent supported the idea but the CGS, Daly, told him that he could not find the 100 men required for the task. Wilton, by then Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, rejected the idea and Vincent thought that he was thinking of the repercussions if the war were lost.²⁵ A later COMAFV, Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan, believed that the effort would have been worthwhile as the province might have become a model for the rest of Vietnam.²⁶ Vincent must have raised these suggestions when Wilton and Daly visited Vietnam as there is no record of them in the messages from Vietnam, and they were not discussed in the Chiefs of Staff Committee.²⁷

Another alternative would have been to allow IATF to operate at greater distance from Phuoc Tuy. As Deputy Chief of the General Staff when IATF was deployed to Phuoc Tuy, Major General Arthur MacDonald developed the view that the Australian concept was too limited. In late September 1967 he visited Vietnam as COMAFV designate, and in discussions with Westmoreland learned that the Americans thought that the Australians were not pulling their weight. Considering the plans to increase the size of the commitment (which will be discussed in the following section) MacDonald believed that:

We ought to be getting more political value out of that contribution ... This was a wonderful opportunity to display to our allies what we were capable of doing. As far as operational ability was concerned we were far in front of anyone else in the country. We were hiding our light under a bushel in Phuoc Tuy.

Returning to Australia MacDonald informally discussed these ideas with Wilton who did not agree; he was afraid that the task force might be sent north.²⁸

24. Ibid., 21.

25. Major General Tim Vincent, address to History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy Association, 7 November 1985. Also, Army Historical Programme, Interview with Major General D. Vincent, 20 March 1972, 44, AWM 107.

26. Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan to author, 23 December 1985.

27. In a cable to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, on 28 January 1967 the Australian Ambassador in Saigon said that Westmoreland had considered transferring Australian advisers in the I Corps area to Phuoc Tuy Province and replacing them with US advisers in the II Corps area. AWM 121, 161/G/1.

28. General Sir Arthur MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.

The Expansion of the Task Force

The fact that 1ATF consisted of only two battalions and had permanently to devote at least two companies to the defence of Nui Dat was of great concern to General Westmoreland, who by January 1967 was talking about the need for a third battalion in Phuoc Tuy Province.²⁹ An exchange of signals between Canberra and Saigon in January 1967 provides some insight into the problem of having a two-battalion task force. With the prospect of a large Allied operation in Phuoc Tuy Province, Vincent asked the CGS to expedite the arrival of any scheduled reinforcements so that they could augment the base defences. The DCGS advised that 213 reinforcements had been despatched, but added that the Task Force commander, Brigadier Stuart Graham, was responsible for the security of his base and his operational tasks had to take this into account. 'The limitation imposed by having two battalions in the force and not three are well understood but this is a fact of life and must be lived with.'³⁰

When Daly visited Vietnam between 12 and 18 March 1967 Vincent explained the problem caused by having only two battalions. Daly replied, 'I can give you one if the pressure mounts too much but I cannot sustain it, so leave it as long as you can'.³¹ Daly then suggested a tank squadron.³² Vincent was thinking along the same lines, and on 22 June 1967 he sent Wilton a seven-page report with six pages of annexes arguing that tanks could operate successfully in Vietnam and that they would increase 1ATF's capacity to destroy the enemy. In a covering letter Vincent added that he needed additional helicopter pilots and other support troops, including engineers. This was on top of the additional battalion that had already been identified as necessary.³³ In the context of this request, on 15 July Vincent gave his forecast of events in Vietnam:

With the build up of the enemy country wide it would be reasonable to assume that his aim is to lengthen the war by stalemate i.e. his strength being sufficient to engage the resources of the Allies yet with his loss rate not exceeding his replacement rate. While his losses may be many times ours this tactic may well bring him to the goal he wants. He is operating on a total war effort (for him) whilst we are limited to the degree of effort because of escalation problems.

29. Australian Ambassador, Saigon, to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 28 January 1967, AWM 121, 161/G/1.

30. COMAFV to CGS, 19 January 1967; DCGS to COMAFV, 10 February 1967, AWM 98, NN, COMAFV-CGS, 1 Jan 1967-28 Feb 1970.

31. Vincent interview, 17, AWM 107.

32. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, 22 November 1974 and 4 June 1975, 61, AWM 107.

33. Vincent to Wilton, 22 June 1967, Vincent Papers (held by author), and NAA, A1946/26, 1967/1176 Part 1.

And if he thinks he can hold us indefinitely then maybe he can win by tiring us out—whilst we thin out in Vietnam he still has an infra-structure in being and a South Vietnam too tired to make the super-effort to throw him out.³⁴

To Vincent the key was therefore to build up the capacity of his force quickly so that it could be really effective. The request for tanks was interesting, because it was opposed by the task force commander, Graham, a former Armoured Corps officer, who believed that the tanks could not be maintained successfully in Vietnam (although his opinion was not clearly stated at first).³⁵ Vincent, a former Signals Corps officer, was convinced that the tanks would provide additional firepower and mobility; as he put it the force needed ‘an additional national military capability to counter the possibility of our being regarded as a casual army of the United States’. The tank squadron would be a ‘valuable addition in this context’.³⁶ Wilton sought advice from the CGS, Daly, who replied that the addition of a tank squadron would ‘significantly increase the operational capability of the force’.³⁷

In a series of meeting in July and August 1967 the Defence Committee, consisting of the Chiefs of Staff and the Secretaries of Defence, External Affairs and the Treasury, recommended additions to the force. At one stage the Defence Minister, Allen Fairhall, sent for Daly and asked for an unequivocal answer as to whether tanks would be effective. ‘Yes’, replied Daly, ‘in the close support role’, and Fairhall agreed to recommend their deployment to Cabinet.³⁸ On 6 September the Cabinet approved the addition of a tank squadron, a joint RAAF/RAN helicopter contribution, additional engineers and other support troops. It also approved in principle the deployment of a third battalion with an announcement to be made at a later stage. The need for an additional battalion appears to have been accepted throughout the year, but its deployment needed to be assessed in the light of the additional burden this would place on the Australian defence organisation (including the need to raise an additional battalion, 9 RAR) and the level of threat in the Malaysia/Singapore region (Confrontation having finished the previous year).³⁹ In April 1967 Defence had advised the government that a third battalion would ‘almost double the operational capability of the Force. The present Task Force is doing an effective and worthwhile job but it could do it more quickly if a third battalion could be made available’.⁴⁰

34. Vincent to Daly, 15 July 1967, Vincent Papers.

35. Signal, Graham to CGS, 3 September 1967, AWM 101, 26.

36. Signal, Vincent to CGS, 4 September 1967, AWM 101, 26.

37. CGS to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, 31 July 1967, Department of Defence, CCOSC Files, Box 18, Section File Part 4.

38. Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly to author, 26 November 1985.

39. Cabinet Minute 6 September 1967, Decision No 563(FASD), NAA, A5840 XM1, Volume 2.

40. Secretary, Department of Defence to Minister for Defence, 20 April 1967, NAA, A1946/26, 1967/1176 Part 1.

Thus while the government was sensitive to requests for additional troops from the United States, much of the initiative for increasing the size of the force came from the Army commanders in Vietnam and from Generals Wilton and Daly, who were keen to provide the most potent force possible in Phuoc Tuy Province. In October 1968, after the tanks had been in action for about six months, Daly advised the Defence Minister that he had called for a report on their effectiveness, and that the task force commander had stated that the tanks had proven to be ‘an asset of considerable value’.⁴¹ Westmoreland certainly recognised that Wilton had argued strongly for the force expansions and hurried to congratulate him on his ‘success in achieving this augmentation’.⁴²

The Barrier Minefield

In May 1967 IATF began laying a twelve kilometre-long barrier minefield and fence from Dat Do to the sea. It was intended that local South Vietnamese forces would patrol and protect the minefield, but when they failed in this task the Viet Cong were able to remove thousands of mines and use them against the Australians. One task force commander estimated that between September 1968 and May 1970 50 per cent of IATF’s casualties ‘were from our own mines’.⁴³ Major General Alan Stretton, chief of staff at headquarters Australian Force Vietnam from April 1969 to April 1970, thought the minefield was a ‘tactical error’.⁴⁴ Many others shared his view.

The construction of the minefield raises important questions about the extent to which higher commanders should become involved in tactical decisions. Although the commander of IATF, Brigadier Graham, obtained the concurrence of the commander of II Field Force, he merely informed Vincent, who immediately visited the area, expressed some concern, but did not veto the project, which had already begun.⁴⁵ When he heard about the minefield, General Daly in Canberra ‘had grave doubts about its effectiveness’ but believed that it was a matter for the commander on the spot; he had no authority, he said, to order a change in operational methods.⁴⁶ Indeed, once the minefield was constructed it would have been a brave call by Vincent or Daly later in the year to order its removal, especially as the extent of casualties to Australian troops was not yet apparent, and it appeared to be effective in denying the area to the Viet Cong. The history of the Royal Australian Engineers, however, points out that authority to lay defensive, barrier and nuisance minefields was restricted to divisional commanders, and as the minefield

41. Daly to Minister for the Army, 28 October 1968. (He requested that the report be passed to the Minister for Defence). NAA A6835/1, 1.

42. Signal, Westmoreland to Wilton, 20 October 1967, CCOSC Files, Box 34, File, Signals between CCOSC and COMAFV.

43. Frank Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 95.

44. Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm*, 213.

45. Vincent address, 27 November 1985, and to author, 2 December 1985.

46. Daly to author, 26 November 1985.

was strictly speaking a nuisance minefield it should have been ‘cleared within a month’ of being laid.⁴⁷

Interviewed in 1976, General Wilton thought that criticism of the minefield was a case of ‘being wise after the event’. He claimed that until he visited Vietnam in September 1967 he did not know of its existence. This is hard to believe as during May the engineer field squadron suffered five killed and eight wounded while laying the minefield, and the signals from COMAFV to Wilton during May clearly mentioned its construction (although in the context of wider operational plans).⁴⁸ Perhaps Wilton did not understand the minefield’s extent and purpose at this stage. When he went to the task force he was shown the minefield ‘with great pride.’

I started to ask questions about it, the background on it, but there is no reason why I should have known about it because it was quite within the authority of the task force commander to put it in ... Perhaps the only criticism really which one should level here would be that perhaps the commander concerned was a bit optimistic about the reliability of the Vietnamese allies ... I wouldn’t criticise any COMAFV or the task force commander for putting out something which in the end lost its effectiveness. It is better than sitting on his backside and not trying anything.⁴⁹

In fact, when in mid 1969 1ATF began to suffer casualties from mines there was considerable concern in Canberra. In June 1969 1ATF had 30 mine incidents, mainly in the Dat Do area, resulting in seven Australians being killed and more than 40 wounded. Wilton wrote to the Defence Minister to assure him that measures were in hand to reduce the casualties.⁵⁰ Next month, on behalf of the Minister for the Army, the Secretary of the Department of the Army, Bruce White, sought explanations from both the DCGS and COMAFV on the security of the barrier minefield.⁵¹ By chance the DCGS was now Major General Graham, who as a brigadier had installed the minefield. In reply, Graham strongly defended his actions:

47. P. J. Greville, *The Royal Australian Engineers 1945 to 1972: Paving the Way* (Moorebank, NSW: Corps Committee of the Royal Australian Engineers, 2002), 783.

48. *Ibid.*, 772. Signals, COMAFV to Wilton, 14, 24, 30 May 1967; CCOSC files, Box 32, File, Signals between CCOSC and COMAFV, opened 3 May 1967.

49. Wilton interview, 34-5, AWM 107. Wilton discussed the task force’s operations with Brigadier Graham in the morning of 16 September and visited the Horseshoe feature, the northern anchor of the minefield, that afternoon, Itinerary of Visit, AWM 98, R875/2/110.

50. Wilton to Defence Minister, June 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 29, File, Miscellaneous 1969 (the file copy does not have the exact day).

51. Secretary, Department of Army, to DCGS, 30 July 1969, NAA, A6836, 2.

I was not naive enough to think that the fence would prevent infiltration of VC, though it would make it difficult for him to withdraw rapidly after an attack and this was an essential part of his *modus operandi*. The basic purpose of the fence was to control the previously unrestricted flow of supplies by vehicle, oxcart and sampan, by channelling their movement through a few check points.

He claimed that a check of mine incidents showed that most of the casualties did not come from mines lifted from the Australian minefield. He said that the possibility of the loss of mines was in his mind at the time, but that in any case the Viet Cong ‘never had any apparent problem in procuring or manufacturing mines and booby traps’.⁵²

Already IATF had begun clearing the minefield, and the COMAFV, Major General Robert Hay, was not happy with the DCGS’s response. As he put it in a signal on 4 August 1969:

We are now destroying the minefield not because the minefield has achieved its purpose but because there are many gaps in it ... and the minefield is a source of supply to the VC. Why cannot we say so and clear this up for good? The Australian press in this area know of this.⁵³

He did not pass on the more blunt comments of the Task Force commander, Brigadier Sandy Pearson, who told Hay that he was ‘somewhat amazed ... at the answers given by Army to the press in Australia’. He thought that the Army would ‘be in for a great ridicule if’ it continued in this vein. One very senior US officer had told him that the minefield was ‘Australia’s big mistake’. While he believed that there should not be recriminations over the laying of the minefield, he thought that a ‘large proportion of the anti-personnel mines laid by the VC’ were from the minefield.⁵⁴ A detailed examination of mine incidents in Phuoc Tuy Province confirmed that a large proportion of IATF mine casualties came from M16 mines in the area around the barrier minefield.⁵⁵

In February 1970 the Defence Minister sought Wilton’s response to comments by the journalist, Denis Warner, that the minefield was the greatest Australian mistake of the war. Wilton reaffirmed his view that Graham’s decision to build the fence and minefield was ‘a sound one in all the circumstances’ and had been effective in achieving its aim of providing a barrier to Viet Cong movement.⁵⁶

52. Major General Graham to Secretary, Department of Army, 1 August 1969, NAA, A6836, 2.

53. COMAFV to Secretary and DCGS, 4 August 1969, AWM 98, 698.

54. Draft letter, Brigadier C. M. I. Pearson to COMAFV, 18 July 1969, AWM 98, 584.

55. Greville, *Paving the Way*, 773.

56. Wilton to Defence Minister, 16 February 1970, CCOSC Files, Box 29, File, Miscellaneous 1970.

Casualties

Closely linked to the problem created by the Viet Cong lifting mines was the more general issue of casualties. Successive COMAFVs have testified that there was no political direction to limit casualties, but as Major General Hay commented, there was a general understanding that the loss of lives needed to be balanced carefully against military gains.⁵⁷ Of course the COMAFVs did not exercise operational control over IATF; but one COMAFV, Major General MacDonald, observed that if an operational mistake were made which caused large numbers of casualties he would not be able to hide from this responsibility.⁵⁸ Casualties were always a concern in Canberra, as Major Robert Joshua, GSO2 Operations at Army Headquarters, reminded the Deputy Director of Operations and Plans in February 1969:

There is considerable senior officer concern when casualties rise.

The Chairman COS has a keen interest in even quite low level detail. When he was CGS he came to the ops room two or three times a week to be briefed.⁵⁹

As mentioned, the operations near Dat Do in mid 1969 caused considerable casualties that prompted questions from the Army Minister. The issue surfaced again in February 1970 when 8RAR returned to the Long Hai hills, near Dat Do. The operation proceeded well until two mine incidents caused casualties, triggering a signal from Daly to the COMAFV, Major General Hay:

Most distressed and concerned at casualties being suffered by 8RAR in Long Hai area. In view of our experience I am at a loss to understand IATF undertaking operations in an area in which they have already been costly and of doubtful value. Please let me have a report urgently, including the aims of the operation and the responsibility for its initiation. At the same time please examine its scope in the light of the current situation and role of IATF.⁶⁰

Hay replied next day that until the incidents on 28 February he considered that 8RAR had achieved significant results for minimal casualties and that the operation was having a considerable effect on the enemy. He continued:

57. Vincent interview, 13, AWM 107; Major General R. A. Hay to author, 5 November 1985.

58. MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.

59. Major R. Joshua to DDMO, 3 February 1969, AWM 121, 4/B/6.

60. Signal, Daly to COMAFV, 28 February 1970, NAA A6836, 2.

You will be aware of the action I took yesterday to prevent further offensive operations [when he visited headquarters IATF]. There has been constant pressure from both CG III Corps and CG II FFV over a long period to put Aust troops into the Long Hais. This has always been resisted by Comd IATF. The present IATF operations were the direct result of the substantial contact on 15 February ... I believe the long term impact of Operation Hammersley on pacification will be substantial.⁶¹

In his history of 8RAR, Bob Hall has shown that even before this intervention, headquarters IATF had taken action to reduce casualties by substituting air strikes for ground assaults—air strikes that were largely ineffectual.⁶²

In March 1970, soon after arriving in Vietnam to take over from Hay, Major General Colin Fraser called on Lieutenant General Julian J. Ewell, commanding II Field Force. Ewell asked Fraser directly whether he was under orders to limit Australian casualties. Fraser replied that he had been given no such direction but that his own view was that in any projected operation casualties could only be justified if there was a sound military purpose offering prospects of substantial benefits from the operation. The type of operation which made no sense to him was to embark upon a short sortie into a defended objective, followed by a rapid return to the original deployment. Such operations had sometimes been undertaken when there were insufficient troops to seize and permanently hold the objective. Ewell accepted this view.⁶³

Operations against enemy bases continued until about April 1970, by which time two Viet Cong battalions had been withdrawn from the province and more attention was being given to patrolling and ambushing around the populated areas. But the COMAFV had not forgotten the experience of the earlier casualties. Thus, when in July 1970 the deputy US Commander in Vietnam, General William B. Rosson, listed some suggested tasks for IATF, General Fraser signalled Wilton with his proposed reply to Rosson. Wilton agreed, and Fraser therefore replied to Rosson that he concurred with the suggested tasks but added a note of caution: 'I am obliged to invite attention to the fact that the 1st Australian Task Force has mounted a series of operations against the Long Hais in the past, which have been costly in life and productive of limited military

61. Signal, Hay to CGS, 1 March 1970, NAA A6836, 2. Also, Hay to Wilton, 1 March 1970, CCOSC Files, Box 34, File, Incoming signals for CCOSC 1970. The previous day Hay had signalled Wilton and Daly that the Australian losses were 'hard to justify' and that he would discuss the future of Australian operations in the Long Hais with the Commander of IATF on the afternoon of 1 March. Daly had apparently not seen this signal before he despatched his. Hay to Wilton and Daly, 28 February 1970, loc. cit.

62. Robert A. Hall, *Combat Battalion: The Eighth Battalion in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 53–4.

63. Letter, Major General C.A. E. Fraser to author, 10 August 1985.

gains'. While recognising the importance of the area, Fraser thought that 'the base area should not be subject to direct assault until such time as there are reasonable assurances of long term denial'.⁶⁴ Fraser's successor, Major General Donald Dunstan, has said that if the situation had arisen he would have stopped any operations in the Long Hais.⁶⁵ There were no more Australian operations in the Long Hais.

Towards the Withdrawal?

The official historian, Peter Edwards, has argued that while the decisions concerning Australia's commitment to Vietnam were 'ill-advised in hindsight', they were 'at least understandable in the context of their times, especially in the mid-1960s'. 'Vietnam was the most difficult and complex challenge to face those responsible for Australia's defence and foreign policies since the critical stage of the Pacific War in 1941-42', and the policy-makers were collectively inadequate for the challenge.⁶⁶

While Edwards is critical of the decision-making process in 1965 and of the attitudes of the Menzies government which saw little need to have its decisions questioned or debated,⁶⁷ he is more critical of the government in the period from mid-1968 to late 1969. By April 1968, following the Tet Offensive, the Johnson Administration was moving towards Vietnamisation and eventual withdrawal. The Nixon Administration that came to power in January 1969 was committed to Vietnamisation and withdrawal. When at the end of 1969 the Gorton government raised the question of withdrawal with Nixon, the latter hinted that economic aid might balance the withdrawal of troops. As Edwards put it:

The hint was not pursued. If the Government in 1968-69 had developed a coherent strategy, including the withdrawal of troops, especially conscripts, from Vietnam, it would probably have spared Australia from much of the tension and division associated with the Moratorium protests, which did not begin until 1970 ... The failure even to address the possibility of such an approach in 1968-69 deserves more criticism than does the original commitment of 1965.⁶⁸

64. Letters, Rosson to Fraser, 23 July 1970, and Fraser to Rosson, 1 August 1970, AWM 98, 700; signal, Hay to Wilton, 24 July 1970; signals, Wilton to Hay, 28 and 29 July 1970. In the later signal Wilton advised Hay that 'you should be reluctant to agree to any mission outside Phuoc Tuy Province, other than in the vicinity of its border, or against D440 or D445 battalions, or for specific tasks of a few days duration'. CCOSC Files, Box 32, File, Outgoing signals COSAFV261 to COSAFV446.

65. Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan to author, 23 December 1985.

66. Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), 344.

67. Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 380.

68. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 348-9.

If Edwards is correct, the relevant question is whether the Australian high command—the COMAFVs, the CGS, the Chiefs of the Staff collectively and the Chairman of the Chiefs—should have presented the government with an alternative point of view to that of merely maintaining the force in Vietnam until victory was achieved. It is notable that many of the COMAFVs doubted the outcome of the war. When he left Vietnam in January 1967 Major General Mackay, having observed that the South Vietnamese were inefficient and corrupt, lacked outstanding leaders and had no will to win, he had grave doubts about the outcome. He claimed that while he did not express his views in his signals to Canberra he did mention them personally to Wilton.⁶⁹

When Major General MacDonald visited Vietnam in September 1967 he thought that the war was being won. But following Tet he lost confidence in American intelligence assessments and began to doubt the outcome. He discussed these views with Wilton (who visited him in March 1968) and perhaps Daly, and by the time he finished his tour in February 1969 he believed that the Department of Defence and the government were trying to work out how to get out.⁷⁰ There was less action in this regard than he thought. During the 1968 Tet Offensive Vice Admiral Sir Alan McNicoll, the Chief of Naval Staff, was visiting Saigon, and he accompanied MacDonald when he visited IATF on Operation Coburg. Like MacDonald he was shocked by the extent to which the Americans had been caught unawares and impressed by the futility of trying to intercept the Viet Cong in the jungle. He claimed that when he returned to Australia neither the Chiefs of Staff Committee nor the Department of External Affairs gave him an opportunity to comment on what he had learned.⁷¹ He thought that Wilton took it upon himself to run the Vietnam War and did not consult the Chiefs of Staff very much on it. Daly, of course, was closely involved in the war, and on a day-to-day basis had more communications with COMAFV than Wilton. Daly thought that while the Allies were not losing the war they were not winning it either. He said that he made his views known to the government but that it was a ‘political-foreign affairs matter’, not a military one.⁷²

The Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Henry Bland, was not responsible for military operations, but he was surprised that Wilton did not take an independent Australian line in considering either broad strategic options or the operations in Vietnam. In October 1969 Bland visited Saigon where he met with the US commander, General Creighton Abrams. On return he reported his views to Fairhall. Soon, however, Wilton came to see him ‘quite upset’ that he had taken it upon himself to speak to Abrams. Wilton said that it was ‘utterly improper—I am the one who deals with Abrams’. Bland

69. Mackay to author, 10 October 1985.

70. MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.

71. Vice Admiral Sir Alan McNicoll to author, 6 March 1986.

72. Daly to author, 26 November 1985.

claimed that the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Alistair Murdoch, sympathised with his views but was never willing to bring the matter to a head in the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Bland was struck by the contrast between the lack of direction in Canberra and the competence and professionalism which he found when he visited Nui Dat.⁷³

Serious discussion about the ramifications of the US withdrawal from Vietnam began in the early months of 1969, following the election of President Richard Nixon in December 1968. On 16 April 1969 Lieutenant General Ewell, the commander of II Field Force, issued a new directive to IATF changing its operational priorities. The first priority was to be pacification, the second was to be the upgrading of the South Vietnamese forces, and the third was to be military operations, subject to Saigon being secured at all times. As General Hay wrote, 'these were a complete reversal of previous instructions to the Task Force'.⁷⁴

The withdrawal of American troops as a result of Vietnamisation was announced in a communiqué from the US Military Assistance Command on 14 June 1969.⁷⁵ In his discussions with the US commander, General Abrams, Hay thought that the Americans were over-optimistic about the ability of the Vietnamese Army to survive if the Allied forces were withdrawn.⁷⁶ This view was shared by Hay's chief of staff, Stretton, who wrote that 'everybody realised the futility of the whole war', and that Vietnamisation was a 'face saving device'.⁷⁷ A later COMAFV, Major General Fraser, however, thought that Vietnamisation was the only feasible concept, while Wilton later commented that it was 'a pity it didn't start earlier'.⁷⁸

The implications of withdrawing Australian forces from Vietnam had first been considered by the Joint Staff in the Defence Department in November 1968.⁷⁹ It was one of the first tasks for the Joint Staff that had been formed only the previous month. The Joint Planning Committee produced a report in May 1969 and updated the report in August 1969. The Defence Committee considered the latter report on 11 September 1969, when the DCGS, Major General Graham, representing the CGS, took the lead in the discussion and argued strongly that IATF constituted a balanced force and should not be reduced by one battalion. If a reduction was ordered the whole task force should be withdrawn. Other members of the Committee pointed out that IATF had been built up progressively and the public was aware of this. Further, perhaps a South Vietnamese battalion or a US battalion could replace an Australian battalion. Graham

73. Sir Henry Bland to author, 29 April 1986.

74. II FFV Memorandum, 16 April 1969, NAA, A6835/1, 5. Letter, Major General Hay to Ambassador Ralph Harry, 4 October 1969, AWM 98, 584.

75. MACV Communiqué, 14 June 1969, AWM 98, R579/1/24, Part 2.

76. Hay to author, 5 November 1985.

77. Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm*, 207-8.

78. Fraser to author, 8 August 1986; Wilton interview, 50, AWM 107.

79. See AWM 121 68/3016.

remained unmoved.⁸⁰ The problem was, as Gordon Blakers, the Deputy Secretary B in the Department (the deputy secretary responsible for strategic policy), reminded Sir Henry Bland shortly before the Defence Committee meeting, that in television interviews in June and August the Prime Minister, Gorton, had emphasised that 1ATF was a self-contained force and to withdraw parts of it would be ‘quite ridiculous’. This made it ‘difficult to bring about a suitably graduated Australian participation in the overall reduction programme’.⁸¹

Despite his earlier comments, on 21 September Gorton urgently asked for the views of the Chiefs of Staff on a possible withdrawal. In the absence of the other chiefs, Wilton and Daly jointly advised that a ‘premature reduction or withdrawal of our forces would cause further pressures on the US to withdraw their forces in the minimum time without regard to the “criteria” and “principles”’ already expounded by President Nixon. It was therefore in Australia’s strategic interest to maintain all our present forces in Vietnam unless:

- (a) An agreement is reached with Hanoi for a mutual withdrawal.
- (b) The stage is reached in a US withdrawal plan, which realistically observes ‘the criteria’ and ‘principles’, when our Task Force can be completely withdrawn by agreement with the US (and South Vietnam).
- (c) The US decide to withdraw their forces in minimum time without proper regard to the ‘criteria’ and ‘principles’.

... Under present circumstances and failing an agreement with Hanoi for mutual withdrawal, we could not withdraw the Australian Task Force and its supporting units from Vietnam in progressive stages without endangering the safety of the Force.⁸²

This advice remained largely unchanged when the Cabinet considered the Defence Committee’s views on 9 December, except the Defence Committee had now admitted that the task force could be reduced to two battalions if a US battalion were available to be placed under operational control if necessary.⁸³

It was this Cabinet meeting that led to Gorton’s cable to Nixon of 13 December seeking his ‘long-term thinking’ so that Australian withdrawals could be based on joint Australian-American planning. It is likely that Wilton thought that Gorton had gone too far. Wilton had agreed that the cable would state:

80. Defence Committee Minute 11 September 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 26, File 1858 Part 1.

81. Blakers to Secretary, Department of Defence, 10 September 1969, loc cit.

82. Wilton and Daly to Defence Minister, 22 September 1969, loc cit.

83. Defence Committee Minute 5 December 1969, loc cit.

The Military advice relating to our Army task force is that any adjustment could call for co-ordinated Australian/United States Military planning.

The final text, as approved by Gorton read:

As to our Army Task Force our military advice is that all our ground force units should, if possible, be withdrawn as one unit though it is possible this might be avoided if there were co-ordinated Australian/United States planning.

Wilton thought that this paragraph made it look as though the Chiefs of Staff had recommended withdrawal. On the night of Saturday 12 December he discussed the matter with Sir Henry Bland and the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Sir James Plimsoll. He then telephoned the Minister for Defence, Malcolm Fraser, who had succeeded Fairhall the previous month, and Fraser promised to bring Wilton's views to the Prime Minister. The cable remained unchanged, but later that night Gorton telephoned Wilton who pointed out that the proposed text applied only if the government had decided for political reasons to reduce the force. Gorton argued that the text was 'a logical interpretation of the military advice in the event of a government decision for political reasons to withdraw or reduce the Task Force under present circumstances'. Gorton asked Wilton to confirm that this was the military advice. Wilton did so and the cable was sent as Gorton wished.⁸⁴ One suspects that Wilton was not happy as he made a detailed three-page note of the matter for file.

While the American reply was not encouraging it did raise the possibility that increased Australian economic aid might offset a reduced troop strength. Gorton spoke to Nixon by phone but the details of the conversation were not released. On 15 December Nixon announced further troop reductions. Next day Gorton stated that when the military situation in Vietnam allowed the Americans to make another substantial withdrawal then 'in consultation with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, some Australian units will be included in the numbers scheduled for such a withdrawal'.⁸⁵ As Peter Edwards commented: 'It was the beginning of the end of the Vietnam commitment, but all too obviously it was an immediate reaction to an American announcement, not the first phase of a carefully considered Australian defence strategy.'⁸⁶

The new Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, moved quickly to take some initiative. On 18 December he wrote to Wilton and asked for 'various possibilities' to be canvassed by the Chiefs of Staff and Defence Committee. He was not convinced that the withdrawal

84. Note for File by CCOSC, 17 December 1969, loc cit.

85. Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton, PM No 88 1969, 16 December 1969, loc cit.

86. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 241.

of one battalion, even with the proviso of an American battalion being made available, was ‘the only appropriate solution or indeed whether ... it is relevant’. For planning purpose the chiefs should be considering a much lower level of threat in Phuoc Tuy Province. More effort should be put into training the South Vietnamese in the Province, and as ‘we develop a training role there should be a lesser requirement for our forces to continue in their current roles’.⁸⁷ The course was set for the withdrawal of one battalion before the end of 1970.

High Command Problems

This brief discussion of some of the key decisions and issues concerning Australian operations in Vietnam reveals the difficulties faced by the Australian high command in Canberra. The first of these concerned the coalition nature of the war. The strategic policy for the war was made in Washington, and Australia was not consulted. As mentioned, perhaps the Honolulu conference in March/April 1965 provided an opportunity to influence American strategy, but the reality was that given the disparity in the size of the American and Australian commitments perhaps Australia could not have expected to be consulted.

From 1965 to 1972 the Australian forces in Vietnam came under the operational control of an American commander. The conditions under which they operated were spelt out in directives that were agreed between the US commander in Vietnam and General Wilton, acting on behalf of the Australian Chiefs of Staff and the Australian government. From 1966 onwards the directive concerning the operations of IATF remained largely unchanged. It seems that little thought was given in Australia towards changing the directive, which adequately dealt with the Australian government’s concerns to protect the Australian force and limit casualties that might have been incurred on adventurous American operations.

The second difficulty was caused by the Australian command structure. As the commander of IATF came under the operational control of the commander of II FFV the Australian higher commanders—COMAFV, the CGS and Wilton—were reluctant to interfere in his tactical handling of operations in Phuoc Tuy Province. COMAFV had no direct operational authority over IATF, although he certainly retained national command of the force.

The higher command structure back in Australia posed even more difficulties. Wilton, as Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, had no statutory command authority,

87. Fraser to Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 18 December 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 26, File 1858 Part 1.

although he represented the Chiefs of Staff who collectively were responsible for operations. The CGS fulfilled a crucial role. As COMAFV was also the commander of the Australian Army component in Vietnam he reported directly to the CGS for a wide range of matters. Further, the CGS was also a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and, except for perhaps the Chairman, he knew more about the operations in Vietnam than any other member of the committee. Indeed, from a broad policy perspective, it is likely that Wilton and Daly knew more about the situation in Vietnam than any other senior officers in Canberra. Between 1962 and 1971 Wilton visited Vietnam on fifteen occasions.⁸⁸ Daly visited almost as frequently.

The relationship between the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the Secretary of the Department of Defence was still evolving. The Secretary had his own civilian policy planning staff that worked in conjunction with the Joint Planning Committee and the Joint Staff. There was no proper Joint Staff in Canberra. Initially all planning and policy matters were considered by the Joint Planning Committee which had an independent two-star officer as chairman, but relied on the operations and plans staffs of the three services for its main work. In November 1965 Defence established a small Joint Services Planning Group, but a Joint Staff with operations and policy sections was not created until October 1968. It was still quite small. Similarly, the Joint Intelligence Organisation was not formed until 1970.

The third difficulty was created by the wider strategic situation. Confrontation with Indonesia that began in 1963 and continued into 1966 meant that Australia had to maintain forces in Malaysia and be prepared to deploy forces to Papua New Guinea. The Army was too small for its many tasks. Throughout the 1950s the Australian government had been reluctant to spend funds on the Regular Army. Admittedly, even when it decided to increase expenditure in 1963 and 1964, the Army had difficulty attracting recruits. The upshot was that if the Army was to retain a prudent reserve in Australia it could afford to deploy only one battalion to Vietnam in 1965 and two battalions in 1966, even if the government had wished to send more. The small size of the force in Vietnam during 1966 and 1967 severely restricted the options open to the Australian commanders.

Ultimately, the higher direction of the Australian forces in Vietnam rested with the government, not its civilian and military advisors. Peter Edwards has shown that the Prime Minister, Menzies, his deputy John McEwen, and other senior ministers, Harold Holt, Paul Hasluck and Shane Paltridge, played the key roles in deciding to deploy 1RAR to Vietnam in 1965. But they were less interested in the finer details of whether the Australian troops were actually achieving their purpose. It is true that Service

88. Once in each of 1962 and 1964, twice in 1965, thrice in 1966, once in 1967, twice in each of 1968, 1969 and 1970, and once in 1971.

ministers, and particularly the Minister for the Army, were sensitive to administrative or disciplinary bungles that might reflect badly on their administration. In retrospect, however, Wilton considered that the government interfered very little in the operations of the force.⁸⁹

Sir Allen Fairhall, the Minister for Defence from January 1966 to November 1969, was a highly competent administrator who took an interest in the technical side of military acquisitions. He was also a strong supporter and advocate of Australia's commitment to Vietnam. But he does not appear to have challenged the Chiefs of Staff by asking them to consider alternatives in Vietnam, and despite later claims that the Prime Minister, Gorton, perhaps favoured a withdrawal there was no directive from the Prime Minister in this regard. The new Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, took a more activist approach. As mentioned, in December 1969 he directed the Chiefs to come up with options for the withdrawal of forces. On 1 May 1970 he directed that COMAFV expand his monthly report to include 'a description of the objectives underlying the operations of the previous month, set in the context of our longer term objectives'. He wanted an assessment of the extent to which objectives were being achieved.⁹⁰

Less than four months after Fraser became Defence Minister, Sir Arthur Tange succeeded Sir Henry Bland as Secretary of Defence. Tange has observed that until then,

The Vietnam show was really run by Army and the Defence Department's attitude was to act as an adding machine for the three services' budgets and the Defence Minister's job was to get them through a reluctant cabinet.

Fraser wanted to overthrow these attitudes and he 'exerted his power far more than his predecessors including Fairhall'. Soon, according to Tange who approved of this attitude, there were 'injured feelings all over the place'.⁹¹ Eliot Cohen in *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, argues that 'the best civilian leaders are those who meddle and ask tough questions of their military subordinates'.⁹² It seems that perhaps the Australian high command in the Vietnam War did not have enough of this meddling.

For all that, the Australian public has much to be grateful for. The Australian Army deployed its units to Vietnam in such a way that casualties were kept to a minimum. In Vietnam the force operated with honour and skill, and within the bounds of resources

89. Wilton interview, 47, AWM 107.

90. Fraser to Wilton, 1 May 1970, Wilton to COMAFV, 4 May 1970, AWM 98, R723/1/13, Vol 6.

91. Sir Arthur Tange to author, 4 March 1986.

92. Dust jacket of Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

available, 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province and the Training Team throughout the country generally achieved more than the forces of other nations. After the war the Army did not have to rebuild its morale and ethos as was necessary with the United States Army. The Army high command must be given credit for these outcomes. Lessons were learned. The new command arrangements that emerged in 1976, particularly the appointment of the Chief of the Defence Force Staff with statutory command authority over the Defence Force, grew out of Wilton's experiences in the Vietnam War. The Australian Defence Force that we know today with its joint command and staff structures—the ADF that performed so well in East Timor in 1999-2000—owes much to the efforts to rectify the higher command deficiencies that came to light in the Vietnam War.

The Training of the Australian Army Units for Active Service in Vietnam: 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment

Michael O'Brien

This essay discusses the efficacy of the training of a particular Australian infantry battalion, 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (7RAR), for the war in South Vietnam. It takes a broad view of the term training, not only including the preparation of soldiers and the unit for war, but also the sustaining of the unit in battle, unit replacement, individual reinforcement and the care of its soldiers after they had returned. There are many opinions on training: while the author's subjective conclusions are listed here, it needs to be remembered that the personal experience of each soldier differed and that there are valid lessons to be drawn from the experience of each of them.

The battalion had two tours of duty in that conflict: from April 1967 to April 1968 and from February 1970 to February 1971.¹ The experiences of these two tours have much in common with other infantry battalions, but there are probably also some significant differences. Infantry was the predominant Australian Army corps in Vietnam: its predominant method of rotating troops, unlike most other corps, was by unit replacement.² The training experience of the other corps that used individual replacement for troop rotation was in many important respects fundamentally different and is not dealt with in this essay.

In both instances, the training of 7RAR was in an Army that had been altered substantially to accommodate the second National Service scheme. It was clear that the Army had insufficient strength to sustain its effort in Vietnam at the level the government

I am most grateful to those who have contributed to this paper. However, the opinions in it are solely the responsibility of the author.

1. An account of the battalion's tours in Vietnam is contained in Michael O'Brien, *Conscripts and Regulars: With the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam 1967-1968 & 1970-1971* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).
2. There are broadly two ways of replacing units in sustained operations: unit replacement, where a unit is relieved by another entire unit, and trickle flow, when the one unit notionally remains in action but its personnel are gradually replaced. In the case of infantry battalions in Vietnam the former method predominated but it was supplemented by some of the latter, particularly caused by the turnover of National Servicemen whose engagements were due to expire.

desired without the contribution made by National Servicemen. In each case these men made up half the battalion strength. Two comments are worth making. The National Servicemen were indistinguishable from their regular Army counterparts in Vietnam. They changed the Army: being a far more representative slice of the community, they brought skills and intelligence to the Army that had not been present in the junior ranks. Private soldiers employed as Army drivers occasionally had law degrees (an interesting misuse of talent). There was challenge to the Army way of doing things: they were, in one observer's view, 'a little more inquisitive and less accepting of some more traditional aspects of military life'. Nevertheless, the Army also brought out the potential in many of these individuals. In 7RAR's case, one can find National Service private soldiers who are now professors of physiology and PhDs.

What makes up the training of an infantry battalion? The approach taken to this question in this essay is the sum of many parts. It includes an underlying system of training in the Army as a whole. It also consists of the stages of training individuals in a unit to do their job. These individuals are not just infantry riflemen: they are the specialists like mortar-men, assault pioneers, signallers, drivers and the junior and senior non-commissioned officers and the officers right up to the commanding officer. It also includes the elements of the collective training of a unit: of building these individuals into the various teams that comprise the greater team that is a battalion. There is an important dimension of leadership at several levels, because training can be lax or rigorous. These levels of leadership exist throughout the battalion, its supporting arms, its higher formation and lead to the very top of the Army. And in common with all training, there are dimensions of both education and experience, of the theory and the ability to practise it instinctively. This essay tries to deal with all these issues but does not attempt to do so evenly.

What was the Army training system at this time? The system had existed and evolved since the Second World War. It consisted of two major stages, individual and collective training. In the first stage, individuals were inducted into the Army and brought to a stage where they were capable and competent of performing the individual skills required of their job. Soldiers' initial training was conducted at a twelve-week course at a recruit training battalion. This course trained all new soldiers with the all-corps (general basic) skills needed for any job in the Army. A second part of individual training, corps training (sometimes called initial employment training) of about ten weeks followed. It sought to bring a soldier's skills to the basic level he needed for his corps, in the infantry case to that of a trained rifleman. There were other layers of the individual training system to train specialist soldiers, to qualify non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for promotion and to train officers. Each of these supplementary courses had been developed from long experience and all produced trainees well suited to their employments. The standard of junior and senior NCOs training was particularly high, reflecting the Australian Army's

continuing emphasis on the importance of junior leadership for battle. Indeed, prior to the first tour there were many battle-experienced NCOs who were felt by most to have a steadying influence on the unit. The Australian Army Staff College achieved very good results from its training of officers for jobs at the rank of major and above, particularly on the staff of the First Australian Task Force (1ATF). The possible exception, a new school to train National Service officers,³ achieved very good results from the outset. This individual training base was the firm foundation for Army capability. Some less well informed critics, often those in the Defence Department, questioned the size of this training base and the number of units involved. Its effectiveness was well proved by the excellence of its product. Its efficiency could be measured in many ways: perhaps the most telling was the rate of effort put in by the instructional staff. Their work was unceasing and intense: the task was achieved by hard work and professionalism.

The second stage of training was collective training, the welding together of trained individuals into an effective fighting unit. This took place successively at section, platoon, company, battalion and sometimes task force levels. Most collective training was done within the battalion's resources, though external units provided supplements when specialised training was undertaken. Earlier stages of collective training were supervised and assessed by the unit's chain of command. Formation commanders assessed the overall training of the unit. Two of the later stages were formally externally assessed. All personnel of the battalion were required to take part in a company-level assessment period at the Jungle Training Centre (JTC), Canungra, in Queensland. Successive companies of the battalion undertook this demanding course of four weeks' duration. The battalion supported the small Jungle Training Centre staff with its own training cadre. The whole process took about three months to complete. Few soldiers forgot this intensive training, particularly the demanding exercises in the last half of the JTC course that were held in the rugged Wiangarie State Forest. The live firing exercises provided valuable battle inoculation. Many lives were saved by its approach to subjects like jungle fighting and weapon safety. Canungra epitomised a philosophy of 'train hard and fight easy': soldiers often felt Vietnam was an easier place than JTC. Canungra weeded out the weak leaders, particularly at the junior level. The philosophy of one Chief Instructor, later to command 7RAR's second tour, was 'the soldiers deserved the benefit of any [leadership] doubt'.

The culmination of collective training was a battalion group (that is the battalion together with its normal allocation of armour, artillery, and engineers) exercise, often held at the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, with control exercised by a task force headquarters, external umpires and an 'enemy' group of experienced soldiers to oppose the battalion.

3. The Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, NSW, described in Roger Donnelly, *The Officer Training Unit Scheyville* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

The exercise was designed to test the unit's training prior to its operational deployment and to assess the performance of individuals and sub-units in a demanding environment. There was particular scrutiny of the performance of leaders in the battalion at all levels. For some units, the results of this exercise were that many of their leaders were replaced. This exercise was run at a demanding pace in an environment that closely matched the area in Phuoc Tuy Province to which the battalion would be deployed. In its realism, it lacked only the levels of helicopter, artillery and offensive air support available in Vietnam.

This succession of collective training, from section to battalion level, took place over about a twelve-month period between the formation of 7RAR (first tour) or its re-formation (for the second tour) and its deployment on operations.

What were the particular strengths of this training system? It was an evolved system, backed by an Army with a continuity of operational service experience in conflict, from the Second World War, Korea, Malaya and Borneo. Senior leaders in the battalion (and even some private soldiers) could apply and pass on their experience of all these conflicts. The combat experience levels in JTC and on the test exercise staffs were also very good. All the training was aligned to an Australian method of waging war: one based on a high standard of fitness and skills, an encouragement of individual initiative, of the importance of junior leadership, of battle discipline more than parade-ground discipline, of preservation of soldier's lives and one firmly based on ensuring the high quality of its non-commissioned officers. The system had been developed and applied by the Directorate of Military Training (DMT) at Army Headquarters: its Director of Military Training (a brigadier) filled a particularly important role in the Army. All units conducting individual training such as the recruit training battalions and the officer schools reported to Army Headquarters and effectively to DMT. The Infantry Centre reported to the Directorate of Infantry, but its approaches were scrutinised by DMT. The absence of a Training Command to overview individual training (the task Headquarters Training Command now performs) did not seem to diminish training effectiveness. DMTs were well-chosen and influential officers who deserve to be given the credit for the particular successes this system achieved.

A further strength of the training system was the doctrine that underpinned it. The Army had used doctrine adapted for Australian jungle (and later counter-revolutionary) warfare since the Second World War. It had begun to publish this doctrine soon after it had begun to fight the Japanese.⁴ Though its British origins were obvious, its promulgation marked a distinct move to an Australian way of waging this type of war. By the time of

4. This doctrine was published in several Army training pamphlets, notably Australian Military Forces, *Infantry Minor Tactics 1941* (Army Headquarters, 1941) and Lieutenant General S.G. Savige, *Tactical and Administrative Doctrine for Jungle Warfare* (Headquarters 2 Aust Corps, 1945).

the Vietnam conflict, doctrine was contained in several principal references: at unit level the publications on counter-revolutionary warfare and the battalion, and at lower levels those on the platoon, patrolling and tracking and ambushing.⁵ These ‘pamphlets’ were well written. They strongly reinforced the Australian approach to this type of warfare and reflected the lessons learned by British and Australian experience against the Japanese and the communist insurgents in Malaya.⁶ They were the result of the good work done in DMT. Some of these publications, particularly those on patrolling and ambushing, have become minor military classics. It is also worth noting that the Australian Army was very receptive to the particular doctrine for Vietnam that was published as the result of United States operational experience. This had also been true during the Second World War. Particular use was made of the US pamphlets on mines and booby traps. The mode of illustration in these pamphlets occasionally approached that of comics: sadly, few Australian instructional pamphlets were as effectively illustrated.

Australian doctrine was kept up-to-date by several methods. First, the particular circumstances of warfare in Phuoc Tuy Province and the support available from Australian and Allied units were outlined in *1st Australian Task Force Standing Operating Procedures (1ATF SOPs)*. These procedures were used for training and suitably translated for use by the battalion in *7RAR Standing Operating Procedures*. Army Headquarters supplemented training material available by issuing periodical *Training Information Bulletins* and more immediate information in *Training Information Letters*, reflecting the experience of earlier battalions in Vietnam. These SOPs, particularly those for higher levels, had been examined critically by the Army’s senior leaders during the Chief of the General Staff’s Exercises. These publications continued a long Australian Army tradition. High quality Australian SOPs had been produced since the First World War;⁷ lessons learned had been promulgated in training bulletins since the Second World War.⁸ In addition, commanding officers communicated frequently with their Australian counterparts in Vietnam, giving a strong sense of immediacy to lessons learned and a clear relevance to the operations being conducted in Vietnam. Some operational analysis was also conducted in Vietnam and in Army Headquarters: it may be fair to say that the application of scientific method to doctrine was only in its formative stages.

The system of training formed a sound and workable approach to bringing a unit to a state in which it could effectively engage in battle. There is no doubt that, however

5. Australian Military Forces, *Ambush and Counter Ambush* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1965), and Australian Military Forces, *Patrolling and Tracking* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1965).

6. Particularly the British pamphlet called *Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, known by its nickname of ATOM.

7. For example, Sir John Monash’s *Operation Standing Orders, New Zealand and Australian Division, Fourth Brigade*, published in Cairo in 1915, which is held in the Australian War Memorial.

8. The Australian Army published selected extracts from the British *Army Training Memoranda* from 1937 and Australian versions from 1941.

sound this theory, the training of a unit remains a function of its leadership, particularly that of the commanding officer. The training of a battalion is at least as much a function of leadership as it is of doctrine. The battalion had two commanding officers for these tours of duty:⁹ both were strong leaders and therefore effective trainers. There are many good examples of this influence: one is the concentration of each commanding officer on the particular training of his officers and senior NCOs for this conflict, using the experience of those who had fought there, lessons derived from operations within the last several weeks and frequent communication with their counterparts serving in Vietnam at the time.

What were some of the challenges facing a battalion being trained for war in this situation? First, units were never at their full strength during training, and, of course, this situation worsened on operational service. Soldiers at all levels just worked harder to compensate for these shortages. The military system imposed its habits of a past era: few soldiers could understand the use of a unit being trained for war for ceremonial guard duties at a capital city barracks. There was not a sensible understanding of the internal support needed to feed a unit. Soldiers, a company at a time, were ‘duty company’ for a week at a time and performed housekeeping tasks like washing-up, to the detriment of training while adjacent training units had civilian staff to perform the same task.

The theory of the training system has been outlined above. How did it work in practice for each tour? There were several governing factors in the training for 7RAR’s first tour. The battalion was new: it was raised on 1 September 1965. The fact that it was formed from selected regular soldiers and officers from 3RAR (and particularly the unmarried ones) meant that there was a good depth of operational experience, particularly in the senior non-commissioned officers. The battalion’s location in Puckapunyal was a pragmatic decision by Army Headquarters but not necessarily the optimal one for efficient training. Supporting arms like artillery and engineers were located remote from the battalion and made all-arms aspects of collective training difficult. Soldiers were far from convinced that their training in areas that could be described as sub-alpine woodland approximated to conditions in Vietnam. Some characteristics of the war in Vietnam, particularly the easy availability of helicopter and close air support, were infrequently and inadequately resourced. Soldiers’ descriptions of ‘heli-rover drill’ when three-quarter ton vehicles were used to simulate Iroquois helicopters were reminiscent of a Second World War-‘Dad’s Army’-like experiences with broomsticks for rifles. The proximity of Melbourne, though not with today’s four-lane freeway available, exposed those on leave to the hazards of road safety and the battalion suffered an alarming number of road

9. The commanding officers were (with their highest rank later attained) Colonel E.H. Smith, DSO and Major General R.A. Grey, AO, DSO.

injuries and fatalities during training. Unit collective training ideally needs a complete unit for a twelve-month period. The flow of National Servicemen continued intake by intake during the continuous training period and interrupted periods of collective training. This lessened the cohesiveness of the unit. Collective training is best done at full unit strength: that aspiration was never reached in practice. The individual training system, particularly the part that undertook corps training, became saturated. The unit became responsible for performing corps training for one intake's worth of soldiers. This was a strain on its leadership and resources, but it produced soldiers who were just that much more part of the unit team. The success of this venture, despite its disadvantages, was repeated for the second tour.

Training for the second tour was characterised by better availability of support arms resources and the better facilities closer to the unit's new home at Holsworthy on the outskirts of Sydney. For example, 106 Field Battery detachments took part in all-unit exercises and became an inseparable part of the unit team. The result was a unit command post that was a model of cooperation and effectiveness. RAAF and RAN helicopters were available in greater numbers with pilots more aligned to the needs of this campaign. Other differences emerged to follow developments in the war: for example, the need to be able to train Vietnamese Popular and Regional Force personnel by either supply NCOs or by attachment to companies. During the second tour of duty, training needed to take account of the technological changes that had occurred such as wider availability of night fighting equipment ('Sniperscopes'), secure radios at unit level, infra red and chemical helicopter-mounted detectors ('Red Haze' and 'people sniffers') and other devices. Rudimentary computers were enabling better use of previously collated information. Even though the effect of these devices was relatively small, their effective use required training. A further difference for the second tour was the usefulness of the directly relevant experience of those who had served previously in Vietnam. About one soldier in every sixteen had served on the previous tour of duty.

How should we assess the training of this battalion in retrospect? In each of the two tours the training was successful. The measure of this success is the performance of the unit in battle: 7RAR met this test well in each case. However, the system of training did not fully cope with the extent of individual replacement of riflemen and particularly NCOs and specialists. Some 1200 men passed through the 800-man battalion for each tour of duty. When a soldier needed replacement, whether because of a battle casualty or other reasons, the battalion had to make do with perhaps less than optimal solutions. A central unit, 1st Australian Reinforcement Holding Unit (1ARU) held trained soldiers at the Nui Dat base in Phuoc Tuy Province. Individual replacements joined 7RAR from the pool in 1ARU. They needed further training, often beyond just unit SOPs to be effective and safe members of the unit. Not all replacements were readily available from 1ARU. Perhaps the best example of this was the need for junior NCOs. The need

was met within the battalion resources by the conduct of promotion courses during its operations. Results from this training, notably from National Servicemen, were very good indeed, but the training further stressed the over-used resources of senior NCOs. While the primary infantry replacement system, unit replacement, worked well in conjunction with the training system, it was sub-optimal for training of individuals outside this system such as those NCOs or any replacement specialists, for example assault pioneers or mortar numbers, who were rarely available from the reinforcement chain when needs arose.

The system also did not work well with the soldiers for whom the end of their term of engagement did not coincide with the unit's tour of duty. This affected some regular soldiers and a large proportion of National Servicemen. Some National Servicemen started with the unit that 7RAR relieved in South Vietnam and had to deal with the difficulty of joining a new and inevitably different team. Some left the unit as their service obligation approached expiry: they proceeded to discharge in Australia, in an environment of less than enthusiastic community support. This lack of consideration was reinforced both by a Returned and Services League not well aligned to welcoming returned Vietnam veterans and by an Army that can be said to have abandoned its former soldiers. Two examples of the latter may suffice. It was an exception for returned unit National Servicemen to be invited to join the battalion's march through Melbourne or Sydney on its return. Representatives of the Army, Corps or unit rarely visited wounded soldiers, some of whom were long-term patients, still in the care of Repatriation Hospitals.

While the lack of what was later called 'a systems approach to training' had minimal effect on what training was actually done, such an approach may have produced a better analysis of the need for post-tour training of soldiers discharged just after their tour, particularly National Servicemen.

Soldiers returning from their tour of duty in Vietnam for discharge (especially National Servicemen) received minimal training to readjust them to their new or resumed civil occupations. Formal post-trauma training (either just after trauma or on return to Australia or discharge) did not occur. Those soldiers fortunate enough to return to Australia on HMAS *Sydney* could be seen to have undertaken a fortuitous ten-day readjustment period after the stress of operational service. This mode of return was predominant for regular soldiers and the exception for National Servicemen.

What were the deficiencies in this training system? There is some good evidence that the standard of marksmanship was not good. Perhaps this can be traced to the lack of good firing ranges close to battalion bases in Australia: there was certainly an effort to have what is considered the ideal, that is weapons fired daily in training, at JTC. It was also difficult to sustain high standards in this area when on operation in Vietnam. A deficit of a different type was the lack of trained linguists. Vietnamese is a difficult

language and competent language-trained soldiers took well over a year to produce. Their lack was only partially counteracted by the use of South Vietnamese Army interpreters, sometimes less trustworthy and almost always less forthcoming than well-trained Australian interpreters. Training in Australia with the full range of fire support available in Vietnam was necessarily rudimentary because of the lack of these resources: this shortcoming was remedied soon after arrival in Vietnam. Intelligence training was sparse and tended to be unsatisfactory for a war where intelligence was a key factor. In many cases, this seemed to be caused by the habit of focussing the intelligence perspective upwards: a better perspective would have been one that concentrated appropriately on the ‘battle intelligence’ needed by the battalion to be more effective in its intimate contact with the populace and the enemy. While soldiers were trained in aspects of Vietnamese culture,¹⁰ perhaps understandably, this instruction was poorly understood.

Conclusions

7RAR’s training for both its tours of Vietnam was well based on an Army system that had proven its worth. It was well executed by the unit’s senior leaders and underpinned by the experience of many NCOs. This training was most successful. It enabled the battalion to dominate enemy forces in Phuoc Tuy and elsewhere and it achieved an overall neutralisation of enemy forces within its area of influence.

It was particularly evident that the high standard of NCO and junior officer training was a key to this success. National Servicemen made very good junior NCOs. While these training systems were good, a dilution of the complementing experience factor caused by either lack of leadership skills or of battle experience is likely to have a detrimental result on training for war. It may well be that peacekeeping experience is a sub-optimal substitute for battle experience.

There is little doubt that JTC’s contribution to the work-up cycle of a battalion preparing for the war in Vietnam was vital. Units preparing for conflict of this intensity need the facility provided by an independent group of hardened and experienced trainers to ensure good team performance at section, platoon and company level. The importance of a JTC-like establishment, as well as its relative independence from a unit’s chain of command, can hardly be over-emphasised.

Training in an environment of the future needs to have a foundation similar to the training of units for Vietnam but will be made more complicated by the availability of technology. At the level of each soldier, night fighting equipment and reliable

10. Each soldier was issued with a *Pocketbook: South Vietnam* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, c. 1965; rev. edn 1967) which contained some information on this topic.

navigation aids will revolutionise the way he fights: at unit level the flow of information from a variety of intelligence and situation awareness resources will test the ability of commanders to discern. It is too easy to view the individual training base as an unnecessary overhead rather than a vital necessity.

Since the war in Vietnam, Army has adopted a 'systems approach to training'¹¹ for its individual training. It is based on a careful analysis of the essential elements of battle tasks and a tailoring of training to see that these tasks can be successfully accomplished. The system incorporates a feedback loop to test the success of this approach and to alter it if training has not produced the desired result. The effect of this approach has had several results. Individual training has been the subject of careful analysis, based on the needs of each particular combat task. Training prior to collective (unit) training has tended, as a result, to be shortened to remove 'non-essential' items. In some cases this judgement has been altered by feedback from units and particularly senior commanders. At best, an optimal use has been made of scarce and expensive training resources. At worst, risks have been taken in removing or abbreviating the training on some battle skills. On balance, the 'systems approach' is likely to have improved the result of individual training, but only if the feedback mechanism is frequently and carefully used. Further, the gains of this approach have not generally been applied to collective training (with the notable exception of some artillery training). It is clear that 'systems approaches' to collective training are likely to be more complex and subjective. The results of a systems approach would be most useful to assess training success at each level: they can too easily be applied to assess the efficacy of leadership. These disadvantages have prevented an application of the systems approach to collective training. A good case can be made for the re-examination of this approach.

Perhaps the most important lessons to be learned from the battalion's experience are those relating to the rotation of units and the handling of individual reinforcements. Unit replacement is the optimal method for the relief of troops in a conflict of sustained intensity. Such a system will also need individuals to replace casualties of all categories. Careful attention needs to be paid to his supplementation. While a bulk reinforcement holding unit in Vietnam worked, a far better method would have been a regimentally-based reinforcement pool, perhaps supported by an Army Reserve depot battalion. The key lesson of rotation is one that needs to be understood at political levels: three units of the same type are required to sustain one unit in continuous operations: one in the fight, one training to replace it and a further recovering from the operations and reconstituting.

11. This approach is detailed in *The Systems Approach to Training* (Sydney: Headquarters Training Command, 1974).

Training for Service in South Vietnam 1966–1967: 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment

Noel Charlesworth

The training of an infantry battalion for active service operations may seem mundane but a successful commitment to a cause and the military operations that follow depend on the lowest common denominator of the equation, that is, the degree and quality of training the infantry soldier is given and the professionalism of those members of a force to support him.

The training of a combat soldier never ceases. He/she can be brought to the required standard of readiness to go on active service, but on arriving in theatre, the training remains an ongoing responsibility. Active service has been quoted in various campaigns as being five per cent excitement and 95 per cent boredom; the excitement periods may well be less. South Vietnam was a typical example. Second Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), spent more rounds fired on company ranges inside the base than was ever spent on operations. I think all battalions would have had the same experience. Skills taught must be maintained throughout a full operational deployment, otherwise we are wasting our time and not supporting our soldiers.

Because the infantry battalions for 1957 onwards had served in Malaya and/or Borneo, the switch from Pentropic organisation to the Tropical Warfare organisation in 1965 did not cause major problems. 2RAR had fostered the raising of 6RAR and then proceeded to reorganise itself. The introduction of National Service was integral to any long time commitment to service in South Vietnam and also raised new problems in relation to manning the battalions. Initially the School of Infantry was unable to carry out the three months corps training required to bring a soldier to Draft Priority 2 (DP2) standard.¹ 2RAR was one of the units tasked with that training and in April 1966 received about 160 National Servicemen from Intake 1/66.

1. Draft Priority denotes the readiness of the individuals of a unit to deploy on operations. It is a function of pre-deployment training from individual through to collective (at unit level), equipment holdings from individual through to unit, and physical, medical and dental fitness. It also includes any administrative prerequisites including wills, financial provisions, next-of-kin nomination etc. The priorities range from 3 through to 1 which is fully deployable. It broadly equates to today's Draft Priority Deployment Status report.

The program of which battalion would serve, and when, became the lynch-pin for allocation of National Service intakes to bring a battalion to establishment. This sounds easy in theory, but not in practice. As the prescribed tour was one year and reinforcement was made at the end of a battalion's tour this had both positive and negative effects. For example, on relieving 6RAR *in situ* on 30 May 1967, we took over 67 Regular (ARA) and 119 National Service (NS) soldiers. This had to be allowed for in each company's strength and was a bit tricky when other than a rifleman was involved. In addition the first 'V' Company of 1 RNZIR² joined the battalion Advance Party on 13 May and was under command of 6RAR until the arrival of 2RAR. This company was made up of volunteers who had extended their two year tour of duty in Malaya for another six months to serve in Vietnam. This addition to the unit would provide me the bonus of a company of well trained troops and the experience of commanding five rifle companies.

At that time, Army Headquarters policy was for commanders of major units to have about 10 days with the Unit they were to relieve—in our case 6RAR. Discussions included:

- lessons from the Long Tan engagement in August 1966,
- weapon replacement,
- the integration of the 2RAR Advance party,
- changes to our organisation such as the need for a designated Operations Officer,
- the change of the primary role of the Anti-Tank Platoon from heavy weapons to 'tracking',
- variations required for SOPs from the 6RAR experience,
- problems associated with Nui Dat base facilities,
- requirements for revetting tent accommodation,
- the importance of the ability to call for supporting fire down to platoon level, and
- battle inoculation.

These items would be on any shopping list of things to do.

2. 2RAR was the first of the so-called ANZAC Battalions established as a result of an agreement between the Australian and New Zealand governments. See below, 206-25.

Individual Training

As I indicated before, reinforcements to a battalion should arrive at DP2 standard. In the battalion it then became necessary to ensure those standards were maintained. This was possible in all aspects of fieldcraft, weapon handling etc. but not in respect of live firing. The absence of ranges close to the battalion barracks at Enoggera made this an important matter to be addressed. It is and has been a well known fact that from a statistical point of view many, many rounds of ammunition are fired to get an enemy casualty.

I think it is also worth noting that all the Company commanders had served in Malaya and/or Borneo as had all Company Sergeants Major and Sergeants. Furthermore, many of the section commanders had been diggers in Malaya; so there was a base of experience from which to start the next phase, Sub-Unit Training.

Sub-Unit Training

By January 1966 Officer, NCO and other reinforcements were in place. Sub-unit training could now start in earnest. Leave was completed and in mid-January a training cadre was sent to the Jungle Training Centre (JTC), Canungra, to prepare the course for companies. Each company would attend this course for three weeks. It provided for training in basic jungle warfare techniques, weapon handling and marksmanship, physical fitness, enemy weapons and proven Viet Cong methods of operation. Lectures and discussions at night included Vietnamese history, culture and the conflict since the end of the Second World War. It concluded with a hard two day march over the McPherson Ranges. The 2RAR cadre was directed and supervised by the Battle Wing of JTC. All companies had completed this course by 12 March. While not at Canungra, Company Commanders ran their own programs to test standards and fitness of the individual leaders at platoon and section level. Battalion Headquarters and Administration Company ran their own series of deployments exercising Tactical Headquarters, the Command Post element, and 'A' Echelon to establish workable tactical loads for movement in an airmobile environment. There was little spare time and we worked a full six-day week.

Despite the fact that South Vietnam was a counter insurgency situation, it was obvious that it was very different from our experience in, and lessons learnt from, operations in Malaya. From a military history point of view, it was more akin to the situation in the Boer War, which was a situation of interface between a colonial ruler and a dissident colonial settler or indigene population.

In some ways this pointed to a different approach to training in that in Malaya, operations were really conducted at platoon level under broad company control, whereas early lessons from South Vietnam were that a company was the smallest sub-unit that could be deployed, and then only with guaranteed mortar, artillery and air and gun ship

support. Battalion HQ had to be trained to provide that support quickly and accurately to ensure successful operations and also to ensure deployments were such that companies in an operation were able to support each other. This became the emphasis of the training and Command Post Exercises (CPX) of the HQ in conjunction with the companies. It was essential that the Battalion SOPs were understood, agreed with and used correctly right down to section level. This would always be a doubt in any commander's mind because of the turnover of our soldiers. It was known before and had to be kept in mind. Maybe this was perfection, but in preparing young soldiers to face the 'unknown' to them, it had to be a standard to achieve. I think with few exceptions the battalion did this.

Unit Training

Apart from CPXs with all companies, our first deployment was to Tin Can Bay. This was a small training area but did allow for live firing. After my visit to 6RAR in January 1967, there were areas that needed attention. Would you believe that the simple but forgotten process of sandbag revetting needed to be taught? This was essential because the life of a sandbag in the SVN climate required a continuing program of refurbishment around tented accommodation, the Regimental Aid Post, stores, weapon pits, etc.

A requirement also existed to prefabricate timbers for a CP which was within the lift capacity of a utility helicopter. Probably more important was the need to establish an easy procedure to pass orders to the companies by radio as they would not always be physically able to attend Orders Groups or react quickly to changes in the tactical situation.

I also felt that the troops should experience the sound of close small arms fire—both overhead and flanking. It was a pity we could not do the same with the Artillery, which had to wait until deployment in South Vietnam with the never ending 'discussion' between infantry and gunner officers about their map reading ability. The same applied to Air and Gunship support. In close jungle this was always a problem because of sound entrapment under the canopy, complicating how close supporting fire could be brought with safety to our own troops. All company officers and NCOs were trained as far as possible in calling for mortar and artillery fire in the event a Mobile Fire Controller or³ Forward Observer was not available. This had to be achieved in six days. On return to Enoggera the battalion started Easter leave and then went to the Shoalwater Bay Training Area for Exercise GET SET, our final exercise. This was conducted by HQ

3. Mobile Fire Controllers were integral to the Battalion's Mortar Platoon and were allocated to Rifle Companies to facilitate calling for mortar fire. They were also able to call for artillery fire, through the Fire Support Coordination Centre at Battalion Headquarters if there were no Artillery Forward Observers allocated to the Company.

Northern Command with observers from Army HQ. It was based on situations that had been experienced in South Vietnam such as Search and Destroy, Cordon and Search and airmobile assault procedures etc. An assessment of the readiness of the Battalion was made and any recommended changes were notified. The exercise lasted from 28 March to 11 April. On return to Enoggera, pre-embarkation leave started and on completion, final preparations for embarkation commenced.

A small advance party was dispatched on 2 May followed by the advance party of 207 all ranks on 7–10 May. On 19 May the main body sailed from Brisbane, arriving in Vung Tau on 30 May. I travelled separately arriving in SVN on 22 May. With the advance party settled and the NZ ‘V’ Coy attached, 6RAR was able to be relieved *in situ* the day the main body arrived. This was done by heavy lift Chinook helicopters from the strip in the battalion lines direct to the deck of HMAS *Sydney*. On arrival further training was required to train the new arrivals in the use of the M72 LAW, M79 and M203 grenade launcher, and the US M90 mm in lieu of the Carl Gustaf M80. (The ammunition for the US weapon had more variety and was a better weapon in that environment.)

From the end of GET SET to disembarkation, there were further briefings on the history of Vietnam, the war with the French, the culture of the country, what was known of the VC organisation in our Area of Operations and the way they operated. In addition, moral welfare discussions were conducted by the Chaplains Department. I might add, as an aside, that during this time all members of the Battalion were informed that no one was obliged to sail with the Battalion if they did not wish to. Some elected not to go; not a great number, but as soon as their wishes were known they were transferred to the Personnel Depot for reposting.

Personal Observations

The training methods used in the 1960s were based on our experience in Malaya and to some extent New Guinea during the Second World War. The experience of the more senior officers and NCOs from Korea was mainly that of having been in operations against the highly organised Chinese Army in a war of static positions after the retreat from North Korea in the period December 1950–January 1951. That experience was a baptism of fire quite unlike the operations in Malaya/Borneo. The use of ‘panji pits’, crude but effective booby traps, and tunnel systems was a new and unwelcome change. The training we undertook was based on irregular guerrilla-type war, not the same sort of war being fought in other parts of South Vietnam which was large scale and vicious. At the same time we had to be aware that that could change (as happened at Long Tan in August 1966), hence the priority of protection in the base.

The absence of a coordinated intelligence system and having to rely on local operations to define our enemy caused many wasted hours and days jungle bashing

looking for clues, rather than set operations against an established enemy. However our method of having all Companies operating within artillery range did not present our adversaries with opportunities to strike us. One aspect of contact drills we did miss in our initial training was the VC/NVA use of rocket launchers into the canopy above our troops. This caused many casualties and was hard to counter.

One could also wonder whether our reinforcement and replacement system did not impinge on morale and efficiency. With a tour being defined as one year, the first month was generally quiet (with trepidation) as was the last month (with wind-up blues). Then of course, there was the three monthly changeover of NS intakes etc. There must be a better way of organising battalions who have to conduct operations in a hostile environment for protracted periods.

On the other hand, in the twenty-first century with the current size of the regular army, one could question the ability today to be able to meet a similar situation. The combat (or interface) capabilities are so different from those of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and it would be hard to define the exact nature of a threat in the next ten or twenty years. Few military experts would be prepared even to hazard a guess, that is if we have learnt anything of world events since the end of the Second World War.

Are we so sure that limited nuclear war by some countries is *not* a possibility? Where would we stand in such a situation? What could we do or even train for in such an eventuality? While we still rely on a Reserve Force to bolster current commitments, no government has supported, nor have the three services seriously implemented, the planning for any type of mobilisation and all that such a process requires in manpower requirements and facilities. Hopefully this would not be of the magnitude of either of the world wars. There are few existing Defence holdings that could even hope to cope with the problem. One could say that such considerations are old hat, old fashioned or old soldier talk, but even if that holds some water, such considerations must always be in the mind of the planner.

One final thought that was given to me when I was a young GSO2 (OPS) in AHQ in the mid-1960s when we had commitments in Malaysia/Borneo and increasingly in South Vietnam. It reads:

The planners are a funny lot, they have neither sword nor pistol.
That's why they stuff things up because their balls are crystal!

Preparing Armoured Units for Overseas Service

John Coates

Before examining the subject let me sketch in some background. When I graduated from Duntroon in 1955, I joined the 1st Armoured Regiment at Puckapunyal with three of my classmates. It was not long before all of us realised that there was antipathy in the army at large towards tanks.¹ I was accosted in the mess one night by an older officer from a different unit who proceeded to harangue me, not over the failure of ‘Red Robbie’s’ 1st Armoured Division in the Second World War to get itself overseas (like Koalas: not for export and not to be shot at!), but over the shortcomings of the British tanks at Bullecourt in April 1917! We had been warned by some of our seniors that people might get into us about the former, but, going back two world wars, virtually to the dawn of the tank as a fighting vehicle, seemed to me to be going over the top in rampant tribalism. Strangely enough, his comments reflected a common strain in the post-Second World War period, that had taken no account of the successes of tanks against Japan in places like Sattelberg in the Huon Peninsula and Slater’s Knoll on Bougainville, as Ronald Hopkins’ history accurately attests.² Not until Vietnam were we, the Armoured Corps,

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1. Over time, we found this to be more widespread than we thought. I return to the subject in more detail later. It had encouraged the then-Director of Armour, Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Graham to write an excellent pamphlet, *Tanks Against Japan*, to, among other things ‘help the subalterns win their mess arguments’. Graham ends the piece by quoting from Brigadier C.H. Kappe’s *The Fall of Singapore*: ‘What was needed was a squadron or two of tanks [on Singapore Island] to track the tired and disintegrated Jap units as they merged into the more open country north-west of the Tengah aerodrome, but we didn’t have the tanks’: *Australian Army Journal* 73 (June 1955), 41.
 2. Three publications deal in detail with the subject of this essay: R.N.L. Hopkins, *Australian Armour: A History of the Royal Australian Armoured Corps 1927-1972* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial/Australian Government Publishing Service, 1978), which is comprehensive, and has stood the test of time; Gary McKay and Graeme Nicholas, *Jungle Tracks: Australian Armour in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), which has the distinct virtue of allowing the participants to tell their own story; and the late Paul Anderson, *When the Scorpion Stings: The History of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, Vietnam, 1965-1972* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002), which concentrates on the cavalry’s experience in the Vietnam War. Two manuscripts of great interest and quality that deal with the subject, and which are to be published, are: ‘“Canister, On, Fire!”: Australian Tank Operations in Vietnam’ by Bruce Cameron, MC, who commanded a troop of Centurion Tanks in Vietnam; and, ‘Pony Soldiers: With the Australian Light Horse in Vietnam 1965-1966’, by Neville Modystack, who served with the original APC troop from ‘A’ Squadron, 4th/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse.

again able to demonstrate how valuable tanks and cavalry could be, either against an entrenched enemy in bunkers or on the move in a wide range of mobile tasks.

Therefore, whatever negative aspects came out of the Vietnam War, the enhancement of the status of Australian Armour was not one of them. And all of us in the Royal Australian Armoured Corps (RAAC) took pleasure in the fact that our greatest protagonists from that conflict were the up-and-coming young infantry commanders and their troops who preferred not to go anywhere near a Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army bunker position without both tank and cavalry support. In short, the Vietnam War helped to restore the RAAC to its place as one of the two manoeuvre arms of the Australian Army.

It did so from a very small base, and a central part of this essay is how we made the 'trickle' system of replacement work as well as it did. Admittedly opinions among tank and cavalry commanders on this subject are not unanimous. Some of us would have preferred to do as the infantry battalions did: concentrate and train as an entity in Australia, test the organisation during exercises and simulated situations, then deploy to Vietnam as a cohesive whole. Others felt that 'trickling' had its advantages. Because the learning curve in actual operations in Vietnam was so steep, they believed we were better to confirm the lessons by stages, absorb them, then instruct others as they arrived. In other words 'learn on the job'. For example: how did you check out a Vietnamese civilian found in a suspicious or 'no go' area? What did legitimate Vietnamese identity papers look like? Information from the villagers from Binh Gia (mostly Roman Catholic refugees from the North) was almost always reliable; that from the villagers of Hoa Long (heavily penetrated by Viet Cong cadres), was almost never so. Every province chief 'took his cut' from franchises in his province, but he got things done and therefore needed to be accorded respect. Old French maps of the area were valuable because they showed places, tracks, and river crossings that were no longer prominent or even recognisable, except by the Viet Cong; when escorting trucks, no matter how good the communications, it was essential to put an armoured vehicle in front to control the speed. This was bread and butter information that was only available in country, and then only if you had been there a while.³ Thus, there were definite advantages in the 'trickle' approach. It also meant that we were always 'on the air' in Vietnam, as one officer put it.

Probably the best answer was a compromise, 'trickle' at first, then switch to unit replacement when know-how and numbers, especially National Service numbers, had built up. As it happened, the successive tank squadrons *were* a compromise; in most cases

3. For the immediately preceding information, and much else besides, I am indebted to Brigadier Gordon Murphy, a Duntroon classmate, who commanded 'A' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, in 1966-67.

half the squadron moved *en bloc*, while the successive follow-up tended to be a movable feast of reinforcements balancing attrition as battle casualties, accidents, sickness and expiration of individual engagements saw individuals replacing others as the former finished their one year's tour of duty.⁴ We did reap advantages from this system. There was always a core of experienced people who, after six months or so in country, had acquired enough competence both to keep their unit humming, and to enable the trainers in Australia to adjust their syllabuses of instruction to current practice as the character of the war changed, because change it did.⁵ Indeed, many of my predecessors in command of the cavalry squadron found my descriptions of operations that occurred in my time almost totally alien to their own of only a few years (or even months) before.⁶ And it was not noticeably different with the tanks.

4. In the case of the tank squadrons the trickle system seems to have happened by accident. 'C' Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment (Major Peter Badman), deployed as a half-squadron originally because the policy makers at Army Headquarters (and some senior commanders) were dubious both as to the value of tanks in Vietnam and also whether they could operate successfully in the theatre, given the nature of close country and jungle and their performance in 'the wet'. Badman was present during a vigorous discussion at Nui Dat between Generals A.L. MacDonald, then Commander, Australian Force Vietnam, and C.E. Long, the Adjutant General, about deploying the balance of 'C' Squadron to the theatre. MacDonald's contention, which differed markedly from his predecessor, Major General Vincent (who almost certainly did more than any other single person to get tanks to Vietnam), was that the tanks' capabilities, tactically, were yet unproven. Long on the other hand contended that, 'C' Squadron had all the administrative, RAEME, and forward delivery organisation necessary to support a complete squadron; the Squadron was charged with looking after a large base camp sited and designed to be defended by a complete squadron; and he could see no reason why the other two troops should not be sent'. Quoted in Cameron, "'Canister, On, Fire!'", 81. The squadron was eventually reinforced to its full strength.
5. Referring to 5RAR's second tour in Vietnam, its CO Lieutenant Colonel Colin Kahn, commented: 'I was trained for a war of cordon and search, and bunkers weren't mentioned. When we got there all we did was fight bunkers. I was trained for totally the wrong war.' Quoted in R.W. Cable, *An Independent Command: Command and Control of the 1st Australian Task Force in Vietnam* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Papers on Strategy and Defence No 134, 2000), 32-3. A similar experience was recorded by Bruce Cameron: 'A replica Vietnamese village was established on the Puckapunyal range for simulation purposes. However, it did not include a replica of an enemy bunker system.' He commented: 'The significance of this was not realised until after our arrival in Vietnam when we found that all the squadron's major engagements involved bunker systems': Cameron, "'Canister, On, Fire!'", 14.
6. For anyone not completely familiar with Army terminology, the commander of a battalion or regiment is a Commanding Officer (CO), the commander of a squadron or company is an Officer Commanding (OC). The successive organisations and their commanders were:
 - 1 Troop, 'A' Squadron, 4th/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse (later became 1 APC Troop): Lieutenant (then Captain) R.K. Hill, May 1965–May 1966
 - 1st Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron (which became 'A' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment): Major R.E. Hagerty, May 1966–January 1967
 - 'A' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment: Major R.E. Hagerty, January–February 1967; Major G.J. Murphy, February 1967–February 1968; Major J.D. Keldie, February–September 1968; Major L.G. O'Donnell, September 1968–May 1969; Major T.F.H. Walker, April–November 1971
 - 1 Troop, 'A' Squadron: Lieutenant C.E. Stephens, October 1971–March 1972
 - 'B' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment: Major R.E. Rooks, May 1969–April 1970; Major H.J. Coates, April 1970–May 1971
 - 'C' Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment (Tanks): Major P.R. Badman, January–November 1968; Major A.L. Vickers, November 1968–January 1969; Major P.W. Bourke, December 1970–November 1971
 - 'B' Squadron: Major A.H. Smith, February–December 1969
 - 'A' Squadron: Major J.A.N. Chipman, December 1969–December 1970.

Organisation

Both the tank and cavalry units started small and were progressively reinforced to about full strength. The first Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) element (it was renamed cavalry later) to deploy to Vietnam was 1 Troop, 'A' Squadron, 4th/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse, commanded by Lieutenant Bob Hill. For some time there had been a regular squadron within 4/19th which was a CMF (Army Reserve) reconnaissance regiment. In Vietnam, Hill's troop was part of 1RAR Battalion Group. It arrived in Vietnam in June 1965 and from then operated with 1RAR Group in a wide variety of tasks. 1RAR Group was itself part of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate). The latter's base was Okinawa. Its task was essentially a strategic reserve and because its commander knew that his brigade was vulnerable to be sent on any one of a number of fire-fighting missions at any time he was keen to operate as intensely as possible for as long as possible; 'get in, do the job, get out quick' was the brigade's unofficial motto. This involved a lot of operations in a short period of time. In fact, the intensity of action that 1RAR Group was subjected to during its tour was more extreme than any Australian Army commitment since Gallipoli. This intensity was to continue under future battalions and their supporting arms.

Hill's troop was redesignated 1APC Troop. It returned to Australia in May 1966 and was relieved in country by 1APC Squadron commanded by Major Bob Hagerty. Hagerty's squadron numbered seven officers and 109 other ranks of whom a substantial number were National Servicemen. Hill's troop had grown to eighteen carriers during its tour. Hagerty's squadron, which became 'A' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, on 15 January 1967, remained at its strength on arrival; subsequent squadrons did increase numbers of both men and vehicles. It is also worth noting that the troopers in the squadron readily accepted the term 'cavalry' as being more accurately descriptive of what they did. Every squadron that served in country carried out more cavalry tasks than it did those of a purely troop carrying nature.⁷

By 1971 when the cavalry squadron was about to return to Australia with the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF), it had grown to 65 carriers: three troops each of thirteen

7. The intensity of particular tasks changed over time. Initially, the enemy in Phuoc Tuy tried to maintain, then regain, the initiative, so the early OCs found the enemy coming at them. Thus, early operations concentrated on 'Search and Destroy' (known later more euphemistically as Reconnaissance in Force) and 'Cordon and Search'. Later, this changed; ambushing came to the fore as contacts became less frequent and the enemy harder to find. Tasks were, as APCs: infantry insertions; redeployments and extractions; ready reaction force; bunker assault in support of infantry; deployment of artillery and mortars; insertion of SAS patrols; logistic tasks; armoured ambulance; as Cavalry: ambushing (with or without infantry support); ready reaction (without infantry); reconnaissance including maintaining a presence as a deterrent; cordon and search operations; flank protection and early warning as part of search and destroy operations; perimeter defence; deploying and protecting 1ATF HQ; armoured command vehicle duty.

vehicles, each troop capable of lifting an infantry company; M125 Mortar carriers; and a number of Armoured Command Vehicles (M577) for the use of both the Task Force Headquarters and the Squadron. Eight Fire Support Vehicles—M113s fitted with Saladin Armoured Car turrets with a 76mm gun—were added to the squadron for trials in the second half of 1971. Despite some limitations on the use of the vehicle, the trials were successful. The squadron's Light Aid Detachment (RAEME) had its own vehicles including two fitters vehicles with HIAB three tonne cranes, and a wheeled wrecker (M543) which was capable of towing an M113A1, either on its own tracks or on a tilt-bed trailer if it was untowable.

The first half-squadron of tanks from 'C' Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment commanded by Major Peter Badman arrived in country in February 1968.⁸ By the middle of the year it had expanded to be a full squadron. Its arrival in what was to be the climactic year of the war could not have been more fortunate. After a series of operations: PINNAROO, an infantry-tank sweep into the Long Hai hills during which the tanks were able to use their direct fire to good effect; then COOKTOWN ORCHID a follow-up operation into the Long Green area within Phuoc Tuy province, three troops deployed in May during the 'wet' to the TOAN THANG operations (security of the Bien Hoa-Saigon-Long Binh triangle), around Fire Support Patrol Bases (FSPBs) Coral and Balmoral, where elements of 1ATF were involved in some of the toughest defensive battles of the war. Here, the firepower of the tanks and their equal ability either to manoeuvre or fight statically within a defended locality or FSPB, were key factors. The distance, 150 kilometres, was extreme for tanks on their own tracks, especially during the 'wet', but was accomplished successfully. The squadron's organisation came to include four troops of tanks, a further two gun tanks on squadron headquarters as well as a Special Equipment Troop of two tank dozers and two bridge layers. Its Light Aid Detachment (RAEME) included two armoured recovery vehicles (ARV) as well as two fitters tracks. Although the ARVs mounted machine guns principally for their own local protection, they were used on several occasions as offensive vehicles. The LAD, by agreement with the Forward Delivery Troop, held a further two fully kitted tanks in its own lines ready for operations.

Getting the tanks off the *Jeparit* and up to Nui Dat was a unique problem. The Americans helped by bringing down a 70 tonne 'Big John' floating crane from Saigon which lifted the tanks onto an American Landing Craft Universal (LCU). The LCUs

8. The first shipment included two troops each of four tanks, three tanks for the Forward Delivery Troop, two SHQ tanks, two tank dozers and two bridgelayers. Peter Badman says he constituted a third troop from the SHQ tanks and the two bridge layers. Thus, the deployment to TOAN TUANG was effectively three troops.

then made a short trip—three tanks at a time—upriver to a ‘hard’ near the capital Baria. There they were offloaded and motored on their own tracks to the 1ATF base.⁹

Individual Training

There are similarities in preparing all types of armoured troops for impending operations. All armoured troopers whether destined for tanks or cavalry, and irrespective of whether they had volunteered for the regular army or been drafted under the National Service ballot scheme, had to progress past certain milestones to be ready for operations. All underwent recruit training for three months at one of the training battalions at Kapooka or Puckapunyal. They then attended periods of Initial Employment Training, at the Armoured Centre Puckapunyal in Radio (it used to be called Wireless), Gunnery and/or Driving and Servicing to fit them as part of a Centurion tank crew or to drive and operate an M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier. The Armoured Corps’ personnel managers usually allocated the smartest recruits to Centurion tank gunnery, which we all accepted to be the most exacting trade to learn. Any who aspired to be crew commanders attended a special course in addition, which many regarded as the toughest they remembered in the army. It not only consolidated their knowledge of the three basic trades referred to, but included tank or cavalry tactics, battle runs (which were very testing), navigation in most types of country, and handling vehicles on the move. Naturally, because of length of time in the army, crew commanders tended to be drawn mainly from regulars. This changed for two reasons: it was not long before the whole army found out that National Servicemen were in many cases better educated than many of their regular contemporaries, were easy to train and quick to learn; and sheer necessity, because basic numbers in the Armoured Corps were so low, we had to accelerate the progress of the best National Servicemen and thrust greatness on them early. For example, Corporal Normie Rowe, a National Serviceman, became a cavalry crew commander and a good one. All had to complete a Battle Efficiency Course, usually at Canungra, prior to embarkation. Young officers from RMC Duntroon, the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, or the National Service Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, all completed a Young Officers course—now known as the Regimental Officers Basic Course—for twenty weeks to teach them to be troop leaders. Their quality was high and, with exceptions in Vietnam, they did not differ greatly from each other in performance.

9. The second shipment did not proceed so smoothly. The Americans could not make available the ‘Big John’ floating crane this time. Instead, the *Jeparit* had to dock at Cam Ranh Bay where a wharf crane unloaded the tanks. Then because there would be a time delay before the *Clive Steele* (LSM) could begin transporting them to Vung Tau, the squadron technical officer Captain Bernie Sullivan elected to leaguer them on the beach. There had been harrasing attacks by North Vietnamese marines against installations and watercraft and Australian tanks would have been a high publicity target. Fortunately, canister ammunition, which would have been a very considerable deterrent, had arrived with the shipment: Sullivan, interview and correspondence July-August 2002.

Probably four aspects were uppermost in the mind of any OC preparing and training troops for Vietnam: equipment, collective training, cooperation training with infantry, and progressing the soldiers' administration to DP1 (Draft Priority 1) status so that individually, they were fit medically, dentally, and in all personal respects to get on the ship or aeroplane.

Equipment

There is an Army saying that the Navy and Air Force man their equipment, whereas the Army equips the man. It is true only in part, and in Armour hardly at all. Our greatest resource *is* our trained manpower, but, we do depend greatly on our equipment. The key equipment of the tank squadron was the Medium Gun Tank, Centurion;¹⁰ of the cavalry squadron, the M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier.¹¹ A third, much smaller organisation in Vietnam, the Forward Delivery Troop, held a small number of crewmen and fully kitted vehicles for both squadrons.

The basic vehicle of the cavalry squadron was the FMC (Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation), M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier. It has recently been upgraded in certain respects and remains in service. It was used in East Timor, and has been one of the most successful armoured fighting vehicles in living memory.¹² Although the original American carriers had a petrol engine the Australian vehicles were all powered by a General Motors V6 diesel developing 215 bhp (the same engine as used in Pioneer buses), which greatly facilitated the supply of spare parts in a crisis. The

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10. At one time there was a popular but mistaken contention that a light tank would be a more suitable vehicle for operations in Vietnam. The Americans trialled the concept using the General Sheridan, Air Portable Armored Fighting Vehicle (APAFV) in 1969. It led to this comment: 'We had a 50-ton tank [M48A3], and when it hit a mine, very seldom was a crew commander injured because it usually just blew a track off. Sometimes it was a catastrophe, but very seldom. Then we got the Sheridan, a light skinned armoured vehicle, 16 tons. It was almost like an APC, but mounted a very large gun. We had the first casualty with these things in Vietnam as a result of one hitting a mine. The driver was killed and the Sheridan was almost totally destroyed. Others, when they later took RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] hits, caught fire and just melted down to the tracks': Eric M. Bergerud, *Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning: The World of a Combat Division in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 72. The Centurions proved to be excellent in Vietnam because of their robustness and ability to absorb punishment and their excellent, 20-pounder, main armament.
 11. The requirement for a tracked Armoured Personnel Carrier for the Australian Army was established in Weapons Equipment Policy Statement (WEPS) 26 in June 1960. Trials to determine a suitable vehicle were held in 1962-3 with two contenders: the UK, FV432 manufactured by GKN-Sankey; and the M113 (the Australian designation of the vehicle became M113A1), manufactured in the US by the Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation (FMC) in two plants at San Jose, CA. and Charleston, SC. The trials—hot-dry at Mt Isa, Qld, and hot-wet at Mourilyan near Innisfail, Qld—established the M113A1 to be the preferred option by a substantial margin: Michael K. Cecil, *Australian Military Equipment Profiles*, vol. 4: *The M113 & M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers in Australian Service 1962-1972* (Melbourne: Australian Military Equipment Profiles, 1994), is an excellent account of the testing, introduction, and brief history of the vehicle in Australian Army service.
 12. General Donn A. Starry, *Armoured Combat in Vietnam* (Poole, Dorset: Blandford, 1981), esp. 21-4 for the vehicle's value, even with inadequate South Vietnamese command in the Mekong delta.

vehicle is easy to maintain and very reliable. It weighs 13 tonnes, has a crew of two—crew commander and driver—and can carry a section of ten fully laden infantrymen. It is amphibious and has a pivot steering system which relies on the normal motion of the tracks for propulsion and steering in water. This capability became marginal later when an extra one inch of aluminium belly-armour was bolted to the hull to give it greater protection against mines. The original vehicles had a pintle mounted .50 calibre Browning machine gun. Then a gun shield was fitted. Then two turrets were fitted in turn. The M74C was dome shaped, cramped, and barely adequate: the T50 turret was better, but neither turret allowed the crew commander to use the inherent accuracy of the weapon, nor to fire on fixed lines. The T50 remained controversial throughout the war. However, either turret was much better than no turret at all, and the T50 has since been modified to advantage. It could house twin .30 calibre, Browning machine guns or a .50/.30 combination. Usually, troop leaders and section commanders had the 50/30 combination, most carriers had twin .30s. The M113A1 has a rear loading ramp which can be lowered either when stationary or on the move for easy access. We frequently used that method in close country to insert SAS patrols.

One of the great advantages that both the tank and cavalry squadrons shared in Vietnam was the excellence of their LADs whose members became as ‘black-hatted’ as the armoured corps.¹³ Because both of them were working for independent squadrons they were larger and had a more comprehensive range of skills than their opposite numbers in Australia, although this was less marked in the case of the cavalry because, unlike the tanks, its reinforcing unit in Australia was not a whole regiment but another squadron that was a mirror image of itself. Put bluntly, both LADs worked their guts out to put vehicles back on the road and it became their unspoken code of conduct not to have vehicles left unserviceable overnight. In the case of a major mine hit this was not always possible. In my own case I was losing a carrier a week on mines for the first two months. Paradoxically, once the tanks arrived in country the cavalry found the going tougher because the enemy’s home made mines were being made powerful enough (40-50 kilos of Chinese Communist plastic explosive) to stop the tanks. That did not often happen because of the resilience of the Centurion. But, a mine laid to stop a tank could make a hell of a mess of a carrier. Like the squadrons themselves, the LADs had a fair mix of regulars and National Servicemen. They also had a fair proportion of ex-Army Apprentices, who are a godsend to any organisation. We had a lot of flexibility in Phuoc Tuy, and also outside the province because three or four fitters (a Forward Repair Team), with a major unit assembly could be flown out by Iroquois to a Fire Support Base or Night Defensive, or right to the damaged vehicle, to be repaired on the spot.

13. ‘C’ Squadron was accompanied by an attached 1st Armoured Regiment Workshop (100 strong), which was quickly found to be too big and unwieldy for the task. Major Badman asked for it to be reduced to 20: the remainder were absorbed into 106 Field Workshop. Correspondence, Badman/Coates, 26 September 2002.

By the time the tank squadron was committed to Vietnam in early 1968 the Centurion was a very old tank. It weighed 52 tonnes, was full of quaint technology, but in critical aspects it was first class. In particular, it was both robust, and had a very good gun. It had very thick armour in the turret and could take massive punishment from mines, which it hit frequently, and from Rocket Propelled Grenades where its turret armour was all but impervious to the earlier enemy rocket propelled grenade (RPG-2). The HEAT (high explosive anti-tank) jet went in but did not penetrate into the crew compartment.¹⁴ The RPG-7 which succeeded the RPG-2 was more lethal. It did penetrate but, unless it hit a vital spot, the hole was eventually arc-welded and the tank kept motoring. A further advantage which the Centurion had, for example, over contemporary American vehicles was in the nature of its road wheels and running gear, which were designed to shear if it hit a mine. The solution then was to drill out the broken studs and refit the gear which could be done (and was) in the field. In comparison, the prevailing US tank (M48A3) with its torsion bar suspension, had to be taken to a base workshop to be repaired.¹⁵ The Centurion's other great advantage was its 20pr (83.4mm) gun with a range of ammunition: canister (like a gigantic shot-gun), which could be used to strip away enemy cover and camouflage, e.g. against bunkers; APCBC (armour piercing capped ballistic cap—known as 'shot') which followed up to either weaken or demolish, or completely destroy the now-exposed bunker; and HE (high explosive) which might or might not be needed and could be used to finish the job provided the range was not so short as to make it a hazard to accompanying infantry.

Because the Centurion's technology was old, its crewmen needed to be very skilled.¹⁶ Its main armament was stabilised and learning to use it to shoot accurately on the move required as good hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity as any other highly specialised job in the army. Driving the tank was easier, but, because it had a crash type gearbox and no synchromesh it took a lot of practice to be proficient. Most officers were lousy drivers, much to the delight of the regular drivers. An ideal Centurion tank driver was short, stocky, and bullet-headed, with a left leg twice as thick and strong as the right (to work the clutch which needed about 30 kilos' pressure), and a great sense of humour. It helped a lot if he also had a good eye for ground. The last thing a crew commander ever wants to do is habitually to have to call 'left-stick' or 'right-stick' to his driver.¹⁷

14. However, there was always a danger from 'spalling', i.e. small bits of metal from either inside or outside the turret which break off and cause casualties. Also because, owing to the heat, it is almost physically impossible to remain closed-down for any length of time, a commander or driver with only a bit of his body protruding and a helmet on, can still be wounded by metal-splash.

15. The M113 A1 torsion bar suspension had similar problems, although when the carrier hit a mine, the destruction of its suspension was the least of the crew's and its passengers concerns.

16. One troop leader had his troops buy sable brushes in Australia which had very soft bristles, so that they could be used to keep clean the electrical harness joints which fed the gun stabilisation system, on the basis that it would prevent the stabiliser breaking down at critical times: Sullivan, interview.

17. Acquiring 'a good eye for ground' was an art. It took time to learn, rarely less than a year, and frequently much longer. It is also useful to mention that maintaining a Centurion was hard physical labour for the crew. Much harder, for example, than with the Leopard I which succeeded it.

A tank has a crew of four, an APC two. An addition to both for many operations were the mini-teams, usually two sappers from the Engineer Field Squadron who searched for concealed mines and warned the crew commanders. Usually, they were carried on the point vehicles only, or in the case of the tanks on an ARV until they were needed. Their help was invaluable and since they were exposed at the front of both tanks and carriers, they suffered many casualties.

Collective Training

Because the crewman's basic training and Individual Employment Training had already been done somewhere else it might be thought that the squadrons had no further responsibilities here. It was not the case. The Armoured Corps expansion—like the infantry—had been so rapid that some tasks were left to units to pick up. We certainly ran our own crew commander's courses to make up the shortfall, and in any case, individual refresher training in areas of skill, like shooting, is always necessary. But our main responsibility was to progressively train people through crew, section (in the case of cavalry), troop, and finally squadron level drills, tactics, and procedures to fit them for their task in Vietnam. It is fair to say that doctrine always lagged behind actual practice in Vietnam. The Army did not have a well-developed system for gathering lessons from Vietnam and disseminating them to those preparing to go there. The process improved over time but only because individuals passed information back, mostly in the form of personal correspondence. There was no system for 'capturing' information from individuals who had loads of experience and were on the point of repatriating to Australia. However, one initiative that helped immeasurably was that every OC went up there for an orientation visit of about ten days before finally deploying for a year. That single experience enabled him to focus training in Australia more cogently than normal peacetime training, where the effort has to be spread over a greater number of possible scenarios.

The old adage about armoured skills is that you must be able to MOVE, SHOOT, and COMMUNICATE. If only it was that simple. I would add a further three qualities immediately. You need to be able to SEE, SURVIVE, and MAINTAIN,¹⁸ and I could add others. Counterinsurgency, or Low Intensity Operations as it is sometimes called, has traditionally been a most demanding type of conflict. In Vietnam, troops were

18. This has contemporary relevance of a special dimension. A tank or APC has to be able to fight around the clock. The night fighting capability of the Leopard I has been allowed to lapse. To be operationally compatible with US, UK, or, say, German armour, in an overseas deployment, it has to be equipped with passive TI (thermal imaging) sights of two types: gunner's sight, and a commander's hunter/killer sight which can be scanning for future targets while the gunner engages the existing target. Its existing active-Infra Red equipment makes it highly vulnerable because an enemy vehicle can trace IR to its source and destroy it.

continually more stretched than the Australian Army had ever been since perhaps Gallipoli. And even if you had the occasional rest and convalescence for 72 hours at Vung Tau, you could easily be recalled to the war. Incidentally, I never found a soldier to be comforted by being told that he was in a 'low intensity situation' in Vietnam. The bullets fly just as fast, the mines were bigger, and Vietnam always had the capacity to switch suddenly from a desultory series of contacts to a conventional war in which the only things missing were an enemy air force and fighting vehicles.

In Australia you found training areas where you could, and probably we were better off than most other armies. At Puckapunyal and Holsworthy we were able to train in our own backyards. And, even though the country did not exactly resemble Vietnam, parts of it were thick, and like Vietnam it constantly changed. The one medium that neither squadron could experience was the 'wet', and even though at Puckapunyal if it isn't raining, as the saying goes, it is about to rain, the 'wet' in Vietnam, like the Top End, is something else. In Vietnam, if you could see buffaloes in a field you knew it would take an armoured vehicle without bogging because the buffalo has a higher ground pressure. For cavalry troop and squadron training I used Singleton, especially the nearby Bulga track, where there are bits of rainforest, and also Tianjara where to save track miles we flew the carriers by C130 Hercules, two at a time, to Nowra, then deployed from there. An important aspect of training is always shooting both by day and night. and my personal belief is you can never get enough of it. But, like sex, it needs to be little and often: not an orgy. Back then, because of the difficulties of putting out picquets, butt parties, shoeing sheep away from the impact area and other overheads, the tendency was to have only a couple of major shoots a year, which means that because skill in shooting is so perishable, for the rest of the year the standard of shooting drops away rapidly. It is easier now with automated ranges. You need to shoot both vehicles and personal weapons every week if you can, certainly every month. We tried to do this but did not always succeed. We were also able to construct vehicle 'sneaker' courses in places like Singleton, which were invaluable for crew and section shooting at night in particular. The tanks were better off at Puckapunyal where they had a fairly lavish array of tank ranges and, in those days, they were the only permanent tenants of the place for a lot of the year. For tactical training they also had belts of thick country in the adjacent state forest.

Still on shooting, there is a further aspect that I would assert for posterity. I am not a Gunner so I am not playing to my own cap badge. But I would also seek every opportunity to train with artillery; to learn to call for artillery fire and then correct it. We were well placed at Holsworthy since 8/12 Medium Regiment was nearby and was helpful in giving the troop leaders and myself the opportunity to do a shoot and correct fire. One of the hardest things many OCs found in Vietnam was getting people to *use* artillery; we were so used to being constrained by peacetime safety conditions. You have to break that mindset.

Training with Infantry

Every armoured OC in Vietnam had started off in tanks at the 1st Armoured Regiment. All of us had cut our teeth leading tank troops and learning the battle drills and procedures that a troop of three or four Centurions demanded. The same was true of 2ICs of squadrons and many troop leaders. Similarly, most senior NCOs had been through the tank experience at Puckapunyal. It was of great value when we got to Vietnam, regardless of whether we ended up there in tanks or cavalry.¹⁹

As an OC, I never thought the differences in procedures, training and basic tactics were very great. However, as a story against myself, I insisted that my cavalry squadron learn the 'fire and movement' tactics that are a tank troop and squadron's bread and butter. One of my cavalry troop leaders challenged that notion on the basis that if we used fire and movement on the road from Nui Dat to Baria we would be laughed out of the province! I reassured him that you only needed to use it in contact, or when you thought you were about to make contact. But, the essential principles are the same, as they are for infantry. Furthermore, you needed to use covered approaches (particularly cover from fire because you cannot really disguise armoured vehicles on the move), with the same rat-cunning that a good infantryman uses in his own approach to an objective.

All this was fine on the esoteric armoured side; it did not relate in the same way to training with infantry, or in developing common, mutually understood procedures. How much did infantry battalions on notice for Vietnam train with either tanks or cavalry? The short answer is that it varied from place to place and also over time. At best it was always uneven, in some cases it occurred not at all. Major Peter Badman's squadron had to concentrate, draw new tanks, and get its people to DP1 (draft priority one) standard so quickly he had only two weeks for his own troop and squadron training. He did not train with the relevant infantry battalions until he got to Nui Dat and then did so with each company of the Task Force in turn.²⁰ Frequently, when training was done in Australia, there was neither time nor priority to take the process far enough. Some battalions did train with a squadron of the Regiment at Puckapunyal, originally on the basis that they would very likely be using US tank support in theatre, but, those were turbulent times and people changed around quickly.

19. Although the RAAC was stretched to the limit in Vietnam we gained an advantage from our smallness. We were less than two per cent of the Regular Army, which meant that almost everyone above the rank of sergeant had served at some time with almost everybody else and knew their personalities, strengths and weaknesses. This became of great value in the theatre itself.

20. Correspondence and interview Badman/Coates, 23-6 September 2002.

There were deficiencies in warning people. It was a surprise to everyone (including Peter Badman and his CO, Lieutenant Colonel Wilton), when they learnt on the ABC News on 17 October 1967 that Australia would be sending its own tanks to Vietnam! The tanks began unloading at Vung Tau on 24 February 1968, and it was all go from then on.

Some infantry-tank training had occurred at Puckapunyal in the early 1960s with ‘B’ Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment (the squadron earmarked for SEATO deployment as part of Plan AMBROSE). The same was not true of infantry-APC training. Neville Modystack described the first APC troops experience in Vietnam:

Our training as cavalry was excellent; our preparation for Vietnam was, in many ways, appalling ... it was a severe culture shock to be linked up with a foot unit [1RAR] as distinguished as it was. This was most evident in the fact that we had no opportunity to train with the battalion, not even so much as a TEWT (Tactical Exercise Without Troops). Lieutenant-Colonel Lou Brumfield, CO 1RAR Battalion Group, later commented, ‘With APCs we didn’t have any direct contact; some of us had seen them at various demonstrations and CGS Exercises but we hadn’t operated with them. Most officers were aware of their capabilities but not the practical application of those capabilities.’²¹

However, it is fair to say that infantry-APC operations are generally less complex than infantry operating with tanks. But, as the action at Long Tan in August 1967 demonstrated, with no prior training, it is also easy for misunderstandings to arise.

As happened then, the acting OC of a relieving company, who had never worked with APCs before, thought he should be in command when the vehicles were still on the move, and a minor barney occurred with the cavalry troop leader. The simple adage is, while the APC commander is manoeuvring his carriers, he remains in command, even if he is junior to the infantry commander being carried, which most often is the case. As soon as the infantry dismount, the APCs revert to in support and do as they are told. Prior training in Australia would have established that, but it had not taken place.²²

The slack was picked up after the original deployments were completed.²³ Some combined arms training always occurred when the battalions were doing their final exercise at Shoalwater Bay. They were joined there by a cavalry troop. Most squadron

21. Modystack, ‘Pony Soldiers’ (unpaginated).

22. The relative responsibilities concerning ‘who commands’ as described above, were subsequently made doctrine in IATF Standing Operating Procedures.

23. There were no SOPs for a tank squadron and Badman said, ‘It was a major job getting them knitted to IATF and all the SVN procedures. We finished the task by the end of January 1968 and the SOPs stood us in good stead thereafter.’ Correspondence Badman/Coates, 26 September 2002.

OCs tried to ensure that the same troop supported that particular battalion in Vietnam, although of course, our 'trickle' reinforcement system meant that many of the APC faces would have changed by then. At the very least we tried to match up the troop leader with the same battalion. In my time at Holsworthy we were alongside 7RAR, which was working up for its second tour. I found that the rapport we developed with Lieutenant Colonel Ron Grey and his company commanders became very close, and in Vietnam, I kept the same troop, commanded by Captain Peter Murphy (then Rod Earle), with the battalion the whole time—to, I believe, the mutual benefit of both.

Instructing infantry soldiers in the use of tanks is harder than with APCs. A tank is a big beast. It is difficult to mount until you learn where to put your hands and feet, particularly when carrying big packs: many hands have been burnt on exhaust covers doing it the wrong way. An infantryman could direct the tank's attention to the target in a number of ways: by hand signals to the crew commander; firing a shot for reference; over the radio; or, by using the Tank Telephone at the left rear. Another note for posterity. Never approach a tank from the rear if it is in a fire position. The crew commander is concentrating on the opposition, and if he has to high reverse out quickly he will do so without looking behind; anyone (or any vehicle) behind him will be stitched up the face with tank tracks if they are in the way! Similarly, because of a tank's relative blindness in thick country or at night, an infantry soldier camouflaged and lying on the ground is hard for a tank crew to recognise, especially if the crew is closed-down. All of these things and others come easier with infantry-tank familiarisation, but just these simple examples illustrate how important prior training is. The same is true of 'marrying-up' prior to an operation.

Pre-Embarkation Administration

Over time, the Army developed fairly slick procedures for ensuring that troops were fit and ready to proceed overseas. Collectively, the Shoalwater Bay training, during which an infantry battalion group was virtually put under the microscope to see that its command and procedures were sound, was a step-up from the past, when the first of the battalions to go to the Malayan Emergency was not well prepared and had not necessarily trained along the correct lines. Every soldier and officer completed a Battle Efficiency Course at Canungra to ensure that he could live in the field, fire his weapons, and not shoot his friends in the process. I personally found it very valuable. For example, it got me firing infantry weapons like the GPMG M60 and the Armalite rifle which I had not handled before. And I was right because I had to use such weapons in Vietnam at odd times.

Because we were reinforcing our squadrons in Vietnam with individuals rather than formed groups, it was necessary to go into each man's case in great detail. Particularly was this so with the National Servicemen whom the army had for only two years full-

time, unless they volunteered for the regular army, which some did. You did nothing by rote. As an OC, you went into every man's case thoroughly. Everyone, whether officer or trooper, regular or National Serviceman, believed he had a special reason for heading off to Vietnam quicker than anybody else. It was great that it was so. You did not have to dragoon people to go to Vietnam. How much residual time did a National Serviceman have in the army? Was there a compassionate reason, e.g. the impending birth of a child, to speed up or slow down someone's movement? Had a man already been to Vietnam and was backing up for his second tour? Did he have special skills? Whatever it was you took it into account. The fact that a man was entitled to a War Service Home Loan on return was known to be a carrot; one year's tax free income was another. Close friendships mattered. You would try to send mates in the same group, or at least, as close as possible to each other. Every man had to fill out a will and lodge it with the Central Army Records Office.²⁴ You had to be a practising psychologist to pacify people who thought they were being disadvantaged, which is fair enough.

All through, you were trying to strike a balance between giving a man the right sort (and amount) of collective training to fit him for his individual task in Vietnam, and getting him there. On occasions, someone's movement to Vietnam would have to be accelerated. If the squadron in Vietnam had a big contact with a number of casualties it affected people's movement, and a man who thought he would be staying in my squadron at Holsworthy for six months, could be whipped out in six weeks. There was a bottom limit which was not negotiable. On a couple of occasions I had soldiers earmarked to go quickly, and who asked to have their pre-embarkation leave of two weeks waived. I was given short shrift by the Task Force Commander at Holsworthy. A man could not forfeit the leave even voluntarily. He had to be given it, and he had to take it.

To Vietnam —Getting it Together

I have written elsewhere that if an army's doctrine is uncertain, how does it train and for what?²⁵ In the case of Vietnam in the early to mid-1960s the late Ian McNeill put his finger on part of the reason:

... the 'all arms' aspects of counter insurgency training was suffering because of what seemed to be an Army-wide preoccupation with the role of infantry. Artillery units were not practising deployment into fire support bases ... Engineers ...

24. Now SCMA (pronounced 'schema')—Soldier Career Management Agency.

25. John Coates, *Bravery Above Blunder: The 9th Australian Division at Finschhafen, Sattelberg, and Sio* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

concentrated on airfield construction ... They practised none of the special skills required, such as demolitions, clearance of mines and booby traps, and tunnel clearance ... Tanks were 1000 kilometres away at Puckapunyal, Victoria.²⁶

At the tactical level in particular, there was almost always a time lag between what can be regarded as 'declaratory doctrine' (i.e. the theory that is put out in courses of instruction, new pamphlets and publications) and 'working doctrine', which must then massage the former into something the combined arms team can work with on the ground. It has to be mutually agreed, validated in practice, and finally exported to the field. There is no such thing as instant tactics.

Earlier in this essay I referred to the antipathy in sections of the Army towards the use of armour. In *Australian Armour*, Ronald Hopkins refers to the years 1950-1960 as the 'in the wilderness' period for the RAAC.²⁷ Except for the 1st Armoured Regiment which was low in priority for maintenance and spare parts,²⁸ any armoured training of consequence was done by CMF units and formations: this was generally confined to annual camps of two weeks and the standard reached was nowhere near proficient enough to expect them to take on infantry-tank cooperation as a formal task.²⁹ Except for informal contacts, the armoured spirit was kept alive by firepower demonstrations for students from the Staff College at Queenscliff and visitors from Army Headquarters (AHQ). In 1961 as the focus changed to Vietnam, a breakthrough came when the enlightened Directors of Armour and Infantry put up a joint submission to AHQ that the army's training teams intended for Vietnam be equipped with APCs. This was refused with the comment from the Director of Military Operations that there was no requirement, nor likely need, for armoured vehicles in South Vietnam.³⁰ What changed this was more a case of American example rather than Australian prescience, for the former were using APCs with their own advisory groups in Vietnam even in the Mekong Delta, which is not

26. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 20.

27. Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 198-215.

28. As tank troop leaders in C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment in 1956-57, there were many occasions when, for lack of spare parts for the Centurions, we had only one of three tanks in each troop running. We combined our troops and took it in turns to be troop leader.

29. In part, this was again a case of doctrine lagging behind the need, largely brought about by low defence budgets, and the traditional reliance on the CMF, which had neither the equipment nor the training for the task. Moreover, 'A' Squadron, Prince of Wales Light Horse, although regular, was equipped as a conventional Cavalry Squadron, not an APC Squadron. Also, the principal APC, the British six-wheeled, Alvis 'Saracen,' was unsuitable. It was neither robust nor user friendly. It bogged easily, and was never an effective infantry carrier.

30. Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 229.

usually held to be favourable armoured country.³¹ Indeed, even when the plan was made to send 1RAR Battalion Group to Vietnam, the primary task for which the APCs were sent also was the armoured transport of stores under the control of the logistic support company.³² This changed almost immediately with experience in the theatre.

Although the tanks moved to Vietnam at short notice, tank-infantry training, as distinct from infantry-APC training, was more established and better understood. During the Pentropic period (1960-65), for example, a very well-written set of Army pamphlets had addressed infantry-tank cooperation for conventional war operations. In addition, several infantry companies from one of the Pentropic battalions spent a month at Puckapunyal training with the 1st Armoured Regiment in infantry-tank cooperation. As a squadron 2IC, sometime squadron commander at the time, I took part in a number of those exercises; they were fun, they were useful, but as they were pitched at conventional war they related only indirectly to operations later in Vietnam. In any case Puckapunyal, as Ian McNeill pointed out, was a long way away from everybody else, and only some people came. In short, there *was* infantry-tank training, but, it was uneven, it was hit and miss, and it was more in the nature of a familiarisation exercise rather than focussed training. There were too many ‘one offs’. As well, many such initiatives were personality driven, rather than the natural derivatives of established doctrine. In any case, until we all knew enough about the nature of fighting in Vietnam to go deep into tactics and SOPs (Standing Operating Procedures), we were skimming the surface, not squarely addressing the problem.

Nevertheless, even this amount of prior training had not happened with the APCs, and although infantry-APC procedures were extrapolated from the days of the Saracen APC, none of it was validated until the first APC troop with 1RAR did so in practice in the theatre itself. There were growing pains. I take my hat off to Lieutenant Bob Hill, who used to be my troop sergeant, and his men for paving the way. His vehicles had formidable early problems: no radios, and therefore no intercom within the vehicle itself. In consequence, each of his crew commanders armed himself with a stick to tap the driver on the shoulder for direction, or belt him over the head to stop suddenly. No

31. General Donn A. Starry's account of the usefulness of M113s in the Mekong delta area was mentioned earlier (n. 12). Reservations about the use of armour in Vietnam came from publications like Bernard Fall's book *Street Without Joy* (1961), especially as Starry points out the annihilation of Groupement Mobile 100 in the central plateau area. However, as Starry points out: '...Groupement Mobile 100 was not an armoured unit at all, but an infantry task force of 2600 men, organised into four truck-mounted infantry battalions, reinforced with one artillery battalion and ten light tanks [M-24 'Chaffee' Light Tank]. Restricted to movement on roads, deploying to fight on foot, it was extremely vulnerable to ambush, and, indeed, a series of ambushes finally destroyed it ... its fate cast a pall over armoured operations in Vietnam for almost twelve years.' Starry, *Armoured Combat in Vietnam*, 5.

32. This notion was put to rest early. Captain Bob Hill's carriers repulsed enemy attempting to penetrate into the gun areas near Phuoc Loc on the night of 28 June 1965. Hill was wounded and was subsequently awarded the MC for his actions: McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 106-7.

crew commanders protection—ostensibly because the original concept was to use them merely as logistic carriers—just a simple pintle mount which meant that the commander had to be half out of the vehicle to fire the 50-calibre machine-gun. You can only go onwards and upwards from there, and it takes time. Major Bob Hagerty had at least as challenging a problem as Hill because his 1 APC Squadron integrated with a much larger task force, not a battalion group. Hagerty started virtually from scratch. He did not have an equipment table which is an essential document, authorising the Officer Commanding to draw weapons, equipment, and vehicles, without which he could neither function nor train. Nor did he have a training directive; he later wrote his own. In fact, so novel was the whole enterprise that he was asked by the two senior officers in his chain of command, the Area Commander at Puckapunyal, and the GOC, Southern Command, what exactly was an APC Squadron!³³

Second Lieutenant David Watts described the pre-training phase:

The last APC work was done in WW2 and I remember we went through Infantry pams to sort out assault formations and worked out SOPs for these. Training was done on the Parade Ground [the carriers had not arrived], with drivers walking one pace left front of their crew commanders as formations were changed on the approach to the objective, ending up in the assault formation. We even discussed (and eventually practised) things like rear rally positions in which we expected to wait to pick up the infantry again. It caused considerable mirth amongst 1 Armd [Regiment] soldiers watching these antics on their Parade Ground, but it is possible to learn the basics of APC work in such a manner.³⁴

As the elder Moltke reminds us, ‘no plan survives contact with the enemy’. Moreover, any plan can just as easily be changed by your own friends as by the enemy! It is not too much to say that every single person had his own Vietnam War. Every infantry CO in Vietnam was different, which affected the expectation he had of support from tanks or APCs. Every infantry battalion had its own distinctive SOPs. Some swept (i.e. fought through) the killing area at night after an enemy clash; others did not. Every APC and tank commander in the chain, down to crew commander, had to be a diplomat of sorts! The verities you learnt in your own corps training often had to be modified to suit different circumstances and personalities. On the basis that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, how well did armour perform in Vietnam?

On the whole, given the original lack of systematic combined arms training, equipment teething problems, and the ‘trickle’ system of reinforcement, to name some of the variables, I believe it was of a high order. That view was reinforced to me by a

33. Interview and correspondence, Hagerty/Coates, 25 September 2002.

34. Correspondence and interview, Watts/Coates, 25-7 September 2002.

number of infantry commanding officers to whom I spoke either then or since, and by four commanders of IATF. A lot depended on the armoured OC and the standards he set within his own organisation.³⁵ Only a very few infantrymen had the sort of inbuilt prejudice about armour that I referred to at the beginning of this paper. After Vietnam, even that had all but disappeared. Most realised that at the end of the day, the armoured commander was in the business of ‘selling’ added security, and the best COs in Vietnam welcomed every bit of added security and support they could get. Some COs were more aggressive about bringing the enemy to battle than others. They were the easiest to deal with. Some fought to have particular troop leaders working with them and for them all the time, others were happy to accept whomever they were sent. I tried to make attachments as semi-permanent as they could be, I believe most of my fellow OCs did the same.

Both tanks and APCs became highly proficient at certain types of operations, and worked out their own squadron SOPs, frequently in conjunction with the battalion they were supporting. The tank’s relative invulnerability was great against bunkers. Indeed, in a statistically supported study of 161 engagements in Vietnam that involved fighting against enemy in prepared defences—especially bunkers—the greatest difference, both in lowering friendly casualties while massively increasing enemy casualties, was brought about by the employment of tanks.³⁶ Again, tanks were unmatched against massed attacks and, even in relatively tough terrain like around the foot of the Long Hai Hills, they were able to move and fight successfully. Further, because the principal Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army tactic was to ‘hug’ their opponents to inhibit their use of artillery or gun-ships, the introduction of the tanks into Phuoc Tuy province provided the shock action, mobility and direct fire means to act as a force multiplier. Formerly, the enemy broke contact when it liked and in circumstances favourable to itself: the tanks vastly complicated the enemy’s design, and helped change the nature

35. Brigadier Alex Smith, a Duntroon classmate who also commanded in Vietnam made a sincere and revealing comment about the quality of his fellow armoured OCs: ‘We trained a lot didn’t we [at 1st Armoured Regiment]. Above all, we learned a lot about use of ground, firepower and manoeuvre, and I believe that that was invaluable to our later applications and our reputation, and to each of us in individual development. I find it hard to nominate any RAAC Sqn Comd in SVN who had not had extensive training. I can also recall, along the way, comments at Tac 3s, non corps courses etc that RAAC officers were well trained. Per-capita the career success rate of RAAC Officers was impressive, in itself positive to armour’s cause.’ Correspondence and interview Smith/Coates 18-26 September 2002.

36. In attacks against heavily defended bunker systems without the support of other arms, the loss rate inflicted on the enemy was 1.6 casualties per attack, whereas the Australian infantry’s loss rate per attack was 4.25 casualties; i.e. substantially higher than the enemy’s. In attacks in which the Australian infantry were supported by Air and/or Artillery, the enemy loss rate rose from 1.6 to 3.5 while the Australian loss rate declined from 4.25 to 3.8. However, in those attacks in which Armour was used with or without Air/Artillery, the Australian loss rate dropped from 3.8 to 3.3, while the rate of casualties inflicted on the enemy leapt from 3.5 to 15.6 per attack. In short, Armour (especially tanks) saves friendly casualties, while dramatically increasing those inflicted on the enemy. R. Hall and A. Ross, ‘Attacks on Prepared Defended Positions by Units of the First Australian Task Force 1966 to 1971’ (unpub ms, ADFA, 2002).

of the battlefield.³⁷ Their success brought accolades from the infantry they supported. Second-Lieutenant Kevin Byrne described the tank support he received at the Song Ca not long before IATF withdrew from operations:

Once they entered the battle area they were very effective. But as they came forward between us all they were pushing down trees that had the effect of camouflaging the enemy and the bunkers ... I remember [Lieutenant] Bruce Cameron getting out of his tank or attempting to get out the first time and an RPG-7 whistled past his ear and down he went again. Eventually he got out and jumped down and came and spoke to me on the ground and so that was excellent. The other thing was that they had a tremendous shock effect, particularly when they put their barrel down a bunker and went kaboom! And also in driving over bunkers. The end result was fantastic I guess and we made the most in that situation with that troop of tanks and their cooperation was tremendous. The movement of the platoon was dictated largely by where the three tanks went and that's the way I played it. It was futile for me to be dictating the movement of the tanks because once the tanks came in I realised that they were the ones that were vulnerable but they were also the ones that had the firepower'.³⁸

The APCs learnt the technique of ambushing using three or four vehicles and 30 or 40 claymore mines and had some spectacular successes.³⁹ Both tanks and cavalry had forces on two-three minute standby as ready reaction forces, and prided themselves on their ability to get on the move quickly. They were used a lot. The simple instructions you usually gave your ready reaction troop leader were, 'get on the move north, south, east, or west (the actual roads or tracks were predesignated in our own SOPs), I will give you orders as you go!' His maps and codes were already in the vehicles which reversed quickly away from their protective bunds and got going.⁴⁰

As well as firepower and protection, great use was made of their flexibility and communications. Armoured communications, particularly with the new range of American radios we absorbed in Vietnam, were superb. I was continually monitoring

37. This basic premise is condensed from Major General Tim Vincent's original paper, asking for tanks to be despatched to South Vietnam as soon as possible, AWM98, Item R579/1/23, Request for an increase to AFV (Army Component), 22 June 1967. I believe it has contemporary relevance to the new spate of asymmetric warfare.

38. McKay and Nicholas, *Jungle Tracks*, 192-3.

39. Sergeant E.S. Levy, DCM, who as a crew commander had been wounded by shrapnel on an earlier tour, became highly skilled at ambushing as a section commander on his second tour. In a series of ambushes on 31 December 1970, 7 January 1971, and 21 June 1971, his APCs killed 21 enemy, then three, then twelve, and captured four prisoners together with documents and other intelligence: Anderson, *When the Scorpion Stings*, 251, 267-8.

40. *Ibid.*, 241-4.

five different radio nets in my own carrier. Among other things, they induced a totally new state of mind in the army. How quickly people overcome differences and adjusted to the hothouse circumstances of Vietnam can be gauged from this description by a sergeant in charge of three carriers:

Due east of Long Tan, up the track, was a feature we called the ‘Twin Tits’. A big shitfight developed: canister, 90mm, RPGs, blow for blow, hitting tanks and hitting APCs and an APC was hit right in front. It stuffs up the engine; the driver was wounded in the head. The tanks would fire and an RPG would fire and [the enemy] traded blow for blow with the tanks and APCs which weren’t giving up at all and the VC weren’t running away. We formed up and assaulted through and I said to my driver, ‘Anyone in those bunkers?’ He said ‘No.’ I looked out the back and there were bastards coming out of their holes like rats and we were right behind the tanks! So we assaulted right in and we caught them on top. It was a classic tank in fire support, APC and grunt contact, brilliant. Meanwhile, we recovered that damaged vehicle ... that afternoon and, out of the mist the next morning, [comes] the same APC—the driver with a bandage round his head flapping in the breeze. The vehicle had been cleaned, steam-cleaned out, new power pack, test driven, everything cleaned up, but still with a hole in it. The crew showered and shaved and were now back! Not even first light and by themselves.⁴¹

Conclusion

As a personal generalisation, I believe that the Vietnam War was the key watershed in the Australian Army’s post-Second World War professional life. We went into the conflict half-trained and inadequately prepared: we emerged from it better than we had ever been, and with a professional edge that, arguably, we have never lost. For example, I do not believe that General Peter Cosgrove’s judgements would have been as well informed in East Timor had he not had Vietnam experience.

As Santayana reminded us, ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’⁴² If we had to do it again would we do it the same way? I hope not. First, we need to keep pursuing and practising ‘all arms’ doctrine, not just in theory, but on the ground. The penalty if we do not is that we just continue to re-invent the wheel! Second, I believe it is a fundamental mistake for so called military analysts and other soothsayers to speak loosely in terms of deploying ‘an infantry battalion’ overseas: it

41. McKay and Nicholas, *Jungle Tracks*, 166. Sergeant J.T. ‘Blue’ O’Reilly was on his second tour as a cavalry section commander. He later became an officer.

42. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 284.

must be a combined arms team, complete with two types of armour, up to three types of artillery if necessary, combat engineers, and its own slice of aviation support. If the potential opposition is so innocuous not to require that, we should re-think sending a military force at all: a force of police and/or civilians is far cheaper. Third, we cannot afford to be as secretive about a potential deployments as we were in the case of sending the tanks to Vietnam. I realise politicians are not easily moved on this subject, but, for the CO of the 1st Armoured Regiment and his earmarked squadron commander to learn of their commitment to Vietnam on the ABC news, suggests strongly that we, the army, connived at the process ourselves, even if inadvertently. Fourth, would we 'trickle' again: my answer would be no. But we would need to know much more about the potential task and have thought through the training variables beforehand. It should not be beyond our intelligence specialists and combat analysts to put us in that position.

The Development of Australian Army Tactical Doctrine During the Vietnam War

Richard Bushby

Military doctrine provides one of the essential touchstones in the functioning of any military organisation. Alongside tradition and history, doctrine provides one of the most concrete expressions of an army's *raison d'être*, and thus defines many of the organisation's professional characteristics. Major General J.F.C. Fuller observed that 'the central idea of an army is regarded as its doctrine, which to be sound must be based upon the principles of war, and to be effective must be elastic enough to admit of mutation in accordance with circumstance'.¹

This essay is concerned with the Australian Army's tactical doctrine during the Vietnam War, the published expression of which was the *Division in Battle* series of pamphlets issued in 1965.² Because the body of doctrine with which the war was fought was written prior to the Army's commitment to Vietnam, it was designed to cover a range of scenarios, locations and types of operations, and not just, or even primarily, those conditions found in Vietnam. However, as a result of six and a half years of continuous military involvement in Vietnam, much of the army came to equate doctrine with the methods of operation employed in Vietnam. What they in fact had seen was the evolution of doctrine into tactics and techniques specifically adapted for the local conditions they faced.

The widely varying nature of operations conducted by the Australian Army during its six and a half year presence in Vietnam provided some inherently contradictory experiences. Indeed, former commanding officers of Vietnam War era battalions drawn together at the Infantry Centre in 1972 commented that:

The Australian war in Vietnam was unusual in that it gave us five periods of 12 months in which the nature and pattern of operations was so varied that it is

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1. Major General J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Art and Science of War* (1926), quoted in Peter Tsouras, *Warrior's Words: A Quotation Book* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992), 146.
 2. Military Board, *The Division in Battle*, Pamphlets Nos 1-11 (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1965).

difficult to produce lessons with broad application to either counter revolutionary warfare or limited war.³

As a consequence of this there are many contradictions in operational methods, experiences and lessons learnt. Resolution of these contradictions and thus the ability to make sense of doctrinal development requires an understanding of the relationship between the Army's doctrine and the following three points: first, the legacy of the Malayan Emergency, an influence that had a profound shaping effect on army doctrine; second, the influence of American commanders whose view of the war sometimes differed significantly from that of the Australians; and third, the role of changing and differing perceptions of Australia's role on the part of our own national commanders. Some of these factors shaped the operational methods and employment of the Task Force while others produced purely technical difficulties to be overcome. Critically, this also demonstrates the cascading influence that a nation's higher strategy has upon minor level operations on the ground. This essay aims to chart some of the shaping forces on the Army's doctrine during the war and describe how the operations of the Task Force's units reflected the influences of these competing focuses.

While this essay deals specifically with the Vietnam War, Vietnam provides only an overarching framework and some historical examples. In a broader sense it is also about the process of tactical dynamism and evolution that occurs in units at war and it demonstrates the importance of context and analysis in the process of doctrinal development. It is this application of context and the intellectual rigour it requires that makes this process very different from simple observation and comment. More importantly though, once this process is understood it permits application irrespective of nationality, time, theatre of operation or mode of conflict.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950 Australia was one of the first nations to pledge its support to the fledgling United Nations' effort to defend the Republic of Korea. Doctrinally, the Australian Army was engaged in a conventional conflict in rugged, mountainous terrain that contributed little to the subsequent development of small unit operations and counter revolutionary warfare concepts that would begin to dominate the Army's thinking in the late 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Despite this, the Korean War served as the first real operational experience for many of the commanders who would later lead battalions in the Vietnam War and gave this generation of commanders their first experience in the application and adaptation of tactical doctrine.⁵ They gained first hand

3. SO1(GS) Directorate of Infantry, *Infantry Battalion Lessons From Vietnam* (Ingleburn: Infantry Centre, 1972), 1.

4. Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 150.

5. Interview, Major General R.A. Grey, Canberra, 29 April 1997.

experience of the changes to tactics, staff procedures, unit establishments and sub-unit employment that characterised the dynamic process of tactical development by units at war.⁶

The decision to send troops to Malaya in 1955 reinvigorated interest in jungle warfare in Australia and placed jungle fighting back at the forefront of Australian doctrinal thinking. Again, the Australian Army had no specific body of doctrine to apply to the situation found in Malaya, and Australians were forced to rely upon the British pamphlet, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations In Malaya (ATOM)*.⁷

The ATOM pamphlet recognised the need for an essentially new type of warfare. In addition to recognising the long known effect of jungle conditions on troop mobility, weapon effect, ranges etc, it also outlined the requirements to defeat an insurgent enemy rather than a conventional one.⁸ At the level of small unit tactical doctrine it was a very frustrating period for troops involved in the procedures and drills of deep jungle patrolling, but searches of villages, jungle navigation, contact and counter-ambush drills, harbour routines and employment of jungle bases all introduced the army to valuable skills that were to be adapted later in Vietnam.⁹

While operations in Malaya provided a valuable basis for the development of Australian doctrine, they also provided several misleading experiences that confounded the development of Australian tactics for some time, for many of the techniques employed there were relevant only to that theatre and were based upon a specific level of operational intensity that did not necessarily apply elsewhere. For example, little emphasis was placed on the employment of fire support to support infantry operations. For example such fire support as was available was frequently limited to those areas served by roads or motorable tracks, or was so inaccurate that it could not be employed closer than 500m from friendly troops.¹⁰ In a theatre where visibility was frequently measured in yards and where contact occurred at similar ranges Malaya provided few worthwhile lessons on the integrated and co-ordinated employment of fire support that would later become so necessary in Vietnam.

The end of the Malayan Emergency in 1960 marked a watershed for the Australian Army. With no war to fight, but with the prospect of further regional conflict probable, commanders were forced to determine a new set of priorities and situations upon which

6. Ibid.

7. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, *Emergency and Confrontation: Australian Military Operations in Malaya and Borneo 1950–1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1996), 19 and 51.

8. Director of Operations, Malaya, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 1958, ch. 3. 16.

9. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 6.

10. Director of Operations, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 1958, ch. 18.

to base training and doctrine.¹¹

Within the army several different, often contradictory, sources were providing tactical doctrine for counter revolutionary warfare. These included 28th Commonwealth Brigade, DMO&P, HQ Eastern Command and the Infantry Centre, and this explains much of the apparent confusion and contradiction apparent in Australian interpretations of doctrine.¹²

The consequences of this were that while some elements of the army were formulating a concept of operations for counter revolutionary warfare, knowledge of developments in doctrinal concepts was limited to a small circle of officers involved intimately with the production of such doctrine. This explains part of the apparent contradiction between the seemingly high levels of understanding of the requirements of counter revolutionary warfare displayed by the organisations mentioned above, and those sections of the army not connected with doctrinal development.

The dalliance with Pentropic ended in January 1965,¹³ and the army was again faced with the necessity of redrafting its doctrine. *The Pentropic Division in Battle* was replaced with the *Division in Battle*, while the former's *Counter Insurgency* pamphlet was replaced with the latter's *Counter Revolutionary Warfare*. Published along side the new doctrine were *Patrolling and Tracking* (1965) and *Ambush and Counter Ambush* (1965) written to provide doctrine on the core sub-unit skills common to either counter revolutionary warfare or limited war.¹⁴

Within the army's field force units, exercises and training, especially for the infantry battalions, had embraced counter revolutionary warfare concepts and practices with growing enthusiasm. Despite this, several factors which influenced the conduct of training would have consequences on operations in Vietnam. In November 1963 the 1st Task Force, comprising the IRAR (Pentropic) battle group, exercised in a counter revolutionary warfare environment for the first time. The exercise followed the basic tactical concept for deployment of Australian forces to Southeast Asia, revealing much about the way in which army planners envisaged forces being committed to that theatre. The task force was required to establish a forward base on a high plateau and to patrol outward to form a controlled area, precisely the concept that would be employed by the 1st Australian Task Force during Operation HARDIHOOD three years later.¹⁵ While Exercise SKY

11. Summary of Conference Minutes: 18 May 1962 Review of Tactical Doctrine, Concept of Operations South Vietnam, CRS A6059/2, 40/441/19, Australian War Memorial. (All CRS files referred to hereinafter are held in the Australian War Memorial.)

12. Draft Operational Concept 1966-1970, Combat Development Policy, CRS A6059/2, 41/441/135, Minute, Summary of Conference Minutes: 18 May 1962. Review of Tactical Doctrine, Concept of Operations South Vietnam CRS A6059/2, 40/441/19.

13. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 22.

14. Interview, Grey, Canberra, 29 April 1997.

15. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 19.

HIGH was a success, it revealed a preoccupation with the role of the infantry and a limited ability to manage the dispersed combined arms aspects of counter revolutionary warfare operations that would become so important in Vietnam. For example, artillery units were not practised at deploying and re-deploying in and out of fire support bases, nor were engineers exercised in operating as splinter teams or mini teams.¹⁶

Many of the reasons for this lack of combined arms training can be traced to SEATO and Commonwealth Brigade assumptions about the terrain over which a future war would be fought. The similarities between SEATO exercise scenarios and exercises such as SKY HIGH indicate that the field force in Australia was drawing much of its guidance on the planning of exercises from the type of scenarios played out in SEATO and British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve training. The situation anticipated by the army saw Australian forces deployed to a highland plateau region within Southeast Asia.¹⁷ The perceived implications of this were a requirement to operate on the lightest possible scales of equipment and support, relying almost totally on re-supply by air. The implications of this fed a belief that artillery would be cut to between 25 and 50 per cent of establishment and that offensive air support would have to make up the difference, and that air portability, mountainous terrain and the tropical monsoon would preclude the employment of armour.¹⁸

If any criticism can be made of any of the doctrinal products of this period it is that they did not bring out fully the subtle changes which had occurred in doctrinal thinking. The army had become comfortable with a number of concepts and phrases as a result of its recent counter revolutionary warfare experience. Thinking about the issues involved in deep patrolling, cordon and search and framework operations can all be traced back to *ATOM*, yet by 1965 the terms, although still in general use, had developed significantly different meanings.

The period encompassing the operational deployment of the 1RAR Battalion Group in 1965-66 highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the army's preparation for the Vietnam War. While Australia and the United States had been allies since the Second World War, Australian military thinking on counter revolutionary warfare was based firmly upon British lessons and experience, and upon Australian experience within a British framework. 1RAR's deployment was within the American 173rd Airborne Brigade,¹⁹ necessitating the assumption of roles and tasks commensurate with its position as an integral element of an American brigade.²⁰

16. *Ibid.*, 20.

17. Concept of Operations in South Vietnam with Light Scales Vehicles and Equipment, CRS A6059/2, 40/441/19.

18. 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Group Training Instruction No 2/6, CRS A6059/2, 65/441/167.

19. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 86.

20. *Ibid.*, 89.

The American forces operational concept presupposed numerous operations of short duration over a large area to find the enemy and bring them to battle.²¹ The slow, deliberate patrolling operations and painstaking searching of ground learnt in the Malayan Emergency were foreign to US methods of operation and US forces viewed the pacification operations that had been so vital in Malaya as of secondary importance to finding the enemy main force units. The pace and scale of US operations precluded the employment of many of the Australian battalion's greatest strengths, namely silent patrolling, ambushing and searching. The aggressive American methods were perhaps not unreasonable given the precarious military situation within South Vietnam at that time, but they certainly unsettled Australian commanders and placed them on notice that they were now part of a very different kind of war from that for which they had prepared.²²

An analysis of the changes to tactics and techniques within the battalion was made by its officers upon return to Australia and highlighted four main areas that underwent change or required new methods to be developed: airmobile planning; patrolling; employment of fire support; and low level tactics.²³

Helicopters provided the primary form of mobility for the brigade's operations. While not new to the Australian Army, the employment of helicopters in Vietnam was on a scale never before witnessed in Australia. The battalion had to learn to cope with the increases in air mobility that allowed large numbers of troops to be airborne at any one time, with the capacity to land in sizeable elements within minutes of one another. The 1RAR notes on operations were intended to enable officers to benefit from recent operational experience when interpreting existing doctrine.²⁴ The development of emplaning and deplaning drills, LZ (Landing Zone) rally procedures, the refinement of the use of indirect fire support and offensive air support in LZ preparation and the development of effective command, control and liaison procedures all allowed commanders to make best use of the flexibility inherent in airmobile operations.²⁵ This was not such a problem for soldiers at the junior level on the ground but it proved to be a major consideration for staff planners, becoming a contributing factor in the introduction of the battalion operations officer to replace the adjutant as the commanding officer's principal staff officer in the headquarters.

21. Address to CGS Exercise 1966 Lieutenant Colonel I. Brumfield and Lieutenant Colonel A. Preece, AWM 102 Box 1[2].

22. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 172.

23. Directorate of Military Training, Training Information Bulletin Number 11: 'Lessons From Operations in Vietnam By 1 RAR' (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1966), 1-37.

24. *Ibid.*, 2.

25. *Ibid.*

On arrival in Vietnam 1RAR was not fully prepared for the techniques of planning air support and had only limited knowledge of the use of artillery.²⁶ This gave rise to several changes in techniques and methods both within the battalion's headquarters and on the ground with the rifle companies. The legacy of Pentropic, SEATO-based concepts on pre-deployment combined arms training has been noted earlier, and it was this, combined with the speed and secrecy that surrounded 1RAR's deployment that contributed to the generally low standard of preparation evident in fire control procedures.²⁷ In addition, the amount of fire support available to 1RAR from US sources was on a scale never before experienced in Australia. The combined use of the battalion's mortars, the direct support field battery, US medium guns, helicopter gunships and offensive air support by tactical fighters required a level of co-ordination and orchestration never before experienced in Australia even on recent overseas deployments. The solution lay in the development of the Fire Planning Group consisting of the key staff of the headquarters.²⁸ These individuals worked in concert to solve the significant problems inherent in the provision of fire support, intelligence and air clearance.²⁹ While on operations the resolution of these problems was the responsibility of the newly-created fire control centre (FCC), run primarily by the direct support battery commander and the mortar platoon commander. While the FCC was co-located with the battalion command post and provided communication, liaison and control for all the battalion's supporting fire it was not yet incorporated as an integral component of the headquarters and required either field telephone or radio communications to pass information.³⁰ Refinements of this system would come later in the army's commitment to Vietnam.

On the ground, the provision of fire support also caused some particular problems which training in Australia had not been able to simulate adequately. There had been little realistic demonstration of the effect that types of fire actually produced on differing targets on the ground, nor had the importance of ranging artillery by sound rather than by sight in the close confines of the jungle been demonstrated adequately.³¹ Additionally, some minor differences in artillery signal and technical gunnery procedures unsettled some Australian commanders.

26. TIB No 11, 'Lessons From Operations in Vietnam By 1RAR', 19.

27. Robert Breen, 'Problems of An Expeditionary Force—First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment in 1965', *Defence Force Journal* 60 (September/ October 1986), 30.

28. TIB No 11, 'Lessons From Operations in Vietnam By 1RAR', 18.

29. *Ibid.*, 19.

30. *Ibid.*, 18.

31. *Ibid.*, 19. One assessment noted it as being between 20-80 per cent effective, depending on local circumstance: Address to CGS Exercise 1966 Lieutenant Colonel I. Brumfield and Lieutenant Colonel A. Preece, AWM 102 Box 1[2].

Such differences in operating methods and aspects of tactics as existed, were simply concrete expressions of a much higher-level divergence of perspective on how the war should be conducted.³² While minor problems in tactical methods were usually able to be reconciled sufficiently to permit effective operational performance, general Australian principles on the conduct of a counter revolutionary warfare campaign—such as population control and civic action—were not easily adapted to fit in with American higher strategy for the prosecution of the war.

From a national perspective the success with which 1RAR integrated into a larger national force so quickly and effectively was a credit to the unit, but despite this the experience of working alongside the Americans during 1965-66 had profound effects upon the development of Australian tactical methods in subsequent years. The resolution of some of these problems through, for example, the creation of the fire co-ordination centre and some others, remained with the army for the whole of its commitment to Vietnam while others, such as coping with American artillery procedures and patrol methods diminished in importance with the deployment of an independent task force.

In some respects the sharply differing nature of American and Australian tactics served to focus and clarify counter revolutionary warfare doctrine within Australia. Even though American big-unit warfare surprised and unsettled the Australians at the time, with the benefit of hindsight some officers are more sanguine about the battalion's experiences.³³ The style of war with which the Australians were presented forced them to confront weaknesses in their training and organisation far more quickly than might have been necessary had Australian methods alone been employed. Critically, after several years of reliance upon theory, the Australian Army's enemy now had concrete form and substance. Various papers written by the officers of the battalion were disseminated around the army and served to inform and interpret existing doctrine, while other procedures which had no existing parallel, such as the battalion's techniques of airmobile command and control, were adopted in their entirety to form the basis of the fledgling task force's standing operating procedures.

The decision to increase the Australian presence in Vietnam to an independent Task Force would allow Australia to make a significant and identifiable contribution to the war, and adopt roles and tasks more suited to the employment of Australian doctrine.³⁴ While this did occur, it became quickly apparent that again, Australian operations were to reflect the changing priorities and focus of both national and US commanders.

32. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 120.

33. Interview, MacFarlane, Canberra, 11 June 1997; McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 172.

34. David Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1986), 12.

In broad terms the Task Force had two main tasks, the first being to conduct operations to destroy or at least neutralise the enemy main and regional forces, and the second to dismantle the Viet Cong infrastructure within the villages.³⁵ These tasks required considerably different approaches, and as a result, the army would face a situation in which its operational methods were hamstrung by the pressure of operational necessity and by an unrealistic assignment of roles.³⁶

It quickly became apparent that within these roles the Task Force would be called upon to perform four main tasks, all different. First, the Task Force would be responsible for maintaining the security of its base area through intensive patrolling. Second, it had within its assigned role the dominance of its Tactical Area of Responsibility within the province; this included a requirement to conduct highway security operations on Route 15 within the boundaries of the province. Third, it was to assist with pacification operations within Phuoc Tuy as required. Finally, it was to be available to conduct operations anywhere within III CTZ.³⁷ The Task Force faced enormous difficulty in attempting to meet these varied tasks. In response, the commanders of the units within 1ATF refined and developed tactical methods in the conduct of search and destroy operations and cordon and search tasks as well as base security.

Initial clearing operations around Nui Dat out to Line Alpha, Operation HARDIHOOD,³⁸ owed much of their conception to the pre-war Exercise SKY HIGH conducted in 1963, hardly surprising given that the initial Task Force Commander, Brigadier O.D. Jackson, had been Director of Infantry at the time.³⁹ Furthermore this operation reflected general army planning for the introduction of a task force sized group to counter an insurgency in Southeast Asia.⁴⁰

This plan had never envisaged a task force having to simultaneously hold a land base and conduct operations in depth. Consequently initial holdings of defensive stores, communications equipment and machine guns were strained severely and battalions were forced to leave machine guns behind when on patrol to protect the task force base.⁴¹

The limited resources of the Task Force meant that only one battalion could be deployed away from the base on extended operations at any one time, while the other was tied down on close protection patrols and manning the defensive positions of the

35. Lecture by Brigadier S.C. Graham, Brisbane 1968, on '1ATF Operations in South Vietnam', copy in author's possession.

36. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War*, 28-9.

37. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 238.

38. Commander's Diary, 1 HQ 1ATF, May 1966, OPLAN HARDIHOOD, AWM 95 1/4/1.

39. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 18.

40. Concept of Operations—South Vietnam, CRS A6059/2 40/441/19.

41. Robert O'Neill, 'Australian Military Problems in Vietnam', *Australian Outlook* 23: 1 (1969), 51.

base area.⁴² When deployed away from the Task Force base, the tactics developed reflect much of the uncertainty and hesitancy which characterised this period. Unlike later periods of operations, search and destroy tasks were conducted at battalion level, with units assigned relatively small areas in which to search, precluding free ranging, dispersed operations. During this period artillery support was mandatory for all operations, due to an understandable unwillingness to be left without fire support if a large encounter with a still relatively unknown enemy occurred,⁴³ and calling for artillery became a standard procedure within the task force as soon as contact with an enemy was made.⁴⁴

The pattern of searching resembled that developed by 1RAR during 1965-1966, with companies employing either a patrol base from which platoon patrols could be sent, or a patrol route which allowed a whole company to search across a wide frontage. Patrol bases were not occupied for more than six to eight hours which was a significant departure from past Australian experience and doctrine and serves to highlight the caution that limited intelligence forced upon the battalion sub-unit tactics.⁴⁵

During the latter part of 1966 the pressure on the Task Force of maintaining search and destroy operations lessened, as the Task Force grew more confident in its ability to ensure the security of the base area and to deal effectively with the threat posed by the main force units. This convinced the task force commander to allow the Commanding Officer of 5RAR, Lieutenant Colonel John Warr, to begin a campaign targeting the Viet Cong infrastructure within the villages.⁴⁶

Several operations conducted during this period developed skills relating to night movement prior to the closing of the cordon, population control, command and control within the battalion and the development of a considerably more complex and effective screening and interrogation facility.⁴⁷ Much of the success of later operations in identifying enemy cadres was owed in part to these refinements and many were later incorporated into standing operating procedures.⁴⁸

42. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 250-60.

43. Commander's Diary, HQ 1ATF, July 1966, 1ATF Operational Analysis July 1966, AWM 95 1/4/5.

44. Commander's Diary, HQ 1ATF, August 1966, 1ATF Operational Analysis August 1966, AWM 95 1/4/7.

45. Commander's Diary, 5RAR, July 1966, Sub-Unit Operational Analysis—Operation SYDNEY, AWM 95 7/5/6 Part 2.

46. Commander's Diary, HQ 1ATF, September 1966, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation HOLSWORTHY, AWM 95 1/4/12 Part 1. During Operation HOLSWORTHY in August 1966 the battalion had cordoned the town of Binh Ba and rendered the village guerrilla platoon ineffective, during which time the Australians had been employed for one day and not fired a shot. The resulting seventeen Viet Cong captured during this operation would normally have required months of patrolling and searching before anything approaching this type of success could be expected.

47. Commander's Diary, 5RAR, September 1966, 'A' Company Sub-unit Operational Analysis Report—Operation SYDNEY, AWM 95 7/5/6 Part 2.

48. John Warr, 'Cordon and Search Operations in Phuoc Tuy Province', *Australian Army Journal* 222 (November 1967), 3-31.

Similar advances were made in the searching of villages and the clearing of fortified positions. 1RAR's commanding officer noted after Operation CRIMP in January 1966 that improved methods of tunnel search and clearance and demolition of bunkers and caches were required from the engineers supporting battalion operations, and by June 1966 Operation ENOGERA demonstrated that such developments had taken place. This operation was aimed at destroying the tunnels and fortifications beneath the now deserted village of Long Phuoc, and to achieve this 6RAR was allocated the whole of 1 Field Squadron RAE in support.⁴⁹ While engineer support was lavish, it had not yet perfected the techniques of employing sappers in small, dispersed groups.

This was the situation that existed by the beginning of 1967, and January 1967 brought a number of changes within the task force. This period also saw the hand-over of command of the Task Force from Brigadier Jackson to Brigadier Graham, and the new commander would develop an operational plan which took advantage of the advances already made in province security and one based upon much greater levels of intelligence than had been available to his predecessor. The result of this was a renewed emphasis on specifically targeted search operations that applied pressure to the Viet Cong village infrastructure.⁵⁰

Despite the new direction which the Task Force commander was anxious to pursue, the Americans still believed that pacification was a task better left to the South Vietnamese. While the Australians may have wished to spend more time on pacification operations, in line with their doctrine and experience, the Task Force commander could hardly deny that conducting large scale operations alongside the Americans fell within the tasks assigned to the Australians. The problems faced when attempting to operate according to the tenets of national doctrine by a Task Force that was too small to encompass all the operational requirements of the force were well illustrated.⁵¹

Following the resumption of sweep operations, 7RAR—one of the two newly rotated battalions within the Task Force—was forced to develop several new techniques for the command and control of large-scale operations and the co-ordination of fire support. As a result of his experiences during the New Guinea campaign within the 2nd AIF the CO (Lieutenant Colonel E.H. Smith) held the effectiveness of supporting fires in high regard.⁵² In consequence 7RAR tended to employ fire support to a greater degree than other battalions, and developed some unusual SOPs and techniques to facilitate its use.⁵³

49. Commander's Diary, HQ 1ATF, August 1966, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation ENOGERA, AWM 95 1/4/8.

50. Lecture by Brigadier S.C. Graham, Brisbane 1968, on 1ATF Operation in South Vietnam.

51. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War*, 30.

52. Interview, Colonel E.H. Smith, 31 July 1997, Canberra.

53. *Ibid.*

These developments, along with several others involving the employment of the battalion's mortar platoon, had been discussed in one of 6RAR's after action reports the previous year.⁵⁴ Smith had access to both 5RAR's and 6RAR's after action reports while preparing 7RAR for overseas service,⁵⁵ and had noted the utility of mortars at platoon and company level during the Korean War.

It is clear that the desire to employ Australian operational methods and doctrine was a prime factor in the decision to expand Australia's commitment in Vietnam to an independent task force. Despite this the first year and a half of operations in Phuoc Tuy province were a frustrating mix of successful pacification tasks and often fruitless operations in depth, many of which were instigated by the Americans. In response to these competing demands, the thinly-stretched and often over-worked units of the Task Force were compelled to adapt existing operational methods to fit the reality of the tasks assigned to them. What this period displays most clearly is the effect which a higher commander's intentions have upon tactics at even the most basic level. The Australians were never forced to abandon the central tenets of their doctrine, namely methodical searching and population control, but the ubiquitous influence of the Americans stretched Australian desires to maintain their own unique doctrine almost to breaking point on some occasions.

Between early 1968 and mid 1969 1ATF was involved in a range of operations that differed significantly from those that had gone before.⁵⁶ This period, in contrast to those before it, produced a situation where tactical development was driven now by purely technical factors.

The 'out of province' years provided two very different ranges of experience. On one hand, the increased intensity of the war forced onto commanders at all levels a requirement to develop a range of new measures in bunker tactics, improvements to armoured/infantry cooperation and the practice of defensive tactics, while on the other hand something very different occurred concurrently within the battalions. In addition to the major developments outlined above, minor yet continuous improvements and changes occurred in core counter revolutionary warfare skills such as cordon and search, reconnaissance in force, ambushing, and convoy protection. The development of the core skills in the first phase of the Task Force's operations represented a period during which the Army consolidated the lessons learnt from pre-deployment exercises and initial operations. The lessons learnt during the out of province years, on the other hand, forced the Task Force to relearn and reapply skills that had been outside the Army's range of experience and training for some time.

54. Commander's Diary, HQ 1ATF, August 1966, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation HOBART I, AWM 95 1/4/11.

55. Interview, Smith, 31 July 1997, Canberra.

Most infantry battalions, with the notable exception of those deployed in 1966–67, accumulated a wide range of experience in attacking bunker systems in close country.⁵⁷ The bunker system was generally not well understood initially by most levels of command and was one aspect of operations in Vietnam on which no emphasis had been placed during training prior to deployment.⁵⁸ The concept of attacking a strong point or defended locality was described in the relevant training pamphlet,⁵⁹ but despite this practical experience of these skills had not been a feature of Australian counter revolutionary warfare experience. For this reason it was accorded no priority in training, and in this the Malayan Emergency was clearly important in shaping perceptions of how the enemy would behave when confronted in his base areas. *Counter Revolutionary Warfare* stated that ‘the enemy is likely to disperse at the first threat’, and used this assertion as a basis for employing encircling tactics when confronting the enemy in a static location such as a camp.⁶⁰

By contrast, confronting the enemy in his base areas in Vietnam was likely to provoke extremely heavy and aggressive defence that resulted in the fiercest of contacts, causing at least one officer to question the efficiency of their pre-deployment preparation.⁶¹ Attacks on defended strong points had been a tactical method employed by Australian troops in every war this century, and in an article published after the return of IRAR from their second tour one of the company commanders pointed out correctly that in bunker fighting, ‘hard won experiences gained in war are often forgotten in peace only to be relearned by bitter experience’.⁶² His assertion is particularly pointed when we consider that almost all the bunker fighting tactics that developed in Vietnam were broadly similar to those techniques developed in other theatres of other wars.

One of the disadvantages inherent in the basic tactical sub-unit, the rifle platoon, was that it lacked organic explosive firepower. The Viet Cong made effective use of RPGs and automatic weapons to produce an enormous volume of fire on contact; in contrast the Australian platoon, conditioned by the experiences of the Malayan Emergency, placed heavy emphasis on the use of single, well aimed shots or quick double taps.⁶³ This attitude

57. Directorate of Infantry, *Infantry Battalion Lessons From Vietnam*, 35.

58. Major A. W. Hammett, ‘More About Bunkers’, *Infantry Magazine* (Directorate of Infantry, Ingleburn, September 1970), 8; Directorate of Infantry, *Infantry Battalion Lessons From Vietnam*, 21.

59. Military Board, *Infantry Training*, vol. 4, pt 2, *The Platoon* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1967), 125.

60. Military Board, *The Division in Battle, Pamphlet 11, Counter Revolutionary Warfare* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1965), 125.

61. Interview, Brigadier C.N. Kahn, Canberra, 22 July 1997.

62. Major A.W. Hammett, ‘The Bunkers of Bullecourt, Buna or Bin-Son’, discussion paper (Terendak Garrison, Malaysia, 1969), 1.

63. A double tap was two rounds fired in quick succession from the standing or kneeling position. The shots were fired instinctively, usually looking over the sights of the weapon rather than through them. While it was effective for engaging fleeting targets it was incapable of producing a sustained volume of fire.

proved to be an inadequate solution to bunkers where the attacking force was required to achieve superiority of fire very quickly. The weakness was particularly apparent to commanding officers who had seen service in the Korean War, where platoons had two light mortars and two 2.5 inch rocket launchers as an integral part of their headquarters.⁶⁴ This problem was not adequately solved until a number of weapons, notably the M79 Light Anti-Armoured Weapon and the rifle-projected M26 Grenade, were introduced into service.⁶⁵ The introduction of these weapons caused an immediate increase in the success of bunker contacts to be noted.⁶⁶

In the assault itself, bunkers presented hitherto unknown complexities for rifle sections. In practice this meant that the combined resources of a whole section were required to destroy a single bunker.⁶⁷ The machine gun team, small arms and M79 grenadiers provided suppressing fire while one or two nominated members crawled forward with rifles and grenades. The importance of careful appreciation of ground and the ability to employ section fire and movement was highlighted during this period. While not new, the tactical lessons of the Malayan Emergency and the early experience of the Task Force's operations prepared soldiers for the fleeting patrol clash type of contact but had not prepared them for the complexities of bunker fighting. The techniques for employing fire and movement correctly were laid out in the relevant training syllabus but recent operational experience had not underpinned the importance of using them.⁶⁸

Undoubtedly the greatest weapon for defeating bunkers was the tank. Despite this, a significant divergence of armoured and infantry tactics had occurred. As an indication of just how much, the radio sets installed in tanks were not compatible with those operated by the infantry,⁶⁹ and this posed particular difficulties when directing fire against targets in bunker contacts. The implications of this for close co-operation were not realised prior to deployment to Vietnam because the infantry were not exposed to tanks as part of their pre-deployment training.⁷⁰ Solutions to the problem varied, and dismounted armoured liaison officers, use of radios when possible and employment of white phosphorous and tracer were all methods employed for indicating enemy locations to tanks.⁷¹ These techniques solved the problems of target indication, but could not be extended to more complex combined arms tasks. It remained difficult to give tanks orders or request advice without reliable radio communications.

64. Interview, Kahn, Canberra, 22 July 1997.

65. Interview, Smith, Canberra, 31 July 1997.

66. Commander's Diary, 5RAR, December 1970, Combat After Action Report—Operation KINGSTON, AWM 95 7/5/December 1970.

67. Hammett, 'The Bunkers of Bullecourt, Buna or Bin-Son', 5.

68. Military Board, *Infantry Training*, vol. 4, pt 2, *The Platoon*, 89-90

69. Military Board, *Armour*, Annex A, Appendix 2.

70. Draft Paper on Combined Arms Warfare Matters presented to the 1971 CGS Exercise by Heads Of Corps, un-accessioned archive document, copy in author's possession, 2.

71. Directorate of Infantry, *Infantry Battalion Lessons From Vietnam*, 42.

As noted already, developments in core techniques of counter revolutionary warfare continued, driven by a combination of enemy action, higher commanders' directives and personal preference on the part of commanders. Patrolling continued to be a feature of operations, but the intent of these patrols changed. The enemy Tet Offensive of 1968 brought an increase in the intensity of the war and with it an increase in the intensity of patrol operations. As a result the Task Force spent large periods of time pursuing the enemy main force units into their base areas and the levels of contact experienced were much more intense, demonstrated by the frequency and intensity of bunker contacts.

In order to meet the demands of intensive patrolling 5RAR altered both its method of patrolling and the employment of its support platoons. In order to cover more ground when patrolling, companies were split in half, and where possible allocated either the anti-armour platoon, tracker platoon or the assault pioneer platoon to give each half company a strength of between two and two-and-a-half platoons.⁷² This type of patrolling was aggressive in the extreme, and on several occasions relatively small forces were able to defeat considerably larger enemy groups with the aid of heavy fire support.⁷³ The commanding officer of at least one battalion was happy to have patrols move out from under the protective umbrella of artillery fire, relying instead on tactical fighters and gunships. This gave him the ability to roam much more freely in pursuit of the enemy without being tied to a radius of a fire support base.

Although problems relating to the role of IATF had been largely resolved by an increase to the task force's manning and by a change in operational concept, past experience, in particular the Malayan Emergency, had narrowed perceptions of what counter revolutionary war would involve and led to a serious decline in some basic military skills. The 'out of province' phase forced some dramatic developments in tactics and techniques which highlighted some of the army's most serious weaknesses and its greatest strengths. While many operations ran counter to the assumptions concerning Australian involvement in a counter revolutionary war, the speed with which solutions to tactical problems, such as bunker fighting and tank co-operation, were developed indicated that experienced commanders were able to draw on a huge range of personal experience once the essence of a tactical problem had been identified. What should have been more worrying for the army was that the importance of most of the skills that were relearned in Vietnam had already been demonstrated in past wars. It appeared that elements of the army were drawing far too heavily on the very recent past rather than on its longer-term institutional memory.

72. Ibid.

73. Commander's Diary, 5RAR, January 1970, Lessons Learnt January 1970, AWM 95 7/5/January 1970.

In mid-1969 1ATF's operational focus shifted for the fourth and final time. The change was heralded by a return to operations within the boundaries of Phuoc Tuy Province and the adoption of three types of tasks: first, pacification; second, to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Regional Force and Popular Force; and third, the continuation of other military operations within Phuoc Tuy Province. This new phase of the war was characterised by small scale ambushes and very small patrols fought in and around the population centres of the province.

In many respects the period between late 1969 and the middle of 1971 may be regarded as the halcyon days of the Task Force's involvement in Vietnam. By this time, operational requirements were matched by capabilities and training almost exactly. For these purposes the experiences of 5RAR, 7RAR and 3RAR demonstrate the significant progression in the development of operational experiences and tactics and techniques that had occurred. These battalions represent three generations of change in experience in Vietnam, for several reasons. First, a link had been established between their respective commanding officers prior to deployment to Vietnam. 5RAR's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Colin Khan, was a classmate and friend of 7RAR's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ron Grey.⁷⁴ Khan wrote extensively to Grey while 5RAR was in Vietnam detailing 5RAR's experiences while on operations and noting the developments the battalion had undergone while in theatre. Grey had found these letters so useful while preparing 7RAR that he insisted his officers write similar letters to 3RAR's officers as well. Second, the Task Force and the Army were badly surprised by the type of activities encountered during the 'out of province' phase. As a result the processes of tactical investigation and development appear to have been stimulated to a greater degree and the formation of the Army Headquarters Battle Analysis Team, in 1969 was a concrete expression of this new attitude.⁷⁵ As a result, the amount of tactical information published and disseminated regularly increased. Finally, when the above two points were combined the preparation of battalions for Vietnam service appears to have been much more closely adapted to meet the likely conditions on the ground in Vietnam than had been the lot of previous units.⁷⁶

A brief examination of 7RAR's preparations helps to illustrate this point. As noted, 7RAR had access to 5RAR's operational summaries and regular letters. The lessons contained within these letters and summaries were distilled and published in the form of a soldier's field handbook and a commander's aide memoir. These documents conveniently

74. Interview, Khan, Canberra, 22 July 1997; interview, Grey, Canberra, 29 April 1997; Michael O'Brien, *Conscripts and Regulars: With the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam 1967-1968 & 1970-1971* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 147.

75. Interview, Colonel A.V. Preece, Canberra, 28 May 1997.

76. Interview, Khan, Canberra, 22 July 1997.

summarised a huge quantity of information otherwise found in several different detailed pamphlets and focused specifically on the upcoming tour in Vietnam.⁷⁷

Tactical training demonstrated a much better understanding of the importance of integrated combined arms support to the infantry battalion than had been the case previously. The Battalion's Direct Support artillery battery was exercised more closely with the unit during its preparation than had previously been the case, and a number of demonstrations were organised to allow officers and NCOs to observe the effects of artillery of a comparable calibre to the US 155mm guns that would support the battalion in Vietnam.⁷⁸ The battalion's final exercise at Shoalwater Bay, COLD STEEL tested the battalion in a much more complete range of tasks in a combined arms environment than previous final exercises had done. COLD STEEL was supported by a complete range of tank, APC artillery, engineer and helicopter assets and included phases of Reconnaissance in Force, the insertion of a blocking force against an enemy attack on a fully developed fire support base, a bunker attack and a cordon and search. These tasks prepared the battalion for a hugely varied range of tasks incorporating all the skills learnt during four and a half years of service.⁷⁹ While some of these issues may seem insignificant, the attention to small details that they represent displays a level of understanding of the smallest technical details of the war in Vietnam which was previously lacking.

Ironically the situation envisaged by COLD STEEL bore little relationship to the type of operations that the battalion conducted during its twelve months in Vietnam. This is not to say that the training which had been conducted failed to prepare the battalion for service because the pattern of operations facing the task force upon 7RAR's arrival was one with which Australian battalions were both comfortable and familiar. Patrolling and ambushing had long been central themes of counter revolutionary warfare doctrine, and these core skills were now enhanced by the addition of skills such as fighting bunker systems and employing support arms, which had previously posed so many problems. Tactical development during this period centred on improving patrolling and ambushing and controlling a widely dispersed battalion conducting a diverse range of operations. While patrol tactics, employment of support arms at low level and command and control procedures provided many new lessons, they did not require whole scale reassessments of doctrine, and occurred within the framework of a higher operational concept with which the Australians were very familiar.

The patrol and ambush tactics developed during this final period were based on the requirement to deploy as many sub-units in the field as possible. By this stage of the war the level of threat posed by the enemy was relatively low, in sharp contrast to the situation

77. O'Brien, *Conscripts and Regulars*, 147.

78. *Ibid.*, 151.

79. *Ibid.*, 152-3.

that existed during earlier phases. The enemy no longer had the ability to mount multi-regimental attacks against the task force base or isolated sub-units within the province, and not surprisingly, this level of enemy threat was reflected in the battalion's sub-unit tactics. This was especially the case in the areas around the population centres where the bulk of patrol and ambush activity occurred until the early months of 1971.⁸⁰

The employment of platoons within the companies usually saw each platoon broken into two half-platoon patrols or ambushes, and manning was such that each patrol usually numbered between twelve and fifteen men. For protection patrols were allocated patrol routes that allowed the two halves to concentrate within no more than twenty minutes march of each other. By doing this more ground could be searched than by a single platoon, while safeguarding the security of the individual patrols.⁸¹ This policy was a natural extension of the earlier 5RAR policy of employing each company in two halves, now adapted to suit the lower level of enemy activity which permitted its application to platoons.⁸² The return to very small scale patrolling allowed many of the tactics developed during the earlier period of Australian counter revolutionary warfare experience in the 1950s such as the patrol base to be re-introduced.

Several interesting similarities between this period of the war and earlier periods can be noted with regard to the way Australian tactics developed in response to the intensity of enemy operations. As a general rule the enemy was now much reduced in numbers and abilities. As a consequence the battalions during 1970 noted an enemy preference for withdrawing when engaged, particularly in bunker contacts, remaining rarely to stay and fight.⁸³ As a result, bunker tactics on the part of the Australian companies tended to revert to an earlier form, necessitating a reintroduction of the bounce or immediate attack, abandoned during the 'out of province' period.⁸⁴

The pacification phase of the war was in many ways the most productive period of operations in the Task Force's operational history in Vietnam. Most of the problems that service in Vietnam was likely to present had either been solved through tactical experience or development, or at least envisaged prior to deployment. Few surprises greeted the units during this period of operations, and for this reason it can not be considered to be a period of real doctrinal development. Unlike the 'out of province phase', for example, there were no significant issues that presented major problems of

80. 7RAR, Notes on Operations—Vietnam 1970-1971, Impressions of a Rifle Company Commander I, para. 11, Commander's Diary, 7RAR, June 1970, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation CONCRETE I, AWM 95 7/7/June 1970.

81. *Ibid.*, para. 12.

82. Interview, Robert Hall, 18 April 1997, Canberra.

83. Commander's Diary, 7RAR, June 1970, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation CONCRETE I, AWM 95 7/7/June 1970.

84. Military Board, *Counter Revolutionary Warfare*, 126-7, Commander's Diary, 7RAR, June 1970, Combat Operations After Action Report—Operation CONCRETE I, AWM 95 7/7/June 1970.

tactical employment for the battalions. This was due in part to the fact that the Task Force returned to basic operational concepts with which the Australian Army had been familiar for some time. In addition, the commanders responsible for training and preparing battalions during this phase of the war were afforded the benefit of five years' worth of previous operational experience. It would appear that tactics had come full circle. While partly true this view would not account for the significant advances discussed above that occurred during the intervening period.

Conclusion

Throughout the six and a half year involvement of operations in South Vietnam the Army was forced to adapt and redefine its tactics and techniques in a number of significant ways. That it was able to achieve these shifts in operational focus and their accompanying changes in tactics so often over such a short period of time is a significant tribute to the army and the men who comprised it. What permitted the army to demonstrate such elasticity in its doctrine was a combination of wide operational experience and rigorous professional training.

During the Vietnam War the Australian Army was presented with four varied periods of operational experience each coming close on the heels of the previous one. As a result tactics were forced to develop very quickly in response to given sets of circumstances which usually only persisted for a relatively short period of time.

It has been said that retrospectively one may deduce an army's implied doctrine from how it organises, trains and equips itself.⁸⁵ The style and concept of pre-war exercises and unit establishments provides an excellent picture of the type of war the army expected to fight, one drawing heavily on the experiences of the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s. While the army's past experiences and preconceptions had left it with some significant weaknesses, the basic tenets of Australian doctrine were sound. Reliance upon patrolling, small unit operations and population control left the army well placed to fight in Vietnam.

Whether this question is addressed from the perspectives of 1RAR's attempts to integrate its doctrine and training into an American brigade, the Task Force's attempts to reconcile divergent roles and tasks, or subsequent periods of the war, the principal themes of this paper remain extant. Army doctrine and operations were a direct reflection of the changing circumstances in which the Australians found themselves employed.

85. Roger Spiller, 'In the Shadow of the Dragon: Doctrine and the US Army After the Vietnam War', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *From Past to Future: The Australian Experience of Land/Air Operations* (Canberra: School of History. ADFA, 1995), 8.

While this may sound obvious in principle, the practicalities of how this manifested itself are less so.

This essay has aimed to give the Australian Army's Vietnam War experience a measure of context and in so doing provide a comment on how the organisation may come to better understand the nature and shaping forces of its history. The Army stands poised to embark on period of unparalleled variety and complexity of operational experience. Its ability to rapidly, accurately and effectively define the origins and context of its doctrine, analyse the nature of its operations and adapt these where appropriate will directly influence its success in future conflicts.

Doctrine, Training and Combat with 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, 1965–1966

Clive Williams

What was it like to be a Platoon Commander in 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), during 1965-1966?

I joined 1RAR at Holsworthy as a brand new Second Lieutenant in January 1965, fresh out of Officer Cadet School, Portsea. Portsea was a significant factor in the junior command structure of 1RAR as most of the Platoon Commanders were Portsea graduates. It is important therefore to say a little about the qualities emphasised at Portsea in 1964.

OCS Portsea was a 12 months' course, beginning either in January or July, whose main aim was to turn out well-rounded infantry Platoon Commanders. Those graduating to other arms or services would normally go to their own corps school on graduation to gain further knowledge of their specialisation. In my case, I graduated to the Australian Intelligence Corps. For us, the normal first posting was two years with an arm, normally infantry, before taking up an appointment with the Corps.

Portsea, in those days, under Colonel Stan 'the man' Coleman and Chief Instructor Major Phil Bennett, valued youth, leadership, fitness and sport, being a team player, and perhaps, above all else, honesty and integrity. Most of the cadets were selected from the junior ranks of the army. In my intake the oldest cadet was 27, and the youngest cadets, including myself, were 18. To my surprise, having been to a British boarding school, there was no bullying or bastardisation. The instructors were all very capable Captains and senior NCOs, most with experience of having served in the Malayan Emergency, which ended in 1960. The Korean War 1950-53 was the last conventional war in which Australia had been involved.

Let me now give you some background on 1RAR. 1RAR in January 1965 was a Pentropic battalion based on a 'four structure', i.e., four sections to a platoon and four platoons to a company. (There were however five rifle companies!) It was also the army's 'Ambrose' battalion—in other words it was on stand-by for deployment overseas if

needed. This was belied, though, by its logistic deficiencies. The army had long depended on the United Kingdom or the United States to provide much of the equipment needed for operations overseas, despite the rhetoric about self-sufficiency. Diggers often went off to the disposals stores to buy the bits of kit that they needed that were not available through the supply system.

I was made the commander of 3 Platoon in 'A' Company. The platoon size initially was 45 but became 34 when we changed to a tropical warfare establishment in March 1965. Major John Healy, a very well respected and capable officer, commanded the company. He had already served one tour in Vietnam, with the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV). Before I arrived, 3 Platoon had been commanded by Sergeant Col Fawcett, a nuggety individual with a great sense of humour and an instinctive feel for getting the best from his men. He extended a helping hand to me, and we got on very well. This was not true of all of the Sergeant/Second Lieutenant relationships; a bad one was a recipe for getting one's career off to a rocky start. Fortunately this was not the case with any of the 'A' Company platoons.

The other key figures in the Company were CSM Jack Cramp and CQMS Dinky Dean. They were both experienced Malaya hands, with considerable experience of how to get the system to work for their areas of responsibility. All of the diggers were regulars and many had had Malaya experience.

Most of the social life occurred in the battalion lines. It was difficult for 'singlies' to get approval to live out, and few diggers owned their own cars. Nevertheless, morale was high and there was a strong sense of community within the battalion.

The first few months of 1965 were momentous for 1RAR. February 1965 saw the arrival of the new CO, Lieutenant Colonel 'Lou' Brumfield, and in March 1965 the battalion split to form 1RAR and 5RAR. Both occurrences were precursors to deployment to Vietnam, although we did not know it at the time.

Throughout this period, the training emphasis was on platoon training. This included allowing the 'A' Company Platoon Commanders to take their platoons to the state forest for a week at a time to practise against each other. Because of our Portsea experience, all of the Portsea Platoon Commanders placed a high emphasis on physical fitness, taking our platoons for runs and assault course training every day, and finishing each week with a nine mile run in full kit. The diggers were required to complete the run within two hours. What was most lacking in our training was regular range practice, said to be due to a shortage of ammunition.

In April 1965, we had a full battalion exercise in the Gaspers area, north of Sydney. At the end of the exercise, the RAAF made themselves unpopular by being unprepared to fly us out as originally planned, due to adverse weather conditions, necessitating an overnight march through hilly terrain in the rain.

On 29 April 1965, Prime Minister Menzies announced that 1RAR would be going to Vietnam in June, much to the dismay of the 5RAR Platoon Commanders, most of whom wanted to go. (Their expectation was that the war would be over within twelve months and they would not get the opportunity to go.) I was pressured by some of my 5RAR friends to let them go instead of me, since I was not a 'real' infantryman and they needed the experience. Needless to say, I resisted their entreaties!

Visiting Intelligence Corps personnel, including WO Bob Rooney, who had served with AATTV in Vietnam, soon provided useful intelligence briefings. We also gained some limited experience with a RAAF Iroquois helicopter; the pilot insisted, though, on having the doors closed and us having our seat belts fastened before he would take off!

On 1 June 1965, 'A' Company was trucked to RAAF Richmond, where we boarded QANTAS flights and were flown to Vietnam via Manila. We stacked our weapons at the back of the aircraft and had drunk all of the beer on the plane before we had departed Australian airspace. We arrived the next morning at Ton Sa Nhut Airbase, Saigon, and were bussed in dark blue US Air Force buses, with mesh over the windows (to prevent grenades being thrown in), to our new 'home' at Bien Hoa Airbase. Although our deployment was supposed to be a secret, there were large banners at Bien Hoa township welcoming us to Vietnam. We entered the base area, were shown a large grassy reverse slope and told that we would have to dig in between the markers placed by the advance party. That was our acclimatisation from winter in Australia to the heat of Vietnam!

Within a few days, we received Malaya-issue four-man tents. They were much admired by the Americans, because of the air gap between the inner and outer sleeves that kept them cool. But the Americans could not understand why we did not put them up in neat rows, as theirs were! They also could not understand why we did not dig our trenches with backhoes, which was their approach. Even though they had backhoes, to our surprise most of their Command Posts were built above ground with sandbag protection. We had been taught that this was risky as rockets are able to blast through sandbag fortifications.

We had become the third battalion of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade, the other battalions being 1/503 and 2/503. We soon had large numbers of US visitors and 'trainers'. The Americans had clearly received little prior training for this type of counter insurgency conflict, their focus having been on NATO Europe- or Korea-style conventional conflicts.

We were allocated the area to our front, to the Dong Nai River, as our Tactical Area of Operational Responsibility (TAOR). We soon had patrols out in the area and were to continue to maintain security for the base in our sector for the next twelve months. The VC regularly mounted mortar attacks against the base, but never in our sector. Similarly

we were never attacked in the TAOR, the VC preferring to go instead for those GIs whose idea of providing base security was dozing in a shady spot near the river and listening to Armed Forces Radio Station (AFRS) Saigon.

Our first operation away from Bien Hoa started on 28 June. I do not intend to provide an account of each operation; instead I will adopt a generic approach. For those interested in a more detailed account of 1RAR operations 1965-66, I recommend *First to Fight* by Bob Breen.¹

Deployment to operations was by way of a variety of means of transport: ‘deuce and a halfs’ (two and a half ton trucks), US semi-trailer ‘cattle trucks’, M-113 APCs, Iroquois helicopters, ARVN helicopters (only once), Chinook helicopters, and fixed wing STOL aircraft. The diggers annoyed some of the senior US officers with their ‘mooring’ or ‘baaing’ when in the cattle trucks but it was always difficult to locate the culprits!

The platoon’s weapons in Australia had been three GPMG M-60s, ten Owen SMGs, with the remaining weapons being 7.62 SLRs. In Vietnam, some of the riflemen converted their SLRs to automatic fire by inserting a matchstick in the firing mechanism. The Owens were replaced after a couple of months in Vietnam by American Armalite M-16s (except for the Platoon Commander’s), and we were issued with three M-79 grenade launchers and three disposable M-72 rocket launchers. I put my Owen (which was heavy and prone to rust) in an oil bath under my tent and replaced it with an M-16 from the brigade aid station. (US medical corpsmen there had a lucrative sideline selling dead GIs’ weapons to the Australians.) On operations, we also carried about twenty M-26 grenades, plus one white phosphorus WP-80 grenade and coloured smoke grenades.

There were some early morale issues. The mail took a while to sort out, which was hard for the married men and for diggers’ families in Australia. The 173rd Airborne Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Williamson, had said there would be no beer for members of his brigade. This was said to be due to concerns that it might exacerbate existing tensions between black and white soldiers in some of the Brigade units.

Local recreation leave took a while to establish. It started after a while with day trips for the diggers to Saigon. The diggers seemed to compete with each other to spend the most or get the most drunk, but it was a good release valve and gave them something to look forward to. There was limited entertainment at Bien Hoa. We had some open-air movies and the occasional entertainment troupe, but these were mainly for the benefit of the base people since the infantry platoons were out in the field most of the time. We did, however, get to see the legendary Bob Hope Christmas Show because we happened to be back in base at the time.

¹ Bob Breen, *First to Fight* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

Many of the platoon members suffered initially from tropical skin infections because we had arrived in the rainy season, when humidity and dampness levels were high. Most of these infections seemed to disappear with the end of the rainy season and the copious use of talcum powder and gentian violet. One of the less savoury duties of the Platoon Commander was to conduct regular foot inspections of smelly feet.

The high level of Australian media interest in 1RAR meant that politicians in Australia soon addressed the administrative and logistic deficiencies, while the visiting Army Minister managed to persuade Brigadier General Williamson to let the Australians have their culturally-important beer.

The main operational activities of 1RAR during 1965-66 were to provide base security at the Bien Hoa Air Base, undertake operations with 173rd Airborne Brigade as its third battalion, and conduct the occasional single battalion operation. Most of the operations were to 'search and destroy' in VC controlled areas and prepare the way for incoming US units. The high operational tempo meant that comparatively little time was spent in camp.

The field size of a platoon was normally around 21 soldiers, including a medic provided by Support Company, leaving five-six soldiers per section. This meant that sections could not afford to have two forward scouts, which in turn increased the vulnerability of the section Corporals.

Many of our contacts occurred as we approached well-worn tracks. This was because VC moving along a track could hear us approaching (despite our using only hand signals) and we could not hear them. Another danger area was concealed villages, camps and bunker systems. They would normally be defended by local VC and booby traps. The size of enemy groups varied from one or two up to company size. We also had the occasional contact with North Vietnamese elements.

The most important skill required of the Platoon Commander was accurate map reading—perhaps no longer relevant with GPS. In Vietnam, one square on the map was 1000 metres or one 'click'. This roughly equated to 2000 paces through jungle. Following a compass bearing and allowing for diversions, you could be reasonably accurate through featureless terrain. Accuracy was important as it guaranteed access to company backup, artillery fire and air support, casevac, and reaching RVs and LZs on time. Getting lost was also guaranteed to lose you points with your troops and the Company Commander.

Australian patrolling tactics worked well in Vietnam, but Brigade pressure to move quickly meant that there was little time for us to undertake effective ambushing or searching. Our 'softly softly' approach did not fit well with the US practice of drawing enemy attention by making a lot of noise, and then using firepower against the VC when they attacked. Unfortunately, the 173rd Battalion's exaggeration of their kill ratio to 10:1 made our tactics—and honest 4:1 ratio—look less successful.

The US platoons were led by ‘Platoon Leaders’, ours of course by ‘Platoon Commanders’. This actually seemed to represent a different philosophical approach to command and control at the platoon level. For example, when there was an enemy contact, the 173rd’s approach was for the Platoon Leader to lead his men into battle. This resulted in high casualties for their Second Lieutenants—the equivalent platoon to mine (3 Platoon of Company A) in 1/503 had four Platoon Leaders killed during our time in Vietnam.

The weather was a significant problem at first. We suffered from continual rain during the wet season, which ran from May to October. This meant that we were wet through at night and everything that could, rusted. The 9mm ammunition for the Owens was late 1940s vintage, and either became damp or was defective, and would sometimes literally travel only a few feet from the weapon when fired. Our clothing and boots were not able to cope with the wet conditions, and we soon traded our boots for the nylon US tropical combat boots—one of their best pieces of equipment.

US harassing and interdiction fire at night often did not take account of Australian positions. We had the occasional close call but we got used to it and it relieved the monotony of sentry duty, so its effect on the VC was probably questionable.

We also lacked experience in the early days in dealing with VC tunnel systems and, because we did not have pistols at platoon level, were obliged to search them armed only with bayonets—the tunnels were too restricted in diameter to allow for anything larger than a bayonet or a pistol to be taken into them. Tunnel searches often produced arms caches: on one occasion we unearthed more than 50 French weapons, many in their original grease packing. Each soldier was allowed to claim and tag a weapon, but not one of the weapons made it back to Bien Hoa. They were all souvenired by US helicopter crews.

US tactical intelligence clearly lacked quality control. We would receive a wad of papers containing intelligence material about the area we were going to next, which I, initially at least, diligently marked on to my maps. I soon discovered that most of the information was worthless and based on unevaluated humint (i.e. human intelligence).

C rations, which were provided by the Brigade, were ‘wet’ rations in cans and, while quite tasty, were heavy to carry. Since we were trying to have as few helicopter resupplies as possible for security reasons, this meant heavy personal loads. The radio batteries were also heavy and did not last long, meaning that several had to be carried in-between resupplies.

Operational security was poor. As we travelled into areas we were to operate in, we usually encountered refugees fleeing towards us to avoid the fighting. Apparently all

operations had to be cleared beforehand with the local Vietnamese authorities and the VC had infiltrated their organisations. This meant of course that we could usually count on a reception from the local VC who had had ample time to prepare for our arrival.

Our radio frequencies often did not match those of US or ARVN units, which meant that it was difficult for us to contact them if they were firing at us. We were mistaken for VC on several occasions because they wore similar floppy hats to us, or because when seen from the air we did not move like US units.

Radios were not provided below platoon level, which was a problem for Platoon Commanders when we deployed sections out for searches. If a section had a contact, it had no way of letting the Platoon Commander know what was happening. I bought walkie-talkies for my platoon but they did not last long in the wet conditions. Command and control was also difficult in secondary jungle because of the poor visibility.

Maintaining dry underwear was a problem, particularly in the rainy season or in wet areas. We were resupplied once a week during operations with shirts and trousers that we had packaged up beforehand, but we had to carry changes of socks and underwear. Socks and underwear took a long time to dry out and were causing skin infections so we just stopped wearing them. Carrying wet and dirty underwear around in our packs with our food was also unsavoury. By the time the rainy season had ended, not wearing socks and underwear had become a habit. Needless to say, I reverted back to underwear when I returned to Australia!

The heaviest items you carry as an infantryman are ammunition and explosive ordnance, water, and engineer stores. Diggers would usually try to take too much ammunition on operations, particularly after an action in November 1965 when we ran low during a protracted engagement with a VC company. The problem with carrying too much weight was that it reduced an individual's efficiency and increased fatigue levels.

Water is consumed heavily on patrol in the tropics but streams were frequent, so we would carry two water bottles (the larger British issue ones were preferred), one with stream water and one with drinking water. The stream water would be used for brews. We also carried purification tablets but treated water was not popular because of its taste. None of us ever became sick from drinking stream water. The main problem with the streams was the leaches, which latched on to you anywhere near a stream.

At the end of operations we would normally make for a designated LZ for helicopter extraction. We did not know how many helicopters would arrive so I usually held off assigning soldiers to helicopters until the last minute. The alternative was continually to change the arrangements, which I found led to confusion. On at least a couple of occasions, 1RAR soldiers were left behind at LZs because they were to be the last out,

and there were not enough helicopters to take everyone. The loss was only discovered when we got back to Bien Hoa and did a head count, but in all cases the indignant diggers were retrieved successfully!

The daily routine on operations was to harbour overnight with the company or battalion, with two GPMGs on the perimeter. These were manned overnight. We stood-to before dawn and, after first light, sent out clearing patrols and placed listening posts. We then breakfasted, cleaned weapons and had the platoon 'O' (Orders) Group to specify the day's activities.

We would then head off for the day as a platoon, or occasionally a company, to conduct search and destroy operations. At a platoon level, the lead section would be rotated every hour to maintain vigilance. We would stop for a 'smoko' every hour, and a brew about three times a day. We would meet up again with the Company in the late afternoon and become part of a harbour position. We would establish the harbour, dig in, and meet with the Company Commander for an 'O' Group. We would then conduct a clearing patrol and pull in the listening posts, and stand-to until it was dark. These procedures ensured that we were never infiltrated at night.

By contrast, the US approach was to conduct reconnaissance by fire. This involved each soldier firing a few rounds to his front. This allowed the VC to do a cross section of the location from the enormous volume of noise. As a result, US troops were often mortared at night. We were only mortared once, but that was because we were protecting noisy brigade support elements that night. The attack lightly wounded my signaller, Private Peter Zerbes, and the Company Commander, Major John Healy.

Once a week on average, we would have a contact with the enemy. This usually involved one or two VC firing at us as we approached, and then taking off at a rapid rate, or disappearing down tunnels. To try to catch the former we would immediately fire about 200 rounds at the point from which the shots had come, and follow up with a contact drill. If we received continuing automatic fire we would call in artillery because we wanted to avoid suffering unnecessary casualties. If we initiated the contact, we would deploy forward immediately. Air strikes were spectacular, but highly dangerous unless there was a defining feature such as a road to guide the aircraft.

Fire support was available beyond anything we had imagined in Australia. As cadets, we had exercised at Puckapunyal with calling in artillery—but then it had been one gun for ranging, followed by battery fire. Now we often had a battalion of guns in support. However, we often did not know where the guns were located. This was a critical factor, since the beaten zone of impact is elliptical along the line of fire of the guns. If they are firing over you, it is therefore a lot more dangerous than if they are off to one side. We often needed the rounds to land within 100 metres of our position so accuracy was highly important. On one occasion, my platoon was bracketed by battery

fire by the New Zealand battery and on another by fire from a US battery. Fortunately, the incidents did not result in any casualties to my platoon.

As my platoon had killed the most VC at one stage, we were granted the much sought after benefit of guarding the Bachelor Officers' Quarters (BOQ) in Saigon for a week. Half of the platoon had to remain on guard while half had the day off. The one moment of excitement occurred when a VC threw a satchel charge or grenade at the BOQ from the back of a motor scooter. One of my soldiers, Lance Corporal Mick Parkes, was lightly wounded in the leg. US MPs upstairs in the building opened fire on the street with automatic shotguns but surprisingly there were no casualties, other than my soldier, who went on light duties for a couple of weeks.

Casualties were an inescapable outcome of our being in Vietnam. While each platoon had a medic, they were in fact 1RAR bandsmen who had been given first aid training. They were simply not experienced in dealing with the major trauma of gunshot wounds to the chest, or serious mine injuries. Once we had taken a casualty, the dustoff helicopter would normally arrive within twenty minutes, depending on whether it was able to find you and whether there was any other major casualty-causing action taking place. We were accorded equal priority with US units, but ARVN casualties were not given a high priority, and the Brigade was certainly not prepared to risk dustoffs taking out wounded VC.

The casualty numbers of 3 Platoon were fairly typical of 1RAR. Each loss is a tragedy. I lost two very capable Corporals (Corporals 'Judo' Seipel and Frank Smith) and a private soldier (Private Peter Gillson), all killed by gunshot wounds. My medic on one operation (Private Chris Clarke) was killed while assisting another platoon whose medic had been killed. I also had twelve wounded, several by mines, and one non-battle casualty.

Enemy casualties were twenty by body count, but would have been considerably more judging by blood trails. Fire support would have accounted for more again. This included a battalion of artillery fire that I called in on two occasions on VC companies, fire support called in on VC withdrawal routes and enemy positions, and the effects of our GPMG, M-79 and M-72 fire. There was no ground follow up to many of these incidents to assess casualties due to lack of time.

I believe there are some important basic qualities that a Platoon Commander needs to be effective. These are:

- Competence in the operational skills needed to do the job.
- Loyalty to the boss.
- Being a team player with people at your own level.
- Being honest with your men.

- Not expecting your men to take risks that you are not prepared to take yourself.
- Placing your men's welfare ahead of your own.

In my view, these were the qualities displayed by the more successful Platoon Commanders in 1RAR.

We finally came to the end of our tour with 173rd Airborne Brigade in June 1966, with the Australian Government deciding that we would not be replaced at Bien Hoa. Australia would instead deploy an Australian Task Force in Nui Dat Province.

My platoon had seen 49 soldiers fill the 34 platoon billets during the past year in Vietnam. Apart from losing those who were killed and some of the more badly wounded, there had been medical evacuees, compassionate RTAs (Return To Australia) and transfers to other units. Some of my more recent 'reos' (i.e. reinforcements) were transferred to the incoming battalions, while some of the 1RAR NCOs volunteered to stay to help 'bed in' the new battalions.

Most of us deployed back to Holsworthy. We found the sudden transition from war to peace to be quite unsettling. We also found to our concern that our unaccompanied kit had been searched and many of our treasured (and declared) Vietnam souvenirs had disappeared. In my case I lost a very nice 'demilled' Russian sniper rifle. Most of the soldiers found it very hard to adjust to peacetime soldiering in Australia after the adrenalin rush of Vietnam, and many opted to return to Vietnam for second tours in due course. For some, Vietnam was obviously very traumatising, but for many it was the ultimate mateship experience and one that forged lifetime bonds of friendship.

Australian Task Force Operations in South Vietnam 1966–1971

Ian Kuring

On 8 March 1966 the Australian Government announced that 1RAR Battalion Group serving with the US Army 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa would be replaced at the end of its tour of duty by an independent Australian Army Task Force. The Australian Task Force would have its own area of operations and be under the operational control of the American 2nd Field Force Vietnam. The area selected for the deployment of the Task Force was Phuoc Tuy Province, located southeast of Saigon.

The 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF)

The 1st Australian Task Force started arriving in South Vietnam during May 1966 and by mid-June had commenced the establishment of its base at Nui Dat (Vietnamese for ‘small hill’) in the middle of Phuoc Tuy Province. The Task Force was structured around two infantry battalions. Each battalion had four rifle companies, an administration company and a support company that included a mortar platoon of six 81mm mortars.

An operational limitation for the Task Force was that with only two infantry battalions, one battalion carried out operations while the other had to provide a ready reaction force and security for the base. This limitation was not resolved until the arrival of a third infantry battalion in December 1967. Unfortunately at the end of 1970, the third infantry battalion was not replaced at the end of its twelve month rotation and the Task Force was again limited to operating with only two infantry battalions.

The other combat elements of the Task Force included: an artillery field regiment with three batteries, each with six 105mm howitzers (two Australian batteries and one New Zealand battery); an armoured personnel carrier squadron, equipped with M113 light armoured vehicles, which when not carrying infantry was employed on armoured cavalry tasks; a field engineer squadron and engineer support troop; an aviation reconnaissance flight equipped with unarmed light reconnaissance aircraft and helicopters; and a Special Air Service squadron.

A Royal Australian Air Force utility helicopter squadron equipped with eight UH-1B Iroquois helicopters based at Vung Tau provided the Task Force with helicopter support for a variety of tasks, including troop lift, resupply and casualty evacuation. The strength of this helicopter squadron was doubled in 1968 when it was re-equipped with sixteen larger and more powerful UH-1D/H model Iroquois helicopters, and a helicopter gunship capability was added during 1969.

Although the Task Force was considered to be an independent Australian force, the Americans provided it with medium and heavy artillery support, offensive air support, medium and heavy lift helicopter support and gunship helicopter support. When large-scale airmobile operations were carried out, the Americans provided additional utility helicopters to assist the Task Force.

The 1st Australian Logistic Support Group based at Vung Tau on the southern tip of Phuoc Tuy Province provided logistic support for the Task Force.

Security of the Task Force Base

The Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat was large, and had a perimeter of approximately twelve kilometres. For the duration of its deployment to Phuoc Tuy Province, the Task Force secured the approaches to the Nui Dat Base through a sustained daily program of patrolling and ambush operations. These patrols and ambushes were usually mounted by platoons and were initially carried out to enemy 82mm mortar range of four kilometres, and later extended to field artillery planning range of ten kilometres.

Other security measures included not having Vietnamese living in close proximity to the base and not allowing Vietnamese to work at the base. The few Vietnamese villages located close to the base perimeter were destroyed and the occupants moved and resettled in other villages.

The Enemy

Prior to the arrival of the Australians, the security of Phuoc Tuy Province depended on local South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Force units, and occasional search and destroy operations mounted by Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and United States Army units.

The Viet Cong and their predecessors the Viet Minh had dominated Phuoc Tuy Province since 1945. Viet Cong guerrilla groups operated in most towns and villages, and main force units operated from bases in the hill, jungle and forest areas of the province. In mid-1966, the strength of the Viet Cong in Phuoc Tuy Province was estimated at around 5000 personnel and included two Viet Cong Main Force infantry regiments (274 and 275, each based on three battalions) and D445 Local Force battalion.

The main areas for enemy bases, camps and movement were in the Nui May Tao Hills, the Long Hai Hills, Nui Thi Vai and Nui Dinh Hills, and along the northern border of the province from the Hat Dich area in the north-west of the province through Slope 30, the Courtenay Rubber Plantation and Thua Tich, to the May Tao Hills in the north-east of the province. The enemy also used the bush areas east of Nui Dat and Long Tan and to the east of Xuyen Moc.

Task Force Operations

The infantry battalions supported by artillery, armour, field engineers, helicopters and close air support were the basis of all major Australian Task Force combat operations in South Vietnam.

Australian infantry operations were based on light infantry skills and techniques related to small unit operations, in the tropical and jungle environment, with emphasis on patrolling and ambush. The Australian Army was well prepared for this, having placed emphasis on training to fight Communist guerrillas in the jungles of Southeast Asia from the mid-1950s.

Mobility

Helicopters and armoured personnel carriers were usually used to transport infantrymen and their combat support into and out of areas of operations. This meant that infantry and their combat support could be deployed over long distances into an area of operations, with the added operational advantage that the force could be quickly redeployed to another area to meet a changed situation. For the infantry based Australian Army this was a revolutionary development that greatly increased the operational capability of each infantry battalion.

Other methods of deployment into and out of an area of operations included movement on foot, on the backs of trucks, watercraft and by short take off and landing transport aircraft (such as the RAAF Caribou).

During an operation the infantry patrolled on foot, loaded down by weapons, ammunition, combat equipment, rations and water. The weights carried by individual infantrymen were usually in the vicinity of 30-45 kilograms.

Battle of Long Tan

It did not take long for the Viet Cong to find out that the Australian infantry operated in a different manner from that of the American and South Vietnamese infantry units. On 18 August 1966, 108 men of 'D' Company, 6RAR, supported by superb artillery fire and a

relief force of armoured personnel carriers carrying 'A' Company, 6RAR, defeated a force of at least 1500 Viet Cong in the Battle of Long Tan. Australian casualties from the battle were eighteen killed and 24 wounded, with known enemy casualties of 245 dead.

The Viet Cong withdrew from Long Tan believing that they had fought with an Australian battalion. Whether this was due to the amount of ground covered by 'D' Company at Long Tan in comparison with the tactical movement of American and South Vietnamese infantry units, or a piece of face saving enemy propaganda is a point of interest.

The importance of the Battle of Long Tan was that the newly-arrived Australian Task Force had been tested in a major battle and the era of Viet Cong domination in Phuoc Tuy Province was being challenged. Unfortunately the Task Force lacked the resources to mount an immediate operation to trap and destroy the enemy force during its withdrawal.

Counter Revolutionary Warfare Operations

In line with Australian Army doctrine for counter revolutionary warfare, most operations carried out by the Task Force were search and clear, cordon and search, and operations related to the protective security of base areas and roads. Most Australian combat operations were carried out within range of artillery fire.

Cordon and search operations were carried out to isolate and search a town or village, with the aim of separating the Viet Cong from any support they received from the population. A cordon was placed around the village to provide security and prevent movement in and out of the village while it was being searched. These operations were usually of a day's duration, with the cordon inserted during the night and the search commencing just after first light. Local government officials and police were usually used to carry out detailed administrative checks on the people and to deal with those that were apprehended during these operations. The civil affairs unit usually provided medical and dental aid to the villagers as well. During the systematic and detailed search of buildings and surrounding ground, the search teams of soldiers were likely to locate the entrances to underground storage tunnels and hides. These had to be searched in detail by small teams of field engineers and infantry assault pioneers known as 'tunnel rats' and if being used to support Viet Cong activities, cleared of their contents and destroyed. This was a difficult and dangerous task carried out in narrow tunnels and hides constructed by small in stature Asians, with the additional risk of booby traps.

In Vietnam, the search and clear operations of Australian Army counter revolutionary warfare doctrine were called 'search and destroy' operations until mid-1968, when the terminology changed to 'reconnaissance in force'. These operations were carried out

in the bush, forest, jungle and hill areas where the Viet Cong Local and Main Force and North Vietnamese Army units lived, trained and moved while preparing for their next operational activity. Australian search and clear operations involved the detailed and systematic search of ground by infantry patrols to locate the enemy and either bring him to battle or disrupt his activities by forcing him to move and then destroy his camps and storage areas. Once the enemy was located in a camp or bunker system, it usually became necessary for infantry and armour to be redeployed to reinforce the unit in contact with the enemy and for blocking forces and fire support to be employed on likely withdrawal routes, in a hammer and anvil concept trap. As the need to increase Australian military influence in Phuoc Tuy Province became necessary, fire support bases were established, so that combat operations to be carried out well away from Nui Dat could still remain within range of supporting artillery fire.

Infantry Firepower and Close Combat

The popular perception of the Vietnam War is that the Allied forces always had an overwhelming superiority in firepower. When considering the war from a broad perspective this is true, however what is usually overlooked is that when an Australian infantry platoon and a Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army (NVA) platoon made contact with each other in an encounter battle, they were on most occasions roughly equal in firepower. Without going into the characteristics of individual weapons, the infantrymen of both sides employed automatic and semi-automatic rifles, machine guns, grenade and rocket launchers that fired high explosive projectiles, hand grenades and command detonated, directional anti-personnel mines. The great advantage for the Australian platoon was that it carried a radio which could be used to request a variety of quick response fire support to assist the immediate battle, followed up by reinforcement, medical evacuation and resupply. In almost all cases, the enemy did not have this advantage.

During 1967 there were occasions where Australian infantrymen, well supported by accurate artillery fire, fought intense battles with determined Viet Cong units, but were unable to develop sufficient combat power to overcome them or to prevent their eventual withdrawal from the area.

In the middle of February 1967, during Operation BRIBIE, 6RAR, supported by armoured personnel carriers, artillery and close air support, spent an afternoon and evening fighting a battle with a dug-in, reinforced company from D445 battalion east of Long Phuoc Hai. 6RAR was unable to defeat the Viet Cong defensive position or to prevent the occupants from withdrawing during the night.

On 5 August 1967, during Operation BALLARAT, a search and destroy operation to the north-west of Nui Dat, 'A' Company 7RAR, supported by artillery fire, fought a battle with a reinforced company from 274 Main Force Regiment. The Viet Cong attempted

to nullify the artillery fire support called in by the Australians by maintaining very close contact with them throughout the fighting. Later in the operation, 7RAR discovered a recently evacuated Viet Cong camp about a kilometre from where the battle had taken place. The Viet Cong company had been fighting to cover the withdrawal of a Viet Cong battalion from the camp. In 7RAR this was known as the Battle of Suoi Chau Pha.

The Long Hai Hills

The Long Hai Hills were a rugged set of hills in the south of Phuoc Tuy Province, in close proximity to heavily populated areas that included the large towns of Dat Do and Long Dien. The Viet Cong had established living and logistic storage areas there, many utilising caves in the hills and covered the approaches with defended positions and booby traps and mines.

The Task Force mounted three major operations into the Long Hai Hills and while destroying Viet Cong camps and storage areas, including installations in caves, was never successful in denying the Viet Cong use of the area. Each of the three operations resulted in large numbers of Australian casualties from mines and booby traps. As the Allied forces did not have the resources to establish bases in the Long Hai Hills, Allied artillery fire, strike aircraft and naval gunfire regularly bombarded selected areas there.

The first Australian search and destroy operation into the Long Hai Hills was Operation RENMARK which took place during 18-22 February 1967. While enemy camps and storage areas were destroyed the infantrymen from 5RAR suffered heavy casualties (seven killed and 22 wounded) from mines and booby traps, without the satisfaction of having fought any battles with the enemy.

The second major Australian search and destroy operation into the Long Hai Hills was carried out during March-April 1968 and involved a combined arms force based on 3RAR, supported by five B52 strikes. Again camps and storage areas in caves and installations were discovered and destroyed. Australian casualties during Operation PINNAROO were five killed and 40 wounded, with known Viet Cong casualties of 40 killed.

In February 1970, 8RAR supported by tanks carried out the last major Australian operation into the Long Hai Hills. A successful ambush and battle with a bunker system had to be balanced with Australian casualties of nine killed and fifteen wounded from two mine incidents and the withdrawal of the enemy battalion from the area as the Australian forces repositioned for a B52 bombing strike to take place. While 42 enemy were confirmed killed, intelligence information later indicated that over 100 enemy had been killed during Operation HAMMERSLEY.

The Australian Minefield and Viet Cong Mine Warfare

During March-April 1967 the Task Force established a permanent fire support base for a rifle company and section of artillery on the Horseshoe feature, located on the northern outskirts of the town of Dat Do. This enabled the Australians to extend their operational influence into a heavily populated area that was sympathetic to the Viet Cong and to provide fire support for operations in the southern parts of the province from Dat Do to the South China Sea and the Long Hai Hills and to the east of the province toward Xuyen Moc.

However the Task Force made a big mistake when it constructed a twelve kilometre barrier minefield, enclosed by barbed wire fences that ran from the Horseshoe feature past Dat Do to the village of Long Phuoc Hai on the coast. The aim of the minefield was to create an obstacle to Viet Cong movement between their base areas in the east of the province and the populated areas in the central southern area of the province, as well as their bases in the Long Hai Hills. As the Australians were stretched for manpower, security of the minefield was left to the local South Vietnamese territorial force units manning compounds and outposts in the area. Very soon, the mines were being skilfully removed by the Viet Cong and used offensively by them with great success to cause casualties to Allied forces personnel in Phuoc Tuy Province.

The Viet Cong were also adept at manufacturing their own mines and explosive devices from explosive taken from unexploded Allied artillery shells and aerial bombs. The Viet Cong anti-tank mines had spectacularly disastrous and lethal effects against armoured personnel carriers and light vehicles.

The Australian Army had gone into the Vietnam War knowing that the Viet Cong employed mines and booby traps as a normal part of their operations, and Australian soldiers were trained accordingly. However the prolific use of mines by the Viet Cong in the southern areas of Phuoc Tuy Province and the high number of battle casualties caused by them (approximately 50 per cent of Australian battle casualties), led to the employment of field engineer splinter teams with infantry and armour sub-units on operations. Sadly, Australian senior commanders had been responsible for the decision to employ the barrier minefield, which provided the Viet Cong with a ready supply of mines. Australian Army engineers eventually completed the removal of the minefield during early 1970, but the mines continued to cause Allied casualties.

Out of Province and Main Force Operations, January 1968-June 1969

In December 1967, the Task Force was reinforced with a third infantry battalion, and during early 1968 its strength was further boosted by the arrival of a squadron of Centurion tanks and additional Iroquois helicopters for the RAAF helicopter squadron.

The increase in strength effectively doubled the combat power and operational flexibility of the Task Force. Large-scale operations based on the employment of two infantry battalions could be conducted away from Nui Dat, while the third infantry battalion looked after the security of Nui Dat and the Horseshoe and provided a ready reaction force. The conduct of operations well away from Nui Dat also meant that fire support bases had to be established to provide command facilities and fire support for battalion operations.

During the period January 1968 to June 1969 the Task Force was involved in search and destroy operations against Local and Main Force Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units not only throughout the more remote areas of Phuoc Tuy Province, but also in Bien Hoa and Long Khanh Provinces to provide security on the approaches to Saigon and the American base areas at Long Binh and Bien Hoa.

In January-February 1968 the Viet Cong mounted a massive offensive throughout South Vietnam during the traditional Tet festivities. The Task Force found itself simultaneously protecting the approaches to the American bases at Long Binh and Bien Hoa as well as fighting the Viet Cong in Phuoc Tuy Province. Operation COBURG, involving 2RAR, and 7RAR, was carried out in the border area between Bien Hoa and Long Khanh Provinces, while companies from 3RAR were involved in fighting in Phuoc Tuy Province to remove the Viet Cong from Baria and Long Dien.

In May 1968 the Task Force was again involved in operations to protect the approaches to the American bases at Long Binh and Bien Hoa when it was redeployed to carry out operations on enemy withdrawal routes north of Saigon. The Australians became involved in intense battles with North Vietnamese units, where for the first time they were confronted with enemy soldiers who came looking for them during 1RAR's battles at Fire Support Base Coral and 3RAR's battles at Fire Support Base Balmoral. During the first night at Fire Support Base Coral, part of the Australian defensive perimeter was penetrated and the Australians were forced to fight to retake artillery pieces and mortars that had been captured by the enemy. As a result of the initial fighting at Coral, the Centurion tanks were deployed to the area from Nui Dat, a distance of approximately 100 kilometres.

During August 1968 while the emphasis was on operations in the more remote areas of Phuoc Tuy Province, two companies from 1RAR supported by tanks were involved in intense fighting to clear a company group of Viet Cong from the town of Long Dien.

Bunker Fighting

During the Task Force's early search and destroy operations the enemy was usually discovered living in or having occupied camps without well developed field defences and bunker systems. From late-1967 this started to change, as the enemy was increasingly

found to be occupying well-sited and well-concealed bunker systems. In many cases the bunkers were so well concealed that infantrymen were already within the bunker system when they discovered it. Enemy fighting from bunkers were difficult to overcome and it was found that infantry fire and movement, supported by artillery fire and air attack was not usually sufficient to remove them. The fight usually resulted in a stalemate as infantry casualties increased and movement was restricted by enemy fire. The best chances for success in bunker fighting were achieved when the tanks were brought forward to support the infantry with their firepower.

Unfortunately Australian preparation and training for bunker fighting in Vietnam was almost non-existent, and this also included infantry working with tanks. However, close combat with a determined Asian enemy fighting from bunker systems in jungle terrain should not have been a surprise for the Australian Army. The lessons of light infantry requiring the support of tanks to defeat an enemy fighting from bunkers had been learnt against the Japanese in New Guinea during the Second World War.

Operations in Phuoc Tuy Province, July 1969–October 1971

During July 1969 to October 1971 the Task Force continued to carry out reconnaissance in force and land clearing operations throughout Phuoc Tuy Province to keep the Local and Main Force Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units off balance. Most of these operations were carried out in the northern border area of Phuoc Tuy Province stretching from Hat Dich in the west across to the May Tao Mountains in the east and the areas in the east around Xuyen Moc. These were interspersed with pacification operations carried out in and around the populated areas of the province in a continuing effort to disrupt the local Viet Cong guerrilla groups and the support they received from the population.

In June 1969, 6RAR/NZ was heavily involved with fighting NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and Main Force Viet Cong units in a series of battles across the north of Phuoc Tuy Province during Operation LAVARACK. During the same operation, 'D' Company, 5RAR, supported by tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and helicopter gunships, was deployed from Nui Dat to fight a three day battle to remove a reinforced NVA Company from the village of Binh Ba.

The announcement of Vietnamisation in mid-1969, led to the Task Force placing an increased emphasis on trying to improve the capabilities of the local Vietnamese regional and popular force units through joint training and joint operational activities. The Task Force did not have the resources or the expertise for this work and in the mid-1970s much of the responsibility for these activities was taken over by the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

From mid-1969, the effectiveness of the constant reconnaissance in force operations mounted by the Task Force in the remote areas of Phuoc Tuy Province and the success in battles such as at Binh Ba became apparent. Contacts with major Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units became increasingly rare, as their numbers had been eroded and by avoiding contact and withdrawing into safe areas they could rebuild and wait for the American and Australian forces to withdraw.

The Australians placed increasing emphasis on patrolling and ambushing on the approaches to the main towns and villages around the Province in an effort to restrict the movement of the Viet Cong guerilla groups, who were running short of supplies. The successful ambush by 8 Platoon, 8RAR outside of Hoa Long on the night of 11-12 August 1970, against a Viet Cong resupply party was an excellent example of these tactics.

The Australians rarely moved at night, preferring to ambush tracks and areas where Viet Cong movement was likely to take place. A feature of Australian ambushes in Vietnam was the employment of the command detonated, directional fire M18A1 Claymore mine and the boost it provided to the firepower of small units. The traditional linear ambush gave way to the employment of triangular shape ambushes sited to deal with enemy approaching from any direction.

When 8RAR was not replaced at the end of its tour of duty in November 1970, the strength of the Task Force was reduced to two infantry battalions. The withdrawal of the battalion immediately reduced the operational flexibility of the Task Force, and increased security and workload problems at all levels. The Task Force continued to operate with a battalion operating in the west of the Province using Nui Dat as its base and the other battalion operating in the east of the Province using the Horseshoe as its base. The Vietnamese Regional and Popular Force units were given increased responsibility for carrying out operations in southern areas of Phuoc Tuy Province, however there was only minimal acceptance of this operational responsibility by them.

As contact with large groups of enemy became less frequent, the two Australian infantry battalions increasingly used dispersed rifle company patrols to search for the enemy, with reliance placed on armoured and air elements as well as artillery fire to provide responsive fire support and rapid reinforcement in the event of serious trouble. Elements of B Company, 7RAR and a troop of armoured personnel carriers ambushed a large party of Viet Cong, south-east of Xuyen Moc in the early hours of 31 December 1970. The battle lasted for two hours and enemy casualties were 21 confirmed dead, among them were senior members of the Viet Cong structure in Phuoc Tuy Province, including command elements from D445 Local Force Battalion. This ambush substantially disrupted the Viet Cong infrastructure in Phuoc Tuy Province.

From mid-1971 Main Force Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units started moving back into the northern border areas of Phuoc Tuy Province. On 7 June 1971, during Operation OVERLORD, 3RAR supported by tanks, artillery and aerial firepower fought a battle with a battalion from 33 NVA Regiment occupying a bunker system on the border of Phuoc Tuy Province and Long Khanh Province. When 3RAR attacked the enemy bunker system the next day, they found that the enemy had withdrawn during the night.

At the end of July 1971, during Operation IRON FOX, 'C' and 'D' Companies of 4RAR/NZ supported by tanks and artillery fire were involved in battles with two large bunker systems occupied by members of 274 Viet Cong Main Force Regiment. Australian casualties were one killed and seven wounded with known enemy casualties of at least twelve killed and an unknown number entombed in bunkers that had been crushed by the tanks.

During September 1971, 33 NVA Regiment moved back into the north of Phuoc Tuy Province in anticipation of the Australian withdrawal from Nui Dat. On 21 September, during Operation IVANHOE, 'B' Company 4RAR/NZ fought an encounter battle with a battalion from 33 NVA Regiment and 'D' Company 4RAR/NZ fought a battle with another battalion from 33 NVA Regiment in a bunker system. Australian casualties were five killed and thirty wounded. On this occasion the fighting was much tougher for the Australian infantrymen as the squadron of tanks had already been withdrawn to Vung Tau in preparation for its return to Australia. For this last Australian battle in Phuoc Tuy Province, the infantrymen of 4RAR/NZ had to rely on artillery fire and generous amounts of aerial fire support from fighter aircraft and gunship helicopters.

These final battles resulted in major enemy units being forced to withdraw from Phuoc Tuy Province, not long after having re-entered it. In September 1971, Viet Cong strength in Phuoc Tuy Province had been reduced to around 1400 personnel, roughly one third of what had been available in mid-1966. However enemy strength had been increased by the deployment of 33 NVA Regiment with approximately 1220 personnel.

The Australian Task Force ceased operations in Phuoc Tuy Province in October 1971 and 4RAR withdrew from Nui Dat on 7 November. While the Task Force had achieved success in most of its battles with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units in South Vietnam, it was unsuccessful in eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure from Phuoc Tuy Province. When the Task Force ceased operations, the Viet Cong influence on the population had been greatly reduced and the people were able to go about their business in daylight without great risk. Unfortunately this situation did not last and during 1972 the Viet Cong started to regain control in most areas of Phuoc Tuy Province.

Conclusion

For the Australian Army its operational experience in South Vietnam could be described as a revolution in military affairs. It had improved the mobility, firepower, communications, combat clothing, footwear, and load carrying equipment used by its combat soldiers.

However, the problems of Australian combat units always having to operate under strength, and of heavily loaded infantrymen continually pushing the limits of their endurance in the extremes of terrain and climate for periods of four to six weeks at a time without a break were not solved.

The Australian Army established itself as one of the world's leading exponents of light infantry operations in counter revolutionary warfare and jungle terrain, and gained valuable experience in combined arms operations and some aspects of joint warfare. Its operational experience in Vietnam had highlighted the need to deploy a balanced and adequately equipped task force organisation for the duration of any future combat deployment.

While its expertise in counter revolutionary warfare and jungle operations were allowed to atrophy in the post-Vietnam era, the experience gained in combined arms and joint operations in South Vietnam has played an important part in the force development of today's Australian Army.

Fighting Against Time: The South Vietnamese Army on the Road to Self-Sufficiency

Dale Andradé

In Greek mythology there is a story of a man named Sisyphus who tricked the gods. His punishment in Hades was to forever roll a rock up a hill, only to have it tumble back to the bottom when he neared the top. If Vietnam was Hades, then the US advisors played the part of Sisyphus, constantly trying to push the South Vietnamese army towards military self-sufficiency, only to see it fall back down the hill of Vietnamisation whenever Hanoi launched an offensive.

Just how good that South Vietnamese Army was is the subject of much debate even today. Some believe that the South Vietnamese never adequately rose to the Communist challenge, that they were dragged down by corruption and incompetence and a regime that failed to gain legitimacy among its own people. On the other side are those who argue that the United States is largely to blame for the defeat. America trained the South Vietnamese to fight a conventional war, then bolstered that mistaken strategy with troops of its own. When that failed, they pulled up stakes and left without adequately preparing the South Vietnamese to survive alone.

Not surprisingly, there is truth to both sides of the argument. The South Vietnamese military was an organisation with many fine qualities, and by 1972 it had corrected some of its shortcomings. Although the military was legitimately criticised for poor leadership, there were many good officers, with even more aspiring young men rising through the ranks late in the war. South Vietnamese troops fought bravely and died for their country—approximately 185,000 regular army soldiers were killed and almost 500,000 wounded between 1960 and 1973, a casualty figure about three times larger than that suffered by United States forces.¹ Clearly, the South Vietnamese were committed to their cause. In the end, however, they were defeated by the Communist forces of North

1. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), 'Last Update of Southeast Asia Statistical Summary Tables', 3 December 1973, table 50, Cumulative Casualties.

Vietnam. For that reason, this essay will concentrate on what went wrong within the South Vietnamese Army rather than what went right. Considering the eventual outcome of the war, the lessons of failure are the most instructive.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam, or ARVN, was created in October 1955, the result of an American crash program designed to transform the poorly trained and organised French-sponsored Vietnamese National Army into an organisation along the lines of the US Army. At the time, this was not an unreasonable plan. The United States saw the situation in South Vietnam potentially unfolding much as it had in South Korea only a few years earlier—with an invasion by an aggressive communist neighbor to the north. Indeed, Hanoi had made it clear that it was not happy with the political settlement dividing the country in 1954, instead preferring a quick military reunification of the country under Communist control. Even then, the North Vietnamese Army was a formidable force, organised along conventional lines and with a proven record of standing up to the modern French army in many engagements. From Washington's viewpoint then, the threat came from an invasion of South Vietnam by the North, and the US military already knew how to deal with that contingency.

At its peak strength, the ARVN consisted of more than half a million men organised into eleven divisions of 105 light infantry battalions, nine airborne battalions, and more than 50 ranger battalions, all divided among four corps tactical zones dividing the country from north to south. Two 'elite' divisions, one of marines and the other of airborne troops, served as South Vietnam's general reserve. Armour, artillery, and ranger units were also available to each corps commander, as were contingents of local militia, known as the Regional and Popular Forces.²

In northernmost South Vietnam was I Corps. Sitting just south of the Demilitarised Zone, this was perhaps the most dangerous part of the country, the region where military planners expected a North Vietnamese offensive to erupt. Two infantry divisions, the 1st and 2nd, were placed there, with another (the 3rd Division) formed in 1971. Eventually, much of the Marine and Airborne Divisions would also spend most of their time in I Corps.

To the south was II Corps, geographically the largest military region in South Vietnam. It encompassed the rugged Central Highlands and 40 per cent of the country's land area, yet contained only a fifth of the population. Two units, the 22nd and 23rd Divisions, were responsible for the entire region.

2. The data in this essay do not include figures for the territorial militia, known as the Regional and Popular Forces, which by 1970 were roughly the same size as the regular army. Militia casualties were also similar to those of the army, making the total figure for South Vietnamese killed in action between 1960 and 1975 approximately 1.37 million men.

The southernmost two corps zones were arguably the most important. III and IV Corps, as they were called, comprised about a third of the land area and 65 per cent of the population. The capital was situated here, as was the Mekong Delta, South Vietnam's economic bread basket. Not surprisingly, then, much of the South Vietnamese military strength remained there—the 5th, 18th, and 25th Divisions in III Corps and the 7th, 9th, and 21st Divisions in IV Corps.

On paper, the ARVN was impressive, but the war did not unfold as expected. There was no invasion from the north. Instead, in 1961 Hanoi created the Lao Dong Party, which Americans came to call the Viet Cong, and it soon became clear that Saigon was battling an insurgency. Between 1961 and 1964 American and South Vietnamese military planners shaped the ARVN to better combat the burgeoning insurgency. The two main objectives were, first, to increase the number and mobility of South Vietnamese ground forces and improve their leadership and training in small-unit tactics, and second, to provide more security in the countryside where the insurgency was growing. Both objectives would become the core of American advisory efforts and neither would ever be completely resolved, though not for want of trying. Between 1960 and 1964 the ARVN grew from 150,000 to 250,000 and incorporated a similar number of territorial forces, or militia to back up the army.³

In order to match the growing US role in South Vietnam, in February 1962 Washington formed a new unified headquarters in Saigon, called the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) to coordinate all American military efforts. MACV was an advisory command, but it was also a theatre-level unified command designed to adapt to the changing war. At this point neither American nor South Vietnamese officials had a firm understanding of the sort of war they faced. 'Counterinsurgency' was the watchword of the Kennedy administration, but as far as the Army was concerned, this really only meant using regular military forces to chase down guerrillas and often ignored the political dimensions of revolutionary war, relegating that to non-military organisations and to the US Embassy. This mindset was passed on to the ARVN. During the period 1960 through 1963, the South Vietnamese concentrated on learning the Viet Cong order of battle and chasing guerrilla bands in the countryside rather than on pacification. When Communist military action slowed, as it often did during any given year, Saigon viewed this as evidence that military operations were taking a toll. What they did not take into account was the fact that the insurgents might simply be resting while Communist political cadres were still hard at work in the villages. From the beginning of the war, the enemy controlled the operational tempo, for the most part selecting when and where they would fight.

3. Memo, Major General Ben Sternberg, MACV J-1, to COMUSMACV, 7 July 1965, sub: RVNAF Strength Summary.

By 1963 the ARVN was beginning to suffer major setbacks on the battlefield. In January of that year, at the village of Ap Bac in the Mekong Delta southwest of Saigon, South Vietnamese forces were ordered to root out a group of entrenched Viet Cong guerrillas. But things went awry. Timid South Vietnamese commanders failed to close decisively with the enemy—even though they outnumbered them and had armor. In the end the Viet Cong retreated, and while officials attempted to portray the battle as a victory, the advisors themselves—along with several reporters present at the battle—saw it as a fiasco and perhaps a sign of things to come.⁴

Ap Bac was just the tip of an iceberg. In November a group of South Vietnamese generals assassinated President Ngo Dinh Diem in a coup that had the tacit support of the United States. Stability vanished and the armed forces were further politicised at a time when enemy gains were continuing unabated. In June 1964, a new MACV commander, General William C. Westmoreland, brought with him to Vietnam Washington's desire to take on a more offensive role, one which would stave off defeat for South Vietnam by bringing American firepower to bear on the increasingly dangerous Communist forces. In March 1965 US Marines landed at Danang, and in May the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the first US Army ground combat unit in Vietnam, deployed to Bien Hoa outside Saigon, followed in quick succession by other Marine and Army divisions. By the end of the year there were 184,000 American military personnel in South Vietnam, up from 23,000 just twelve months earlier.

The decision to commit US troops to combat was a clear admission that the ARVN was not capable of standing on its own. Throughout 1965 American troops increasingly took over the responsibility of launching offensive operations against enemy main force units while the ARVN turned its attention toward area security. This division of labour was formalised in the 1966 Combined Campaign Plan, and for the next three years little would change. While the American decision to take over much of the fighting made sense in light of the worsening situation in South Vietnam, it encouraged the ARVN to settle into a static defence, dubbed the 'bunker mentality' by some advisors. In a single year ARVN performance dropped dramatically. South Vietnamese units killed twenty per cent fewer enemy soldiers in 1966 than in 1965, even though Communist battle casualties rose by 50 per cent. Between 1966 and 1969 South Vietnamese combat battalions were, man for man, only about 55 per cent as effective as US battalions, though one has to take into account that ARVN battalions had only one-tenth the artillery and air support available to a US battalion.⁵

4. For a complete account see David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac: They Did Everything But Learn From It* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 2001).

5. Southeast Asia Analysis Report, 'GVN Regular Force Effectiveness', August 1970, 18.

The ARVN's shortcomings boiled down to four basic issues, all of them interrelated in many ways. First, the national strategy left Saigon perpetually on the defensive; second, the ARVN quickly became over-reliant on American support; third, the military suffered from generally poor leadership; and finally, there was endemic desertion within the ranks. The first two problems were largely the fault of the United States. Despite the fact that North Vietnam made it clear that it intended to reunite the country by force, US planning never seriously considered giving the South Vietnamese an offensive capability aimed at carrying the war into the Cambodian and Laotian base areas or into North Vietnam itself. At the same time, they came to rely on the presence of American units and their firepower that would perform much of the manoeuvre warfare.

Arguably the most debilitating weakness was poor leadership. American advisors from Westmoreland on down certainly knew this, but lacked the authority to remedy the situation. The highest ranking South Vietnamese officers often owed their positions more to political connections than to battlefield prowess. In his important statistical study of the Vietnam War, Thomas C. Thayer used the 7th ARVN Division as a case study of how good leadership alone could turn an ineffective unit into an effective one. After the US 9th Infantry Division withdrew from IV Corps in the summer of 1969, the Mekong Delta region became almost entirely the responsibility of three South Vietnamese units—the 7th, 9th, and 21st Divisions. Concerned about the poor performance of ARVN units there, US advisors pressured Saigon to replace inferior commanders. President Nguyen Van Thieu agreed and relieved several officers, including the 7th Division commander, Nguyen Thanh Hoang, and replaced him with Colonel (later Brigadier General) Nguyen Khoa Nam, an aggressive brigade commander from the Airborne Division. During the first six months of 1970 the division became more aggressive, spending 30 per cent more time on offensive operations. As Thayer concluded, 'The lone action of putting a competent commander in charge produced these profound favorable effects. No other changes were necessary.'⁶

This case was the exception rather than the rule, although in some cases Saigon was taking steps to get rid of poor officers. Within the pacification system responsible for security in the countryside, which on the American side was administered by the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program within MACV and on the South Vietnamese side by a system of military officers administering provinces and districts and coordinating territorial militia operations, US officials succeeded in formulating an agreement with President Thieu to replace ineffective or incompetent officers. By 1970 CORDS had pressured the South Vietnamese Government to replace virtually all of the worst province and district chiefs. The system impressed US Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, who in October 1970 asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

6. Ibid., 66.

of Staff, 'do you think that the MACV-CORDS system ... could be adapted to improve the leadership of [ARVN] military units?' The secretary also pointed out that 'there is little sign of a systematic and continuous MACV effort to have the [South Vietnamese government] replace poor combat commanders with good ones'.⁷ MACV never had much luck, however.

The situation was exacerbated by a shortage of experienced officers. Between 1967 and 1972 the officer corps had too many lieutenants and captains and not enough majors and colonels. The manpower was there; Saigon simply did not promote them fast enough. In his study, Thayer argued that the reason for this was the 'product of a promotion system that responded more to the politics of the senior generals than to the needs of the professional military service'.⁸

Leadership problems inevitably affected morale, a fact clearly demonstrated in ARVN desertions. Between 1965 and 1972 a stunning 840,000 troops from all services deserted the ranks, a figure that exceeded casualties by 6 to 1. The South Vietnamese Army was responsible for almost 80 per cent of that figure. Desertions were high even in the elite forces—ranger units suffered as much as 55 per cent desertion rate in a given year; airborne units 30 per cent; and the Marines fifteen per cent.⁹

These fundamental flaws remained uncorrected through more than a decade of American advice and support. Despite a general realisation within the US Army that the United States would not fight in Vietnam forever, between 1965 and 1969 there was no serious and concerted effort to bring the ARVN up to the level it would clearly need to be in order to stand alone against the North Vietnamese. Instead, advisors often served as a conduit to American firepower, and the ARVN became addicted. As noted military historian Harry Summers observed, 'If there is a criticism of this field advisory effort, it is that US advisors were too good, for they inadvertently helped to create a dependency that was to prove fatal once US support was withdrawn ...'¹⁰

But in the final analysis, advisors could not change the basic weaknesses in the South Vietnamese military system; they could only shore up the structure. As the US Army's official history of the advisory effort in Vietnam concluded, 'Why, after all, should Americans force changes down the throats of the Vietnamese generals who, by 1968, ought to have known what was possible and what was necessary to ensure the survival of South Vietnam?'¹¹

7. Memo, Sec of Def to Chairman, JCS, 7 October 1970, sub: RVNAF Leadership.

8. Southeast Asia Analysis Report, 'RVNAF Leadership', June 1968, 48.

9. Southeast Asia Analysis Report, 'RVNAF Desertions', June-July 1971, 12.

10. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *Vietnam War Almanac* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985), 236.

11. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), 515.

The Nixon administration formally announced its Vietnamisation plan in July 1969, and US combat units began redeploying from Vietnam. Since the national strategy counted on a combination of US and South Vietnamese forces to combat the Communists, the eventual reduction of more than half a million American troops left a very large hole in the order of battle that would inevitably stretch the ARVN almost to the breaking point. Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, the Chief of Staff of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, observed that the ARVN's pre-Vietnamisation posture in the countryside 'nailed down our main striking force—the divisions—in a static, helpless posture from which they could not be extricated'. When the Americans left, he continued, 'We therefore lost our strategic mobility and initiative'.¹²

When historians write about early 'tests' of Vietnamisation they invariably come up with two major examples: the incursion into Cambodia in the spring of 1970 and the offensive into Laos in early 1971. In the first, dubbed Operations TOAN THANG 41 and 42, the South Vietnamese portion of a combined thrust into Cambodia west of Saigon, III Corps used its 5th and 25th ARVN Divisions, along with ranger units and two armoured cavalry squadrons, to attack enemy base areas in a region known as the Parrot's Beak. Between 14 April and 30 June some 50,000 South Vietnamese troops were on the offensive, chasing North Vietnamese units from their strongholds and destroying their supply depots. South Vietnamese planners called it 'the most successful operation ever conducted by III Corps'.¹³ American advisors accompanying the South Vietnamese into Cambodia largely agreed, noting that it 'demonstrated the capability of the Vietnamese forces to conduct large unit operations without major US assistance', though they also pointed to a lack of aggressiveness among the armoured cavalry and an over-reliance on air support.¹⁴

The overall success of the operation was based on three factors. First, the South Vietnamese were fighting alongside an American force of better than two divisions that ensured the North Vietnamese remained fully engaged. Second, the South Vietnamese were for the first time leaving their defensive shell and going on the offensive in a formerly 'off limits' area. Finally, and most importantly, the South Vietnamese had superior commanders leading the operation. The III Corps commander, Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri, according to one account, 'was aboard his command ship all day and every day during these operations, making contacts, receiving reports, giving orders, and stimulating his unit commanders on the ground into action ... His combat prowess, personal courage and command ability became legendary and widely recognised'.¹⁵

12. Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1980), 381.

13. Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, *The Cambodian Incursion* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1978), 69.

14. AAR, Op TOAN THANG, Combat Adv Team 90, 25th ARVN Div, 11 June 1970, 2.

15. General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership* (Washington, DC: US Center of Military History, 1981), 126-7.

To the south, IV Corps also supported the operations with its own smaller thrust into Cambodia, and its commander, Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh, was also a first-rate officer. But within a year, both Tri and Thanh were dead, killed in helicopter crashes, and South Vietnam was deprived of two of its best commanders.

This combination of factors was the exception, not the rule, however. During the second crossborder operation the South Vietnamese lacked two of these factors—strong leadership and American troops fighting alongside them—and the outcome was much different. Launched in February 1971, Operation LAM SON 719 was aimed at North Vietnam's second major concentration of base areas, the Route 9 corridor into southern Laos. This was Hanoi's main infiltration route into northern South Vietnam, a region that was well-guarded and crisscrossed with complex lines of communication and resupply. American planning was haphazard, hurried, and unimaginative, and the South Vietnamese would pay the price. In early February the three elite units—the Marines, Airborne, and Rangers—along with the 1st Armored Brigade, pushed towards the Laotian town of Tchepone in the heart of North Vietnamese Base Area 604. This time, American advisors were not permitted to accompany the units, but US aviation assets provided much of the lift and gunship capability. The South Vietnamese were outnumbered from the start, their 17,000-man force facing at least 22,000 North Vietnamese, including armour. Although the objective of LAM SON 719 was to ravage the base area and hinder future North Vietnamese infiltration, the operation soon turned into a rout. The South Vietnamese reached Tchepone on 6 March, but were immediately chased away. During the next three weeks they fought their way back to the border, suffering more than 7500 casualties—almost half their force—in the process, including 1764 killed. American losses were also heavy. A total of 108 helicopters were destroyed and another 618 damaged, and 215 men were killed. The enemy suffered an estimated 20,000 dead, but the images of South Vietnamese soldiers fleeing the battlefield, some of them clinging to the skids of flying helicopters, dominated the news.¹⁶

Although LAM SON 719 was a defeat for the South Vietnamese, President Nixon, in a televised address, announced that 'Tonight I can report that Vietnamisation has succeeded'. The truth was the opposite. Despite the disadvantages they faced, the South Vietnamese did not fight well and they failed to accomplish their goal of pushing the North Vietnamese out of the base area. Much of the problem was caused by poor tactical coordination. For example, advisers with the 1st Armored Brigade, which during much of LAM SON 719 was under the operational control of the Airborne Division, noted that the Airborne Division commander 'failed to support [armoured units] or withdraw them even when [they] became surrounded on three sides by enemy armor ...'¹⁷ Even

16. For details see Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, *Lam Son 719* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1979).

17. AAR, Op LAM SON 719, Senior Advisor, 1st Armored Bde, 26 March 1971, 2.

the Marines, who, in the words of an advisor, ‘performed admirably in the face of the strongest enemy forces they have yet encountered’, showed fundamental flaws in their operational execution, including an ‘inexplicable failure to launch aggressive ground action’ to clear the enemy from around key firebases.¹⁸

Unlike the case of the Cambodian incursion, this time leadership was a liability. The I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, a better bureaucratic survivor than a military commander, failed to execute effective command or support his troops in the field. After the war, General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, wrote with Lam firmly in mind that ‘The appointment of general officers to these key command jobs should have been devoid of political considerations and based entirely on military professionalism and competence’.¹⁹ Unfortunately, Lam was not relieved until after he committed another serious blunder more than a year later.

The most serious test of Vietnamisation came in the spring of 1972 when North Vietnam launched the so-called Easter Offensive, a massive attack designed to achieve a conventional military victory. Approximately 120,000 troops backed by armour and artillery struck South Vietnam on three fronts at a time when the dwindling US ground forces were down to less than 100,000, of which only 5000 were combat troops. Still in-country, however, was the US advisory network, which continued to maintain American advisors with each of the South Vietnamese combat divisions.²⁰

The opening shots of the offensive came in I Corps. At noon on 30 March the North Vietnamese attacked the arc of South Vietnamese firebases along the demilitarised zone and the western border with Laos, raining artillery rounds on the surprised defenders. On 2 April the South Vietnamese surrendered Camp Carroll and its major concentration of long-range artillery, giving the enemy unrestricted access to western Quang Tri Province. The North Vietnamese advance then slowed for three weeks, but on the morning of 28 April they attacked again, pushing to within 1.5 kilometres of the capital. General Vu Van Giai, the 3rd Division commander, had fewer than 2000 troops left, so he decided to abandon the city and consolidate his forces south of Quang Tri City, even though this meant conceding most of Quang Tri Province to the North Vietnamese. It was a sound decision and might have saved the remnants of the 3rd Division had not the I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Lam, ordered Giai to ‘hold at all costs’. Lam allowed Giai no flexibility to move any units without specific approval.

18. Rpt, Senior Marine Advisor to Dep Senior Advisor, I Corps, 21 March 1971, sub: Combat Operations AAR LAM SON 719, 5.

19. General Cao Van Vien and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1980), 102.

20. Detail on the Easter Offensive comes from Dale Andradé, *America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 Easter Offensive* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Bewildered by the conflicting orders, South Vietnamese units splintered and virtually disappeared, abandoning most of the province north of the capital. US advisors in Quang Tri called for rescue helicopters, and on 1 May the US Air Force evacuated 132 survivors from Quang Tri, 80 of them US military personnel.

Although Lam had proven to be a poor officer since taking command of I Corps in 1966, it took the debacle of 1972 to finally convince Saigon to remove him. Lam was replaced by Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, one of the best officers in the South Vietnamese Army. His mission was to defend Hue, minimise further losses in the region, and recapture lost territory. Truong pushed the North Vietnamese from Quang Tri City in September, although much of the province remained in enemy hands for the rest of the war.

In II Corps, South Vietnam's central region, the North Vietnamese tried to split South Vietnam from the rugged Central Highlands to the sea. Lieutenant General Ngo Dzu, a timid officer, commanded the region, though his weakness was offset by the highly competent John Paul Vann, one of the most experienced and effective American senior advisors of the war.

Although the main objective of the North Vietnamese attack was the Central Highlands, the fighting began in coastal Binh Dinh Province, long a stronghold of Communist support. The attacks were partly a diversion intended to draw South Vietnamese troops away from the Central Highlands. The ruse almost succeeded, but Vann persuaded Dzu to leave the 23rd Division in the highlands to defend against the main thrust.

When the North Vietnamese realised that the diversion had failed, they concentrated on the Central Highlands. During the second week in April the enemy attacked the small district town of Tan Canh and nearby Dak To firebase. The South Vietnamese force there, part of the 22nd ARVN Division, quickly disintegrated, leaving the way open to the provincial capital of Kontum. General Dzu was soon relieved of command, replaced by Major General Nguyen Van Toan.

But the North Vietnamese inexplicably paused at Tan Canh and Dak To for almost three weeks, allowing the South Vietnamese time to reinforce Kontum. When the attack did come in mid-May, US airstrikes decimated the North Vietnamese and prevented the loss of the provincial capital. Fierce fighting by the 23rd ARVN Division, commanded by another solid officer, Colonel Ly Tong Ba, ensured that the enemy attacks would fail, and by June the North Vietnamese were retreating back across the border.

The third phase of the offensive occurred in III Corps west of Saigon, around the town of An Loc in Binh Long Province, base of the 5th ARVN Division. In early April North Vietnamese troops feinted into neighbouring Tay Ninh Province, but advisors with the 5th ARVN Division correctly predicted that An Loc was the real target.

North Vietnamese armour played a larger role at An Loc than at any other place during the Easter Offensive. Enemy tanks stormed through the town of Loc Ninh just north of An Loc on 5 April, then struck An Loc itself on 13 April, but poor use of infantry in support of the armour, combined with the ARVN's effective use of hand-held light anti-tank weapons hampered the onslaught. By 21 April the attack had faltered and the North Vietnamese settled into a classic siege.

South Vietnamese military officials in Saigon planned to relieve the city by sending the 21st ARVN Division north from the Mekong Delta, the only time during the entire war that an infantry division moved outside of its corps area of operation. For three weeks the division crept northward, often held at bay by much smaller North Vietnamese units. Although the 21st Division never reached An Loc, its slow advance may have helped turn the tide of battle because it diverted more than a regiment of enemy troops.

On 11 May the North Vietnamese again tried to overrun An Loc in what advisors later described as 'the fiercest attack'. An Loc held, with terrible losses on both sides. While the North Vietnamese were completely spent, the ARVN had enough strength left to launch limited counterattacks, gradually driving the enemy to the north and west. However, the town of An Loc was destroyed and much of the territory surrounding remained under North Vietnamese control.

South Vietnam survived the offensive and claimed a victory, though a costly one. Government figures claimed 10,000 soldiers killed, 33,000 wounded, and more than 2000 missing in action. Over 1000 of them died during the first two weeks in April. However, unofficial figures ran much higher, placing South Vietnamese combat deaths at almost 30,000, with 78,000 wounded and 14,000 missing, though these were never confirmed.²¹ Even so, the ARVN could not have prevailed without the massive air support called in by American advisors. Although some ARVN units performed well, many did not, so in the end the South Vietnamese effort during the Easter Offensive really proved very little—except that the South Vietnamese had survived one more round in the long war, and few doubted that Hanoi would attack again in the years ahead. In the meantime, Saigon could do nothing but wait for the next offensive.

This defensive strategy remained the crux of South Vietnam's disadvantageous position throughout the war. While North Vietnam could prepare interminably for an offensive with little fear of a pre-emptive strike, and then pick the time and place of its attack, Saigon was forced to remain forever vigilant, maintaining a thinly spread defensive network all over South Vietnam. Other weaknesses also remained. Defensively,

21. Friendly casualty rates are for the period between 30 March and 30 July. Although many South Vietnamese soldiers died retaking Quang Tri during August and September, they are not included as part of the Easter Offensive. Army Activities Report, Southeast Asia, 'Statistical Information on Current Enemy Offensive', 26 August 1972.

the ARVN was not organised in depth with sufficient fortification, and there was a lack of firepower coordination between the Army, Marines, and Air Force. Artillery was often broken down into small elements confined to isolated firebases which became good targets for enemy artillery. Finally, South Vietnam's reserves were woefully inadequate. Since all of South Vietnam's infantry divisions were deployed in static defence, by 1972 each Corps had only one ranger group as a tactical reserve. The strategic reserve—the Airborne and Marine Divisions—were already committed in I Corps and could not reinforce other attacks across the country. On the eve of the American departure from Vietnam, General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, freely admitted that 'Vietnamization still had a long way to go toward developing the self-supporting capabilities of the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces].'²²

Why, if Vietnamisation had been going on since 1969, was improvement so difficult to discern? Clearly, as we have seen, progress was being hampered by something deeper than manpower and materiel. Indeed, at the beginning of the Easter Offensive the South Vietnamese Army was among the best-equipped in the world. By 1972 the United States had provided 640,000 M16 rifles, 34,000 M79 grenade launchers, 40,000 radios, 20,000 trucks, 400 tanks (including state-of-the-art M48 tanks), 200 helicopters, and almost 700 fixed-wing aircraft, including F-5 and A-37 jet fighters. Such military power would seem sufficient to turn back Hanoi's aggression.²³

The problem was that none of the ARVN's basic weaknesses had been solved by Vietnamisation. Two that have been discussed earlier are worth revisiting in the specific context of the Easter Offensive: the shortage of combat officers and desertions. By June 1972 there was such a shortage of field-grade officers that out of 104 South Vietnamese manoeuvre battalions, only four were commanded by lieutenant colonels. The rest were commanded by majors, captains—even lieutenants. By October the situation was worse, with only one battalion commanded by a lieutenant colonel. By the end of the year a new officer development program improved training, but the South Vietnamese officer corps never completely recovered.²⁴

The opposite was true in the enlisted ranks. Despite heavy losses in manpower, MACV noted that 'the RVNAF personnel replacement system seemed to function adequately ... in that losses were replaced rapidly'. Only during April when the level of enemy attacks was highest, and September when South Vietnamese forces were taking heavy casualties during the counter-offensive in Quang Tri, did replacements fail to keep up with losses. By the beginning of 1973, South Vietnamese manpower had all

22. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, 110.

23. 'How Good is Saigon's Army?' *Time*, 17 April 1972.

24. MACV 1972-73 Command History, vol. I: C-26.

but recovered from the Easter Offensive, boasting 566,996 regular forces and 549,909 in the territorial militia. Every battalion in both the Army and Marines were at least 73 per cent of authorised strength, with most of them over 90 per cent (The Airborne and Marine Divisions, elite units which had been badly mauled during the Quang Tri counter-offensive, actually showed a net increase in total strength). These statistics are more interesting in light of the fact that 70 per cent of all manpower losses were from desertions, a figure that was 43 per cent higher during 1972 than any previous year.²⁵ In the end, therefore, guns and tanks—of which Saigon had plenty—were not as crucial to South Vietnamese military effectiveness as intangible factors such as leadership and morale.

The Paris Peace Accords, signed on 23 January 1973, ended all direct US military support to Saigon. Although President Nixon intended to back the peace treaty with the threat of American bombers should Hanoi break the accord, it was not to be. In July 1973 Congress passed legislation ending funding for US military programs in Southeast Asia. In addition, although Saigon had been promised \$1.45 billion for fiscal year (FY) 1975, Congress slashed the figure to \$700 million. This was not the first drastic cut. Military aid had reached a high of \$2.7 billion in FY 73, but then dropped more than 50 per cent to \$1.26 billion the following year. The cut in FY 1975 funds only continued the downward trend.²⁶

At the same time argued some critics, North Vietnam was receiving ‘uninterrupted’ aid from its benefactors in the Soviet Union and China.²⁷ In reality, North Vietnam was also experiencing severe cutbacks from its Communist benefactors. Figures from US intelligence agencies showed a dramatic drop in military aid to Hanoi, from a high during the 1972 offensive of \$750 million, to \$330 million the following year and \$400 million in 1974—figures which, even at their highest point, paled in comparison with US aid to South Vietnam.²⁸ General Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam’s Defense Minister, wrote that while Hanoi planned for a new offensive ‘we needed to economize on our use of artillery and tanks, because after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, both the Soviet Union and China stopped supplying us with these weapons’.²⁹

25. OASD Report: ‘RVNAF Appraisal’, 15 February 1973; MACV 1972-73 Command History, vol. I: C-28.

26. These figures also included military aid to Laos, but that portion amounted to only a small fraction of the total. For FY 1973 funds see Public Law 92-570 10/26/1972; FY 1974 Public Law 92-570 11/16/1973; FY 1975 Public Law 93-437 10/08/1874.

27. For example see Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), 382.

28. Figures cited in Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 334.

29. General Vo Nguyen Giap, with Pham Chi Nhan, *The General Headquarters During the Spring of Total Victory: A Memoir [Tong Hanh Dinh Trong Mua Xuan Toan Thang: Hoi Uc]* (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2000), 147.

Decreased funding had just as much of an impact on North Vietnamese troops as it did on the South Vietnamese. During the 1972 offensive, Communist forces fired more than 220,000 rounds of tank and artillery ammunition, but by 1974 the North Vietnamese Army's entire stock of tank and artillery ammunition was only 100,000 rounds, including strategic reserves.³⁰ The Communist small arms ammunition stockpile in South Vietnam was 70,000 tons, along with 107,000 tons of gasoline, and 80,000 tons of food. Although these numbers were far from optimum for another major offensive, Hanoi believed that the stockpile 'was sufficient for us to support large forces conducting protracted, continuous combat operations as called for in our strategic combat plan'.³¹

Indeed, North Vietnamese forces were much more frugal with their firepower than their opponents. According to US Department of Defense figures, American forces in 1969 used an average of 128,400 tons of munitions per month (75,600 tons were bombs, the rest artillery). The South Vietnamese used about ten per cent of that figure per month, while the highest North Vietnamese expenditure, reached during the 1972 offensive, was about 1000 tons per month, or less than one per cent of the American total. Even in 1974, as military officials in Saigon were warning the US Congress of the dire ammunition shortages that would result from a reduction in aid, South Vietnamese forces fired an average of 56 tons of munitions for every ton used by the North Vietnamese.³²

In 1975, South Vietnam was at no greater disadvantage vis-à-vis its opponent than in the previous five years. The real problem was that, as South Vietnam faced the final showdown, its armed forces were still plagued by problems first revealed more than a decade earlier. Any progress they had made was trumped by the North Vietnamese, who were consistently better at incorporating lessons learned and applying them to future campaigns. Thomas Thayer said it best. The ARVN 'was a fairly good fighting force', he wrote, 'but it was not going to be good enough'.³³

30. Merle Pribbenow, 'North Vietnam's Final Offensive: Strategic Endgame Nonpareil', *Parameters*, Winter 1999-2000, 59-60.

31. Merle Pribbenow, trans., *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 350.

32. Paul N. McCloskey, 'The North Vietnam-South Vietnam Confrontation', Report on Vietnam Fact-finding Trip, 24 February to 3 March 1975, *Congressional Record*, 14 March 1975, 6777.

33. Thomas C. Thayer, 'How to Analyze a War Without Fronts: Vietnam 1965-72', *Journal of Defense Research*, series B, Tactical Warfare, vol. 7B: 3 (Fall 1975), 823.

The Making of Tigers: South Korea's Military Experience in the Vietnam War

Kil J. Yi

Introduction

In February 1965, at the request of the US government, President Park Chung Hee¹ of South Korea dispatched 2000 military engineers to South Vietnam with some solemn words: 'You must keep in mind the fact that the honor of your fatherland and the expectations of your 27 million fellow countrymen rest on your shoulders.' Eight months later, in the fall of 1965, when Korea dispatched an infantry division named the Tiger Division, Park invoked Greek mythology.² Their posterity would be as proud as those old Greeks whose ancestors were the 'brave soldiers who fought in the battle of Troy'. These remarks were more than the hyperbole that military commanders casually use to motivate foot soldiers marching into battlefields. In Park's mind his soldiers had every reason to be proud in mythological proportions because Korea's future depended on the quality of the help being rendered to Americans and South Vietnamese.³

In the early 1960s, South Korea was at the height of insecurity, not because of an imminent threat from its mortal enemy, North Korea, but from the changing policy outlook of its patron, the United States. The so-called liberal nation builder in the Administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson faulted America's foreign aid policy heretofore for concentrating on conventional military buildup in its client states without a vision for long-term economic and social improvements. As a result, despite receiving billions of dollars in aid, America's clients remained mostly poor, dependent,

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1. Korean names are written surname first, to be followed by given and middle names. For example, president Park's full name is written Park Chung Hee rather than Chung Hee Park, which is a westernised style. Korean names that appear in this article follow the traditional Korean style.
 2. Although Korean soldiers in South Vietnam were affectionately called 'tigers' or ROKs, after Republic of Korea, they were organised into Tiger, Blue Dragon, White Horse, and Dove units. The Tiger Division was the first combat force unit to arrive in South Vietnam.
 3. Bum Shik Shin (comp.), *Major Speeches by Korea's Park Chung Hee* (Seoul: Hollym Publishers, 1970), 237, 281.

and under the rule of anti-Communist strongmen in command of large military forces. In these countries, corrosive socio-economic problems engendered pro-Communist, anti-American sentiments, and in some cases, armed resistance to the US-supported government. In the words of one of the chief architects of nation building, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the American people needed ‘a new program that they could support with good conscience and some degree of enthusiasm’.⁴ That program would need to build a functioning and free society in America’s client states and ‘graduate’ them from US assistance program.⁵

South Korea was one of the first countries to be scrutinised by these liberal nation builders because of the gulf between the magnitude of help rendered and the depth of underdevelopment. In the words of Robert Komer of the National Security Council, one of most vocal nation builders in Washington, South Korea was ‘a mess[,] one of our [America’s] great failures despite billions in pump priming’.⁶ America’s involvement in South Korea since 1945 had nurtured ‘an unstable US stepchild’.⁷ These harsh words were not entirely misguided. A former Japanese colony, South Korea became independent in 1948 after three years of American occupation. Two years into its existence, North Korea attacked the South, forcing American intervention that lasted for three years. The Korean War, which cost nearly 40,000 American lives, ended in neither victory nor peace for the allies, mostly made up of US and Korean soldiers. Failing to sign a peace treaty, belligerents remained in a state of war under an armistice agreement, requiring continued American presence and assistance. In addition to financially supporting Korea’s 600,000-strong armed forces, the US also had 50,000 of its own soldiers stationed in Korea. At the same time, American economic aid was averaging \$200 million per annum yet barely keeping South Korea’s economy afloat. In essence, Korea became a mendicant nation stricken with poverty but in possession of one of the largest military forces in the world.

Usually underdevelopment engenders political upheaval, and South Korea was no exception. In the spring of 1960, protests by mostly university students toppled the US-backed regime of Rhee Syngman, South Korea’s first president and its self-proclaimed founding father. Korea’s Second Republic that replaced Rhee’s rule, also supported by

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4. Memorandum of Conversation: Korean-United States Tour d’Horizon, 14 November 1961, *Foreign Relations of United States 1961-1963*, Vol. XXII, *Northeast Asia* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 532. This volume will hereinafter be cited as *FRUS 1961-1963, Northeast Asia*.
 5. Walt W. Rostow (Special Assistant to the President) to Lyndon B. Johnson, 6 March 1967, ‘Vol. IV, 1/67-8/67’, Box 255, Korea, Country File, National Security File (hereinafter cited as Korea Country File), Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereinafter cited as LBJL).
 6. Komer to McGeorge Bundy (Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs), 26 March 1964, ‘Memos, Vol. I, 11/63-6/64’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.
 7. Komer to Johnson, 31 July 1964, ‘Memos, Vol. II, 7/64 - 8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

Washington, was short-lived. A group of junior officers of the South Korean military launched a coup and ended it only one year after its birth. The revolution of 1960 and the coup of 1961 demonstrated to the US that Korea's social and economic problems contained enough revolutionary firepower to topple governments it had unequivocally and generously supported. The liberal nation builders now asked: What had gone wrong in Korea? The answer was not difficult to find.

Washington's assistance deterred North Korea's takeover of the South and kept it anti-Communist. However, US aid could not remedy 'the lack of national direction or sense of responsibility of the Korean people or their leaders'. In other words, Koreans developed an addiction to American handouts that were offered as long as their armed forces remained 'solidly on the side of the Free World'. This state of dependency in exchange for South Korea's military confrontation with North Korea, however, came under increasing attacks from 'the mounting forces of nationalism, of unfulfilled expectations, and of youthful impatience'. Out of this frustration, some liberal elements in South Korea began to assert that, perhaps, North Korea's socialist approach to nation building was a correct path for the Korean people. The US was at a crossroad; without a genuine reform and development these forces were certain to seek 'an outlet in further revolutionary action, in courses which would further instability, and possibly in accommodation with the Communist north'.⁸ In Kennedy's words, 'the economic and political situation in and about Korea were such as to present a hopeless situation'.⁹

Washington's nation builders saw a reduction in Korea's conventional forces as the solution to Korea's problems. Without relocating part of the resources that went into maintaining Korea's bloated armed forces, US officials argued, the Koreans would not be able to 'put their own house in order'.¹⁰ At the same time, in order to put America's own balance of payment in order, liberal nation builders insisted that the US reduce its military presence in Korea. This blueprint for reducing the allied military forces caused uncertainties and anxieties in Park's government. Born of a military coup in a country with a strong Confucian tradition, in which generals were expected to be at the service of the gentry-scholar rulers, Park was viewed with suspicion, if not derision. Realising this sentiment, the coup plotters rationalised their action as a revolutionary act to rescue Korea from the hands of ineffective civilian leaders who could neither defend nor feed the nation. The junta pledged to neutralise Pyongyang's threat and eradicate poverty, all at the same time. These bold promises, of course, were predicated on a continuing

8. Presidential Task Force on Korea: Report to The National Security Council, 5 June 1961, Box 4, Vice-Presidential Security File, National Security File, LBJL (hereinafter cited as Presidential Task Force on Korea), 12.

9. Notes of the 485th Meeting of the National Security Council, 13 June 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963, Northeast Asia*, 481.

10. Komer to Bundy, 20 December 1961, *ibid.*, 549.

military buildup in Korea, which not only deterred possible North Korean attack but also guaranteed the flow of hard currency from the US in the form of military assistance. Washington's insistence on military cutbacks, therefore, threatened the very survival of the Park government. As Park pleaded with Rusk, 'in Korea it was impossible to switch from one to the other at once'.¹¹

The Seoul government's escaping act from this predicament was the US-Korean alliance in the Vietnam War. Between 1965 and 1973, South Korea dispatched about 320,000 soldiers to Vietnam, slightly more than ten per cent of the American commitment. At the height of Korea's involvement, its soldiers in Vietnam numbered 50,000. Korean casualties include 4600 killed-in-action and 15,000 wounded.¹² In the process, South Korea repositioned itself from a defensive to offensive player in containment and the staunchest ally of the US in Asia. Seoul thereby placed itself on the top of the Communist world's enemy list and exposed itself to a campaign of intimidation from North Korea that was certain to exploit South Korea's diversion of forces to Indochina. Now Washington had no choice but to commit itself deeper to the militarisation of Korea. In essence, South Korea's intervention in the Vietnam War was a classic example of seeking safety in the heart of danger.

The inconclusive end to the Korean War in 1953 was responsible for South Korea's large conventional forces. Since the armistice, North Korea turned unification of the peninsula into its *raison d'être*. In order to prevent Pyongyang from launching a second attempt at unification of the peninsula, South Korea built 'the largest military establishments in proportion to population in the entire world'.¹³ The US, on the other hand, had a different strategic calculation. It was convinced that Russia and China, North Korea's patrons, would no longer support Kim Il Sung's fanatical desire to become the sole ruler of the peninsula. Washington had a rationale for this conclusion. Unlike in the days before the outbreak of the Korean War, there could not be speculation on the part of the communist bloc as to whether the US would commit itself to defend South Korea. The US military was already in place on the peninsula, defending the most likely route of North Korea's southbound push. The next time around, the US would not have to secure a UN authorisation of a 'police action', and then intervene. Also, America's improved capacity to bring in reinforcements from other areas, plus air superiority, precluded Kim Il Sung's contention that North Korea's main military objectives would be achieved before the arrival of large scale American forces. In addition, unlike 1950, the South had more than enough men in arms—double the size of North Korean forces—to hold the line until the arrival of American reinforcements. If, however, Park had any

11. Memorandum of Conversation: Korean-United States Tour d'Horizon, 14 November 1961, *ibid.*, 533.

12. Detailed statistics on South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War are found in the website of the Institute for Military History of South Korea's defense ministry: <www.mnd.go.kr>.

13. SNIE (Special Intelligence Estimate) 42-61, 21 March 1961, *ibid.*, 433.

fear of the Communist side introducing nuclear weapons into the war, he should not worry, said Kennedy. The US had the capability to ‘deliver a more crippling blow to the Soviets than they had originally launched’, about three to eight times ‘quantitatively and far ahead quality-wise’.¹⁴

The US found Park vulnerable to its pressure to scale back Korea’s military establishment because of his precarious hold on power. As one US official described deridingly, Park’s revolutionary council was composed of ‘a bunch of lieutenant colonels’ who had no experience governing a nation. They also had enough enemies within Korea’s military and the political establishment. The Kennedy Administration’s withholding recognition or interrupting the flow of aid to Korea would have guaranteed Park’s unraveling. After all, as noted by American officials, in Korea, ‘the United States was the only game in town’.¹⁵ Therefore, following Park’s coup, the administration’s Task Force on Korea urged Kennedy to mix ‘friendship and firmness’, or more commonly speaking, carrot and stick. It should be made known to Park that the US was willing to ‘contribute significant additional assistance’, but also that it was ‘ready to withhold such assistance if necessary to force appropriate Korean action’. That action included a ‘substantial reduction in [South Korean] forces’. In conjunction, the smaller forces of Korea should now contribute more to internal security, civil works and economic growth. The nation builders of Washington wanted Korean soldiers to be utilised for ‘National Construction Service and other appropriate civil works projects’. They would learn the ‘skills and vocations’ with which they could make ‘a greater contribution to [building] Korean infrastructure’ during and after their military service, insisted Washington.¹⁶ According to this plan, Korean soldiers would spend more time with shovels than rifles, and learn to operate bulldozers rather than to fire howitzers. Also, Washington hoped to cut the corners of its military aid by requiring Seoul to procure the part of its military needs that could be produced in Korea rather than relying on the shipments from the US. And the biggest ticketed item: the Koreans living with a smaller US military presence in its midst.

To Park, Washington’s nation builders were misreading and misleading Kim Il Sung and his patrons in Moscow and Beijing, and underestimating the value of Seoul’s contribution to containment in Northeast Asia. Park saw another Achesonian debacle on the horizon. In the minds of most of Koreans, including Park’s, Dean Acheson, President Harry Truman’s Secretary of State, was the root cause of the Korean War. In January 1950, only a few months after the withdrawal of American forces from South Korea, Acheson enunciated during a National Press Club speech that South Korea was

14. Memorandum of Conversation: US-Korean Relations, 14 November 1961, *ibid.*, 537.

15. House Committee on International Relations, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations: Report of the Subcommittee on International Organization*, 95th Congress, 2nd Session, 1978, 164.

16. Presidential Task Force on Korea, 1-9.

out of America's 'defense parameter' in Asia. It meant that an attack on South Korea was not necessarily a declaration of war against the US, which was the case with Japan and the Philippines who were guaranteed of American intervention. Five months after the speech, South Korea was attacked. A veteran of the Korean War, Park believed that Washington's talk on the reduction of the Korean forces and American presence in Korea would embolden Kim Il Sung to try to accomplish what he had failed in the Korean War. Park was apt to say, Koreans 'learned about the savagery and atrocities of communism not through books but through direct bloody physical experience' of the Korean War that killed one million of his compatriots. Koreans did not need another learning experience to know the brutalities of a Communist invasion.¹⁷ When Park met with Kennedy in Washington in November 1961, six months after his coup, he insisted that Korea's 600,000-strong army was a 'must' in order for his country to remain 'the staunchest anti-Communist country' in the world, and deter North Korea. Diverting his soldiers away from military barracks to construction sites was possible but only when 'their primary duty was not imperiled'.¹⁸ Park's entreaties, however, failed to reverse the downward slope of the projected American assistance. One of the reasons, Park was told, was the Kennedy Administration's spending 'a great deal more money' in Southeast Asia than originally planned.¹⁹ True to the liberal nation building doctrine, the US military assistance program to Korea in 1962 dropped to \$143 million from \$202 million in the previous year.²⁰ The message was clear: Park had to reduce his conventional forces.²¹ Despite the drop, one of his aides told Kennedy, 'Korea continues to be our most expensive military satellite'.²² Kennedy asked rhetorically, 'Why did we [the US] ever spend so much on ROK [Republic of Korea] forces instead of shoring up SEA [South East Asia] more?'²³

Lyndon B. Johnson was equally determined to reduce US aid to Korea. In the words of McGeorge Bundy, the nation's security advisor, Johnson was 'most anxious'²⁴ to do this because South Korea was no longer 'a high priority target as to tie up a large

17. Bum, *Major Speeches by Korea's Park Chung Hee*, 36.

18. Memorandum of Conversation: Korean-United States Tour d'Horizon, 14 November 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963, Northeast Asia*, 533.

19. Memorandum of Conversation: US-Korean Relations, 14 November 1961, *ibid.*, 537.

20. Young Soon Yim (ed.), *Handbook on Korean-U.S. Relations: Centennial Edition* (New York: The Asia Society, 1985), 283.

21. The Joint Chiefs of Staff voiced the strongest opposition to cuts in the allied military presence in Korea citing the danger of 'encourag[ing] the very aggression we [the] US seek to deter'. See Lyman L Lemmitzer (Chairman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff) to Robert S. McNamara, *FRUS 1961-1963, Northeast Asia*, 554. Also, the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 did not help the liberal nation builders.

22. Komer to Kennedy, 31 May 1963, *ibid.*, 648.

23. Komer to Carl Kaysen (Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs), 26 September 1962, *ibid.*, 607.

24. McGeorge Bundy to Alexis Johnson (Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs), 20 December 1963, 'Memos Vol. 1, 11/63-6/64', Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

proportion of US assets'.²⁵ The 'plain fact of the matter' was that Southeast Asia had emerged as a 'big danger area' requiring increased US commitment.²⁶ And the US no longer had 'the dough to sustain' the existing military commitments abroad.²⁷ The combination of reduction in Korean forces with reconstitution of 'one (or even two)' US divisions currently stationed in Korea into a strategic reserve for Southeast Asia to be stationed in Hawaii would reduce the 'gold drain' in Korea, noted one internal memo from the Johnson Administration.²⁸ The administration had to live with the fact that a 'high defense budget necessitates [the] most efficient use of all resources available to meet US responsibilities worldwide'.²⁹ In other words, Ho Chi Minh, not Kim Il Sung, was the one who had to be contained immediately. It was Saigon, not Seoul, that needed more bolstering. Formalised as National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 298, Johnson instructed the Pentagon and Foggy Bottom to study the possible withdrawal of one US division from Korea by 1 June or, at the latest, 1 December, 1964.³⁰

The State Department's vocal opposition delayed the proposed cuts in the allied military presence on the peninsula. Rusk warned that diverting US troops away from Korea would likely be interpreted by the Communist side as American intention to 'disengage' from the area at a time when, necessitated by the conflict in Vietnam, America's commitment to defend its friends and allies came under scrutiny. Robert Barnett, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, warned that if the withdrawal took place, Park's ability to govern would be 'seriously impaired' and 'the possibility that the government might be overthrown by a coup or revolt would be substantially increased'.³¹ If cuts had to be made, the State insisted, the size of the Korean forces should be determined without reductions in American military presence for the time being. The Defense Department retorted that Americans would want to see their sons come home rather than the sons of Korean families going back to theirs earlier than expected. Unable to come to a decision, Johnson agreed to 'hold in abeyance' the troop redeployment issue.³² Temporarily putting the troop reduction issue on hold, however,

25. Untitled, 7 December 1963, 'Memos, Vol. 1, 11/63-6/64', Box 254, Korea Country file, LBJL.

26. Komer to Johnson, 22 January 1964, 'Memos, Vol. 1, 11/63-6/64', Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

27. Komer to Bundy, 9 December 1963, 'Filed by the LBJL', Box 256, Korea Country File, LBJL.

28. Untitled, 7 December 1963 'Memos, Vol. 1, 11/63-6/64', Box 254, Korea Country file, LBJL.

29. Cable 1538 to Tokyo, 16 December 1963, 'Cables, Vol. I, 11/63-4/64', Box 250, Japan, Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

30. 'Study of Possible Redeployment of US division now stationed in Korea', NSAM 298, 5 May 1964, Box 4, National Security Action Memorandum, National Security File, LBJL.

31. Robert W. Barnett (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs) to Robert W. Black (Chief of the Military Assistance Division of the Agency for International Development), 5 October 1964, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Vol. XXIX, Part I, *Korea* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2000), 52. This volume will hereinafter be cited as *FRUS 1964-1968, Korea*.

32. Bundy to McNamara and Rusk, 9 June 1964, 'NSAM 298—Study of Possible Redeployment of US division Now Stationed in Korea', Box 4, National Security Action Memorandum, National Security File (hereinafter National Security Action Memorandum), LBJL.

was no comfort for Park who realised that when the war in South Vietnam intensified, the issue would resurface.³³

At this point, South Korea offered a helping hand in South Vietnam to a patron that had become less generous and more indignant towards a slow rate of nation building in Korea.³⁴ Park told US officials that his country had ‘a million men well trained in [guerrilla] type of warfare’, who could be sent as regular soldiers, or, if the US preferred, as volunteers.³⁵ Washington’s nation builders, however, saw Park’s offer for what it was—an attempt to win continued American support for his conventional military buildup. ‘We would have to pay for this, and we might as well pay the Vietnamese to do the job themselves’, came the response, Kennedy’s Defense Department.³⁶ When Park forwarded the same offer to the Johnson Administration, he was rebuffed again: South Korea had ‘no significant military contribution’ to make as far as the Vietnam War was concerned.³⁷ Also, there was the concern that Korean soldiers in Vietnam would look like ‘mercenaries ... pulling US chestnuts out of the fire rather than coming to the aid of beleaguered fellow Asian’.³⁸

Washington’s ambivalence toward Korea’s participation in the Vietnam War began to wane as America’s allies in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation either resisted getting involved or lacked soldiers to contribute. SEATO members’ inaction or inability upset Johnson who wanted to boost the morale of Saigon and overwhelm Hanoi with his so-called ‘more flags’ campaign. Johnson vented his frustration on his ambassadors who

33. ‘Memorandum for the President’, 8 June 1964, ‘NSAM 298—Study of Possible Redeployment of US division Now Stationed in Korea’, Box 4, National Security Action Memorandum, LBJL.

34. Park’s predecessor, Rhee Syngman, had first linked Korea’s intervention in the conflict in Indochina to America’s underwriting of expansion of Korea’s armed forces. In February of 1954, Rhee offered a combat division to the embattled French forces in Vietnam in exchange for Washington’s financing of a 75 per cent increase in Korea’s military forces, from twenty to 35 divisions. The offer was turned down. See, Memorandum of Discussion, 185th Meeting of NSC, 17 February 1954, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1054-56.

35. Memorandum of Conversation: US-Korean Relations, 14 November 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963, Northeast Asia*, 536.

36. Edwin W. Martin (Political Advisor to the Commander in Chief, Pacific) to Sterling J. Cottrell (Director of the State Department’s Vietnam Task Force), 19 January 1962, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. II, *Vietnam* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 54. The US allowed South Korea to send a group of intelligence experts whose arrival in Vietnam in May 1962 marked the beginning of South Korea’s involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. Worth H. Bagley (Naval Aide to the President’s Military Representative) to Maxwell D. Taylor (President’s Military Representative), 3 May 1962, *ibid.*, 374.

37. Cable 838 to Seoul, 18 March 1964, ‘Cables, Vol. V, 3/64’, Box 2, Vietnam Country File, LBJL. The US had more reasons than its discomfiture with Korea’s anticipation of material rewards, to refuse Park’s offer of troops for South Vietnam. For example, South Korea’s deeper involvement threatened the US-backed *rapprochement* talks between Seoul and Tokyo, two vital US allies that did not recognise each other largely because of Seoul’s refusal to establish formal relations with its former coloniser.

38. Cable 3456 from US Mission to UN, 20 March 1964, ‘Memos, Vol. XI, 3/64’, Box 3, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

were given the task of convincing their host governments for assistance to Vietnam: 'I am gravely disappointed by the inadequacy of the actions by our [American] friends and allies in response to our request that they share the burden of Free World responsibility in Viet Nam.' He averred that Americans 'should not be required to continue indefinitely, alone and unassisted, to be the only champions of freedom in Viet Nam today'.³⁹ Johnson now had no choice but to turn to the country his aides derided as America's unstable stepchild.

A turning point in the US-Korean Alliance in the Vietnam War came in the form of major floods that hit the north and central coastal regions of South Vietnam at the end of 1964. As the extent of the damages became apparent, Rusk inquired of ambassador Maxwell Taylor in Saigon whether Washington should use the floods as a pretext for dispatching American military engineers, accompanied by 'appropriate combat forces for security purposes'.⁴⁰ Taylor was opposed to the dispatch of American forces that would give the Saigon government the wrong impression that 'the US is prepared to take over more of the responsibilities' of the war. Therefore, the ambassador proposed, the damages from the flood should be used as 'a means of trying to obtain third country military engineer aid'.⁴¹ Rusk agreed and on 17 December, the US ambassador to Seoul, Winthrop Brown, was instructed to solicit 'military engineers or additional military medical units' because there was 'much road repair and bridge-building to be done in flood-damaged areas of Central Viet Nam'.⁴² To the shock of the envoys Park volunteered 'two combat divisions ... at any time they might be needed'.⁴³ For the time being, however, Park had to be satisfied with sending non-combat soldiers. In late February 1965, the first contingent of 600 military engineers arrived in South Vietnam. Two months later this force grew to 2400 soldiers, consisting of 'a high quality, hand-picked group' that made 'an excellent impression'.⁴⁴ South Korea had now become the second largest foreign presence in South Vietnam after the US.

39. Circular Telegram 14, 2 July 1964, 'Cables, Vol. XIII, 6/64-7/64', Box 6, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

40. Cable 1065 to Saigon, 12 November 1964, 'Cables, Vol. XXI, 11/1-15/94', Box 10, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

41. Cable 1502 from Saigon, 14 November 1964, 'Cables, Vol. XXI, 11/1-15/94', Box 10, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

42. Cable 531 to Seoul, 17 December 1964, 'Cables, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65', Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

43. Cable 552 from Seoul, 19 December 1964, 'Cables, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65', Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL; Chester L. Cooper (Member of National Security Council) and Bundy to Johnson, 22 December 1964, 'Memos, Vol. XXIV, 12/19-25/64', Box 11, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

44. Situation report on South Vietnam, 3 March 1965, 'Memos, Vol. XIX, 3/1 - 8/65', Box 14, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

Until the summer of 1965, the Johnson Administration was in denial. When Park offered combat forces, he was often presented with lessons on the nature of guerrilla warfare. The Vietnam War was not ‘that kind of war’ where regular units from foreign countries could confront the enemy on the battlefield.⁴⁵ In the words of State Department experts, the

struggle against [the] Viet Cong is a guerrilla war in which [the] enemy is elusive and difficult to find and fix. He seeks to attack by surprise ... When being pursued he often melds into [the] population. Under such circumstances it is difficult even for [the Vietnamese] forces.⁴⁶

Therefore, until the summer of 1965, America’s choice of weapon against this enemy was aerial bombing over North Vietnam. These operations whose codenames included FLAMING DART, BARREL ROLL, and ultimately, ROLLING THUNDER, however, failed to live up to their planners’ strategic calculation that destruction in the North would pressure the guerrillas in the South to cease action.⁴⁷ The bombing campaigns certainly were not as deadly as their codenames suggested. As the bombing went on, one Johnson biographer noted, ‘there were clearly more of them [the enemy] than before’ on the ground.⁴⁸ By spring of 1965, the triumvirate of America’s Vietnam policy, Robert S. McNamara, secretary of defense, McGeorge Bundy, national security advisor, and Dean Rusk, secretary of state, had to concede that ‘a substantial allied ground force’ must be committed, as Park had insisted all along:

[A] force which had Australians, Filipinos, Thais, Koreans and conceivably even Pakistanis would give real international color to the defense of South Vietnam and would also have a substantial braking effect on any possible Communist escalation.⁴⁹

However, ‘major forces could come only from Seoul’ while ‘small Australian and New Zealand participation’ could be expected.⁵⁰ On April 2, during an NSC meeting,

45. Cable 531 to Seoul, 17 December 1964, ‘Cables, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

46. Cable 12 to Seoul, 3 July 1964, ‘Cables, Vol. II, 7/64 - 8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

47. Johnson did not authorise the bombing of North Vietnam’s urban centres and industrial facilities that his generals recommended out of fear of provoking Beijing. See Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air War: American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 73-88.

48. Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 464.

49. Bundy to Johnson, 6 March 1965, ‘Memos (A) Vol. XXXI [2 of 2], 3/12-31/65’, Box 15, Vietnam Country File, LBJL. Ambassador Taylor warned that US ground forces in Vietnam would engender criticism that the US had assumed ‘the old French role of alien colonizer and conqueror’. Cable 3003 from Saigon, 16 March 1965, ‘Memos (A), Vol. XXXI [1 of 2], 3/12-31/65’, Box 15, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

50. ‘Key Elements for Discussion, April 1, 1965 at 5:30 PM’, Tabs 120-140, Deployment of Major US Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 2, Box 41, National Security Council Histories, National Security File, LBJL.

Johnson authorised an ‘18,000 to 20,000-man increase in US military support forces’ and ‘urgent exploration’ with Korea, Australia, and New Zealand for a ‘rapid deployment of significant combat elements’ in proportion with American escalation.⁵¹ Since the US had only a slim chance of getting sizable forces from the latter two, this instruction was essentially a proposal for a US-Korean military alliance in Vietnam.

Park’s state visit to Washington in mid-May 1965, which coincided with the fourth anniversary of his coup, opened the formal negotiations for South Korea’s intervention in the Vietnam War. It was Park’s moment of personal triumph. Four years earlier Washington sought to exploit Park’s insecurities to undertake measures that, in the short run, threatened the survival of his government. Now, Park was a state guest of a US that was confronted with the most tenacious enemy it had encountered but without the commitment of meaningful assistance from its treaty partners. Reflecting his sense of urgency, Johnson requested from Park a combat division at four different points throughout their conversation. In return, Johnson assured Park that ‘Korean aid to Viet-Nam would mean that there would be kept in Korea a military strength equivalent to that at present so that Korean security would not suffer’. At the same time, Johnson pledged to ‘see to it that troops and money enough will be provided to ensure’ Korea’s security.⁵² With this statement Johnson made a dramatic turnabout in his policy vis-à-vis South Korea. As late as two months prior to the meeting, the Johnson Administration was going forward with the decision to ‘subtract 9,000 spaces from present authorized strength of 8th US Army amounting to 51,000’. No longer would Johnson seek a reduction of forces in any form. The American president in essence notified Park that his administration’s campaign to de-conventionalise the Korean forces would halt as long as South Koreans were fighting in Vietnam.⁵³ The following day Park returned to the White House for a second meeting with Johnson and confided that South Korea’s ‘well-trained and well-disciplined [soldiers] really formed part of [the] US forces’. Korean soldiers were ‘ready to fight against Communism’ and that ‘they would be with the United States’. Park also reminded Johnson that his forces were ‘dependent on US assistance’. Park’s assurance was ‘very heartening’, said Johnson.⁵⁴ Five months later the first contingent of Korean combat forces left for South Vietnam. After eleven years of rebuffing Korea’s offer to enter the fray, and failing to win significant troop commitment from SEATO allies, the US embraced South Korea as a combat-sharing partner in the jungles of South Vietnam. By the end of 1966, there were 50,000 South

51. NSAM 328, 6 April 1965, reprinted in US Department of Defense, *Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel Edition, vol. III (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 702-3.

52. Memorandum of Conversation: US Korean Relations, 17 May 1965, ‘Memos, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

53. Telegram 866 from Seoul, 15 March 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968, Korea*, 61.

54. Memorandum of Conversation: Visit of President Park, Communiqué Meeting, 18 May 1965, ‘Memos, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL.

Korean soldiers fighting in South Vietnam. At this point, in terms of the ratio of soldiers dispatched to Vietnam and its population size, South Korea became the largest troop contributor among the nations assisting South Vietnam.

As promised by Johnson, the US-Korean alliance in the Vietnam War accelerated, rather than decelerated, Korea's conventional arms buildup. For South Korea's first division to South Vietnam, the US agreed to 'No US or ROK reduction in Korea without prior consultation', and to finance 'complete replacement' of the division sent to Vietnam. In addition, the Johnson Administration promised not only to maintain the existing level of the Military Assistance Program (MAP), but also to underwrite a comprehensive modernisation of the Korean forces' 'fire power, communications and mobility'. Furthermore, the US pledged resource for South Korea to upgrade three reserve divisions to the status of active division. In 1966 when South Korea committed a second combat division, the US pledged 'substantial items of equipment for the modernization' of the Korean forces, plus resources necessary for improving Korea's anti-infiltration capability, ammunition production, and air transport capability.⁵⁵

The US-Korean alliance, of course, failed to stop the communist takeover of South Vietnam. However, for the Park government, it removed the primary sources of its insecurities. Korea was no longer under pressure to convert its conventional military forces into nation builders. Actually, South Korea came to occupy the position that it had never been in: the most committed partner in America's containment policy in Asia who deserved a large share of US military assistance. As one White House official noted, 'None of our [America's] other friends has nearly as good a record [as the Koreans]. A good deal more would *not* (italic original) be unreasonable for the Australians, New Zealanders, Filipinos, Thai, Malaysians—to say nothing of our “staunch” European friends.'⁵⁶

For all intents and purposes, South Korea intervened in the Vietnam War in order to impress a US that was willing to reward the Seoul government with additional military aid. It was imperative on the part of South Korea to demonstrate its value to the war effort in Vietnam and increase its leverage vis-à-vis Washington. In the words of US officials, they wanted to 'present a credible Korean image'.⁵⁷ This goal affected the way in which South Korean soldiers fought and behaved in South Vietnam. South Korea's desire to prove its worthiness as an ally became more intense because, in the beginning,

55. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Republic of Korea: Hearings before a Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, 91st Congress, 2nd Session, 1970 (hereinafter cited as *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*), 1549-50, 1569.

56. Brown to Rusk, 2 November 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968, Korea*, 216

57. Cable 3169 from Saigon, 2 March 1966, 'Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66', Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

the US military commanders were not enthusiastic towards the Korean combat troops. As noted by officials in the US embassy in Saigon, American generals had ‘very little zeal’ regarding troops from countries like Korea: ‘[T]he care and feeding of these third country elements has always proved far more trouble than it is worth.’⁵⁸ Indeed, the orders were tall. The US was expected to provide ammunition, fuel, and rations as well as ordnance, automotive and communications equipment. Also, American logistics units had to transport men and material.⁵⁹ Moreover, American officials were sceptical of Koreans’ ability to fight a guerrilla war. Rusk once told Park, who had just volunteered his soldiers for Vietnam, that Korean forces had no ‘suitable role’ to play in that conflict because of their lack of experience in guerrilla warfare and of ‘skilled cadres ... with command of English/or French, who might be most useful against the Vietcong’.⁶⁰ In any event, the US military decided to assign base security duties to Korean units that would allow American soldiers to conduct offensive operations: Koreans ‘appear to be sensitive to the possibility of heavy casualties and would be pleased to take over the security mission at the major logistic bases of Cam Ranh and Qui Nhon. They can profitably be used there to extend the secure areas and reinforce the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] in that populous and important province’ along the coastal areas of central Vietnam.⁶¹ With the bases protected by the Koreans, envisioned Westmoreland, American soldiers could be used for ‘sustained combat against the new PAVN [People’s Army of Vietnam] forces’ in the region.⁶² Accordingly, South Korea’s first division, the Tigers, entered the war essentially as sentries at the American *entrepôt* in Vietnam.

By the middle of 1966, however, the ROK’s tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) was extended far beyond the periphery of the port facilities. Korean soldiers now controlled areas north of Qui Nhon to the base of Phu Cat Mountain, a distance of roughly twenty miles. To the northwest, the Korean forces extended their control about 35 miles inland near the town of An Khe (An Tuc). Towards the south, the Korean Marine brigade, the Blue Dragons, operated along Highway 1 between Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa, a distance of nearly 50 miles, to keep it open. Eventually, the official Army history records, Korean forces ‘provided protection to the South Vietnamese for a distance of several hundred miles up and down the coast’, from Da Nang in the north to Phan Rang

58. William H. Sullivan (Secretary of State’s Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs) to Bundy, 24 June 1964, ‘Memos, Vol. 12, 6/14-27/64’, Box 5, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

59. CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command) 222149Z, 22 April 1965, ‘Cables, Vol. 33, 4/21-30/65’, Box 16, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

60. Cable 12 to Seoul, 3 July 1964, ‘Cables, Vol. II, 7/64-8/65’, Box 254, Korea Country File, LBJL; ‘Research Memorandum: Third Country Assistance to South Vietnam’, 28 August 1964, ‘Memos, Vol. XVI, 8/16-31/64’, Box 7, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

61. JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) 10969, 13 June 1965, ‘Cables (B), vol. 35, 6/1-21/65’, Box 18, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

62. COMUSMACV (Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) to CINCPAC 64435, 23 November 1965, ‘Cables, Vol. XLIII, 11/23-12/19/65’, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

in the south.⁶³ In a testimony to America's reliance on the Koreans (and perhaps, to its desperation to find any help possible), General William C. Westmoreland, commander of US forces in Vietnam, remarked, 'I would be happy with any additional Koreans, regardless of what type or unit. The Koreans have done a magnificent job.'⁶⁴

South Korean soldiers, who were instilled with their *raison d'être*—to make their country a worth ally of the US by contributing visibly to the war effort—were told to behave in the following manner: 'Brave and fearsome to the enemy, polite and kind to the Vietnamese, well disciplined and reliable to our allies.'⁶⁵ Were they? In March 1966 about five months after the arrival of the first contingent of Korea's combat soldiers, Westmoreland's MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Korean units. The commander of the American forces in Vietnam was impressed with the Koreans despite some problems. First, in terms of their combat effectiveness, Koreans were reported have achieved a kill ratio of about 16:1 against the enemy. They 'excelled in defending and securing installations and routes'. They were also 'very effective in maintaining security over an area, either alone or in coordination with ARVN units'. US officials as well as the Vietnamese agreed that the 'social behavior' of the Koreans was 'excellent' and perhaps, 'better than that of Americans'. The Koreans were observed to have spent leisure time playing 'volley-ball rather than in bars', even in Saigon where there were, certainly, 'more bars than volley[-]ball courts'.⁶⁶ In other words, they were satisfying the first and third conditions—to be effective and dependable. The Korean forces' record on the second condition—to be polite and kind to the Vietnamese—however, did not receive unanimous approval from their Vietnamese and American allies.

The Koreans' skills and reliability as a fighting force were palpable at least in their casualty reports. According to official accounts, after one year of operation, Korean units in Vietnam recorded to have inflicted the following casualties on the enemy.⁶⁷

63. Stanley Larsen and James L. Collins Jr, *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Department of Army, 1975), 136, 145.

64. 'Background Briefing Presented By General Westmoreland', 29 June 1967, '#18 History File, 1 June-1 July 67 [I]', box 12, Papers of W.C. Westmoreland, National Security File (hereinafter cited as Westmoreland Papers), LBJL.

65. *The New York Times*, 9 November 1972, 3.

66. Cable 3169 from Saigon, 2 March 1966, 'Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66', Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

67. Gukje Munje Yonguso (Institute for International Affairs), *The Vietnam War and Korea's National Security* (Seoul: Gukje Munje Yonguso, 1966), 111. South Korea's second division, the White Horse, arrived in South Vietnam in August, 1966, which explains its insignificant combat contribution shown

Enemy casualties inflicted by Korean Units (as of 18 October 1966)

	<i>Tiger</i>	<i>Blue Dragon</i>	<i>Dove</i>	<i>White Horse</i>	<i>Misc.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Killed (Verified)	3584	1112	47	10	5	4758
Killed (Presumed)	1138	108			6	1252
Captured VC	1292	133	6			1431
Detained	3515	1516	56			5087
Voluntary Surrender	57	140		1		198
Total	9586	3009	109	11	11	

Meanwhile Koreans suffered casualties of 354 killed, 992 wounded, and ten missing.⁶⁸ It meant there were 13.4 enemy killed in action, for every Korean soldier killed in battle, not counting presumed ones. Some US officials did question the validity of this successful record in the beginning. Westmoreland for one had ‘initially suspected’ that the numbers were ‘not accurate’. However, he concluded them to be ‘reasonably factual based on the opinion of Americans now stationed with the Republic of Korea forces and working with the units on a liaison basis’.⁶⁹

Koreans attributed their success in battle to the so-called ‘cut and destroy’ strategy with its heavy emphasis on psychological operation in contrast to the ‘search and destroy’ strategy of the American units.⁷⁰ This is how a typical operation by Korean units unfolded: prior to undertaking military actions, Korean forces often relocated a large number of villagers, for the purpose of ‘denying the fish the water’. Then, they undertook preliminary psychological operations designed to persuade the enemy not to resist, and, at the same time, collect information on them. Here, in the eyes of American observers, Korean units undertook some novel approaches to psychological operations. For one of the relocated populations, Koreans sent back the wives or mothers of suspected Vietcong operatives or sympathisers to the villages in the hope of persuading ‘their husbands and

68. ‘Memorandum for the President’, 11 October 1966, ‘Memos (B) Vol. 60, 10/66’, Box 37, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

69. ‘Mission Council Action Memorandum No. 163’, 1 February 1967, ‘Vietnam Memos (B) Vol. 65, 2/1-16/67’, Box 40, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

70. Dong Wook Lee, ‘Interview: Chae Myung Shin, The Former Commanding General of ROK Forces in Vietnam’, *Wolganchosun*, August 2000, 352-67. *Wolganchosun* is a leading monthly news magazine in Korea that is considered right of centre in terms of its editorial stance.

71. ‘Operation Oh Jak Kyo’, 11 June 1967, ‘#18 History File, 1 June-1 July 1967 [I]’, box 12, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

children to give up 'if they really cared for their lives'.⁷¹ Another type of preliminary psychological operation was called market strategy. Before commencing military action, Korean units set up a 'market facility' where 'villagers from the VC controlled areas, as well as from the GVN controlled areas were allowed to trade and, occasionally, provided with food and medical treatment' by the Korean soldiers. The main goal was to dispel the image of the Koreans as a hostile occupation force in the minds of the villagers, some of whom were Viet Cong operatives or sympathisers. Also, the markets allowed people to prepare themselves for the upcoming military campaigns that were certain to disrupt the flow of goods. The Korean military commanders boasted that the market strategy encouraged many 'ralliers and refugees' to enter into the friendly areas and provide information that was of great help in planning the upcoming military operation. In many ways, the market was similar to neutral Switzerland where enemies trade and spy on each other. When told of this particular strategy, Westmoreland commented excitedly that it was 'the most sophisticated psywar plan' that he had heard of in Vietnam.⁷² Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was equally impressed. He cabled Johnson, 'This is the kind of clever politics, plus clever soldiering which our side must do. It is what I have been dreaming of for three years. And now it has happened. We are going all out to get the word around so that others may do the same.'⁷³ Only after conducting such psychological operations did Korean units embark on search and destroy operations.

Once the operation was underway, the Korean units' modus operandi was invariably described as 'meticulous', 'deliberate', and 'harrowing'. For example, Henry McPherson, Johnson's special assistant, sent to Vietnam to report on America's third country allies, wrote back, 'God, they [Koreans] are a tough bunch. They have a method of seal-and-search that is the epitome of war psychology; it is slow, harrowing, and effective.' He told Johnson that his only hope vis-à-vis Koreans was that he would 'never meet one in a rice paddy some night without the right set of credentials'. McPherson also visited an Australian unit, where the commanding officer himself recognised that Aussies were 'too cautious' and that their 'effectiveness was being diminished by their conservatism'. There were problems as well. Because of the Koreans' tough approach to weeding out the enemy, McPherson reported, some US officials felt that they 'created as many problems as they solved' by being 'too brutal and careless of civilian life'.⁷⁴

What caused such rumblings, even among American allies, that Koreans could be doing more harm than good? The problem was the Koreans' extensive dealings with

72. 'Memorandum for Record: MACV Commanders' Conference, 22 January 1967', '#12 History File, 13 December 1966-26 January 1967 [II]', Box 10, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

73. Cable 16456 from Saigon, 25 January 1967, 'NODIS, Vol. 5(B) 1/67-4/67', Box 47, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

74. Henry McPherson (Special Assistant to President) to Johnson, 13 June 1967, 'Vietnam-1967 (part 2) [3 of 3]', Box 29, Files of Harry McPherson, National Security File, LBJL.

civilians for propaganda and intelligence gathering, which led to an unusually large number of ‘detainees’ generated by their units. According to the table provided earlier showing what the Koreans accomplished, the number of people who were detained under the suspicion of being enemy elements was almost equal to the verified kills. For example, as of October 1966, the Tiger Division reported to have killed 3584 while generating 3515 detainees. The Korean Marine Brigade, the Blue Dragons, reported 1112 enemy killed while reporting 1516 as being detained. According to a study done by two generals, Lieutenant General Stanley Robert Larsen and Brigadier General James Lawton Collins Jr, who had successively commanded the US I Field Force in Vietnam, and worked closely with the Koreans on a liaison basis, ‘Detainees were a valuable source of information’ for Korean units. ‘They were retained in one central area until the Koreans were convinced they had been properly exploited. There was no rush to release the people to return to their homes, the theory being that if held long enough they would provide the desired information.’ During interrogations, ‘Koreans used rewards routinely to elicit information. They fed and provided medical attention to those people from whom they sought information. They also used bribes of food, money, candy, and cigarettes to soften the more likely subjects (women and children).’ After the interrogation, the study noted, ‘villagers themselves were employed to point out Viet Cong dwellings and the location of weapons, booby traps, and enemy equipment’.⁷⁵

Korean units at times employed controversial methods of identifying Viet Cong sympathisers and family members. According to Kim Ki Tae, a 31 year old commander of the 7th Company, 2nd Battalion, of the Blue Dragon Korean Marine Brigade, who served in Vietnam from September 1966 to November 1967, soldiers under his command took the quality of garments that villagers were wearing as a possible clue in identifying family members as Viet Cong operatives. Captain Kim related that once soldiers under his command detained a young woman in her twenties who claimed ignorance on her husband’s whereabouts. When the soldiers noted that she was wearing what they thought to be fancy imported under-garments, they suspected her to be the wife of a high-ranking Communist official, reasoning that the wife of an ordinary peasant could not afford such fine articles of clothing in the middle of a war. As a suspected wife of a VC commander, evidenced by what she was wearing, she was detained.⁷⁶ Because of the large number of detainees generated by the Korean units and their controversial method of identifying enemy elements and sympathisers, as well as extracting information from them, Korean units’ modus operandi was increasingly seen as controversial.

75. Larsen and Collins Jr, *Allied Participation*, 156.

76. Sung Chul Hwang, ‘Haebiyong Jungdae Jangui Kobaek (Confession of A Marine Company Commander)’, *Hankyoreh* 21, 35-37. *Hankyoreh* 21 is one of the leading weekly news magazines in Korea that is considered generally left of centre in terms of its editorial slant.

South Korean units were not free from accusations of wanton and blatant killing of civilians. According to the US Embassy in Saigon, ‘when sniped at or otherwise provoked, by mines or booby-traps’, Koreans showed a tendency to ‘react in a very tough manner, sometimes destroying [the] offending hamlet’.⁷⁷ Nearly a quarter century after the end of the war, one Vietnamese villager recalled that ‘[m]eeting a Korean was like meeting death’.⁷⁸ Testimonies by Korean soldiers concerning civilian casualties are as rare as the stories of their heroic pursuits and gestures of kindness are abundant. Yet one unusually vivid testimony is available. Again, according to Kim Ki Tae, a marine captain, his company took part in a ‘cut and destroy’ operation named YONG AN in Quang Ngai province in November 1966. During the early phase of the operation, Kim testified after nearly 35 years, his soldiers entered a hamlet, rounded up between 40-50 villagers, and collected their names while giving out candies and cigarettes to children. Kim, feeling that the entire operation had already caused an alarming number of civilian casualties, ordered his men to ‘let them go’. However, soon after giving that order and moving away from the group, he heard rifle shots and exploding hand grenades. He turned around and found the situation to be as irretrievable as ‘water spilled on the ground’. Under the circumstance the best he could do was to order his men to make sure that there would not be any survivors to tell the story. Kim also related that sometimes children, after being given candies and cigarettes, were killed by the more experienced soldiers in order for them to demonstrate to the fresh recruits the cold-heartedness required of a soldier in Vietnam. Such killings of children were rationalised as eliminating the next generation of VC who would seek revenge for what was done to their villages and families.⁷⁹

Could this be an exaggerated confession of a disillusioned veteran attempting to expunge his guilt by painting himself and his experience as demonic as possible in order to make his redemption more dramatic? Actually, Kim did retract part of his testimony after protests from the Korean veterans of the Vietnam War. Kim’s story, however, bears remarkable resemblance to testimonies collected from the villagers by a Quaker couple, Diane and Michael Jones, who conducted extensive interviews with Vietnamese villagers in 1972. Testimonies from Captain Kim and the villagers are identical in terms of the location—Quang Ngai province, Son Tinh District, date—between 9-14 November 1966, and actions taken by the Korean soldiers although they are separated by nearly three decades. The following is what one villager related to the Jones:

77. Cable 3169 from Saigon, 2 March 1966, ‘Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66’, Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

78. Ron Moreau, ‘Apocalypse Then: Vietnamese villagers mournfully remember a pattern of atrocities by South Korean soldiers’, *Newsweek* (International Edition, Asia), 10 April 2000. This article is available in the following website: <<http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/nw-srv/printed/int/asia/a18168-2000apr3.htm>>.

79. Sung Chunl Hwang, ‘Haebiyong Jungdae Jangui Kobaek’, *Hankyoreh* 21, 35-7.

That afternoon [of 9 November 1966] I and most of the people in Dien Nien [Son Tinh District, Quang Ngai Province] went to stay near the Nui Tron outpost [under the control of South Vietnamese forces] until the Koreans were finished with their operation. But more than 50, perhaps up to 100, women and children stayed in their homes. At evening the Korean soldiers came back from An Tho and again gathered these people into a group. They passed out cakes and candies to the children. Then with machine guns and grenade launchers they killed them all. They left the bodies in a large pile. There were no survivors. We know they passed out candy because the men who went down from the hill and discovered the bodies two days later found pieces of it in the mouths and hands of the dead children.⁸⁰

It is less important whether what happened above was actually committed by Kim's company.⁸¹ What is significant is the pattern of behaviour; rounding up of civilians, separating women and children who were given 'bribes' because they were deemed 'more likely subjects' from which information could be extracted.⁸² Also men were interrogated for a sustained period. In any event, regarding the YONG AN operation, the Korean marine commander reported to Westmoreland that his soldiers were 'proceeding deliberately in clearing their TAOR' and at the same time 'making friends with the people'.⁸³ He did not seem to question that these two objectives seldom went hand-in-hand in the Vietnam War.

There is another case of the possible killing of civilians by Korean Marines, the Blue Dragons, about which Korean veterans and the surviving Vietnamese villagers provide similar testimonies. This particular incident, which took place near Da Nang, lacks confessions by actual participants that place the smoking guns in the hands of Korean soldiers. Nevertheless, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. According to recent testimonies given by the veterans of the 1st Company of the 1st Marine Battalion of the Blue Dragons, a group of Vietnamese civilians was found dead after a patrol by Korean units. During a retaliatory campaign after the famous Tet offensive of 1968, Korean units were on patrol near Phong Nhi village adjacent to Highway 1 in Dien Ban District of Quang Nam Province. Tensions were high as the Koreans sought to punish the enemy for the harassment they had suffered during Tet. First, the testimonies from the soldiers who were in the patrol. In the early morning of 12 February (14 January

80. Frank Baldwin, Diane Jones, and Michael Jones, *America's Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1976), 20-1.

81. There is one major difference in the two testimonies mentioned here. According to Kim, the Korean units encountered the villagers in the afternoon; in the villagers' story the killings took place in the evening.

82. Larsen and Collins Jr, *Allied Participation*, 156.

83. 'General Westmoreland's Historical Briefing, 11 November 1966', '#11 History File, 13 Dec 66 – 26 Jan 67 [I]', Box 10, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

in the Lunar Calendar,) the 1st Platoon approached the village and encountered enemy fire coming from the village. Immediately, the Korean soldiers commenced a search and destroy operation in Phong Nhi. When the 1st and 2nd Platoons entered the village, the enemy had already fled and only the women, children, and elderly, about 70-80 in number, remained. They were ordered to leave the village and walk toward the rear, in the direction of Highway 1 where the 3rd Platoon was moving up toward the village. Soon after the 1st and 2nd Platoons left the village, rounds of gunfire were heard in the rear. The following day, the leader of the 2nd Platoon, Lieutenant Lee Sang Woo, found 40-50 dead bodies covered with straw mats by their family members near Highway 1, the area to which the villagers were ordered to evacuate the day before. Lee testified, after more than 30 years, that he heard from others that his comrades in the rear had massacred the evacuating civilians. It could be deduced from this testimony that the villagers could have encountered the 3rd Platoon on their way to the rear area and met their fate. This, however, remains only a strong possibility because of the lack of concrete evidence that the members of the 3rd Platoon actually fired the shots at the civilians. The leader of the 3rd Platoon testified that he could not remember clearly what had happened, but that smoke was already coming out of the village before his unit arrived. The commander of the 1st Company that took charge of the attack on Phong Nhi, Captain Kim Sok Kyun, who also claimed not to have a clear recollection of the operation, was shipped back to Korea after the killings were publicised.⁸⁴ The results of the Korean government's own investigation remain sealed.

There is the villagers' version of the same incident that paints Koreans as reacting in an erratic and bloodthirsty manner. According to the villagers, a detachment of Korean soldiers struck a land mine a few hundred yards from Phong Nhi, rather than coming under fire. Shortly after the explosion Korean soldiers entered village, rounded up people, and shot them. They also killed some who remained in their homes and set fire to the hamlet. '[S]ome of the bodies, including those of children, had been disemboweled with knives', one witness claimed to have seen. Another related that there were 'naked bodies of small children who appeared to have been literally torn apart by people pulling on both legs'.⁸⁵ Phong Nhi, incidentally was a 'secure' village where even the families of South Vietnamese soldiers, the allies of the Koreans, lived. Their denunciation of the actions of the Korean forces prompted the Saigon government to lodge complaints against the Seoul government. Therefore, stories of the Phong Nhi killings were less likely to have been instigated by Communist propaganda.

84. Kyung Tae Go and Sang Chul Hwang, 'Yangmin Haksal, Jungang Jungbobueso Josahaetda (Civilians Killings: The Korean Central Intelligence Agency Had Conducted Investigations)', *Hankyoreh* 21, 4 May 2000, 18-22.

85. Baldwin and Jones, 'America's Rented Troops', 29.

US officials were aware of the fact that Korean patrols employed heavy-handed measures and often produced a large number of civilian casualties. Regardless, US military personnel showed remarkable nonchalance. For one, MACV claimed that the ‘Vietnamese seemed to approve this tactic, saying toughness was necessary, and noted that villagers now tend to keep VC [Viet Cong] elements away and that as result Koreans do not get sniped at much any more’.⁸⁶ There is evidence that US military commanders might have indirectly encouraged such behavior. For example, Westmoreland reported to Washington that ‘It is significant that Highway 1 has remained open through the length of the Korean TAOR during the [Tet Offensive]’.⁸⁷ Realising the importance that their American allies attached to the opening of Highway 1 the Koreans once held a public ceremony ‘observing re-opening of Route [Highway] 1 between Cam Rahn and Toy Hoa’, throughout which Korean units held the enemy in check and repaired the road. US officials found this ceremony to be ‘most unusual’, for it could have invited the enemy to disrupt the road again and net a propaganda victory. Nevertheless, this show of self-confidence on the part of the Koreans was a ‘welcome’ event.⁸⁸ It should be noted that in trying to keep Highway 1 open, the Korean forces ended up being implicated in such incidences as the Phong Nhi killings.

There was another problem with the Koreans’ *ruse de guerre*: ‘heavy use of artillery’.⁸⁹ Here, too, the Koreans were not squeamish about such practices. For example, the commander of South Korea’s second division, the White Horse, noted during a conference among the commanders of the allied forces that one of the ‘significant characteristics’ of his division’s operations was ‘the concentration of firepower on successive objectives’. He insisted that the ‘enemy should be neutralized within the ring of encirclement with continuous bombardment to prevent organized resistance’. The Korean commander expressed a ‘[s]incere appreciation’ to US units for providing the ‘fire support’. Such an assertion was in contrast to a report from an American field commander who had just completed Operation ENTERPRISE that ‘[v]ery careful control must be exercised over fire support means. There are lots of people in the area, few free fire zones [which are considered enemy territory], and very restrictive rules of engagement.’ The Australian commander, Major General Tim Vincent, on the other hand, felt that ‘a major problem to face is providing freedom for the people in the ATF [Australian Task Force] area’. This particular conference ended with Westmoreland’s

86. Cable 3169 from Saigon, March 2, 1966, ‘Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66’, Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

87. Earl G. Wheeler (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) to Johnson, 11 February 1968, ‘Vol. 61, February 10-13’, Box 29, Walt Rostow, Memos to the President, National Security File, LBJL.

88. Cable 12711 from Saigon, 7 December 1966, ‘NODIS, Vol. 4(A) 7/66-12/66’, Box 47, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

89. Cable 3169 from Saigon, 2 March 1966, ‘Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66’, Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

remark, which the Korean commanders probably understood as an approval of their tactics: 'We have been our own worst enemy in advertising civilian casualties. The press picks up reports and people in the US think there are more civilian casualties than anytime in history. Actually, there are fewer than ever. Commanders and troops have exercised the greatest restraints.'⁹⁰

When confronted with the accusation that his soldiers had brutalised the Vietnamese civilians, the commander of the Korean expeditionary forces to Vietnam, Major General Chae Myung Shin, held the enemy's modus operandi responsible: 'Even I, the commander, suffered two terrorist attacks, from which I survived barely. [In one occasion,] the female who approached me with a hidden bomb was about twelve or thirteen years old. When the commander [who is well protected] was subject to such an attack, try to imagine what the enlisted men were going through' during their patrol. Chae concluded that Vietnam was 'a difficult war where even God could not identify' combatants from noncombatants:

A cute seven-year old approaches [the soldiers] in a playful gesture, then, drops a hand grenade and runs away. Soldiers who could not escape will fall, and shots will be fired [by the surviving soldiers] toward the direction [of the child.] In any war, there are circumstances where such a reflexive retaliation could take place, and the Vietnam War was the worst case. That does not mean our soldiers killed civilians indiscriminately.⁹¹

In any event, according to some recent research that is disputed by the Seoul government, Korean soldiers might have killed somewhere between 8000 to 9000 civilians in South Vietnam.

Technically, at least, the US military command should assume partial responsibility for the South Korean forces' excesses. First, the Korean forces' operations were coordinated with American field forces and, second, within this arrangement, MACV's 'requests' were 'honored as orders' by the Korean units.⁹² In case of the Korean Marine Brigade, the Blue Dragons, against which accusations of civilian killings were most frequently levied, it was under the 'de facto operational control' of the 1st US Marine Division. Actually, Westmoreland boasted of securing an assurance from Park that the Korean president was 'happy that the Koreans are under your [Westmoreland's] command', and that he was ready to use this statement to keep the commanders from Seoul in line.

90. 'MACV Commanders' Conference, 2 April 1967', '#15 History File, 27 March-30 April 1967', Box 11, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL

91. Dong Wook Lee, 'Interview: Chae Myung Shin, The Former Commanding General of ROK Forces in Vietnam', *Wolganchosun*, August 2000, 352-67.

92. Larsen and Collins, Jr, *Allied Participation*, 134.

In return for the Korean commanders' taking orders from him, Westmoreland once admitted that he had to 'scratch their backs'.⁹³ Such arrangements, plus the Koreans' reliance on the US forces for airmobile and tactical fire support, made Washington partially responsible for the conduct of the Korean forces. The US military command in Vietnam was in a position to know about Korean units' modus operandi and demand corrective measures. However, American commanders not only acquiesced to the practice but showered the Koreans with what one US commander called 'studied flattery' to the Korean generals.⁹⁴

One unique aspect of the way Korean units operated in South Vietnam that set them apart was their heavy involvement in pacification. In many cases Koreans stayed in the villages after they were 'secured' and tried to contribute to rebuilding the community, something that US soldiers were not encouraged to do because of the danger of appearing to be an occupying army. But not the Koreans. As explained by the Korean military, its soldiers had three post-combat objectives: '(1) to provide a secure environment and prevent enemy infiltration; (2) to conduct extensive civic action, and (3) to support revolutionary development efforts of the RVN.'⁹⁵ In the process Korean soldiers were put in a position where they had to deal closely with civilians.

The Korean pacification campaign also began with a psychological operation. The Tigers certainly took 'pride in the number of VC killed' during combat operations, but also realised that 'the number of family [sic] who cry over the death of the VC will increase accordingly to such an extent that they would not try to understand or sometimes even deplore the war efforts of Free World Forces in Vietnam', said one Korean commander. Therefore, Korean soldiers were encouraged to pay a 'condolence call on the bereaved VC family, in an effort to express our regrets, explain the inevitability of our action which resulted in such a sorrowful consequence and deliver to them relief goods and money in our gesture of consoling their broken-hearts'.⁹⁶

It is difficult to imagine that families and relatives of Communist operatives were comforted by seeing the soldiers who had killed their loved ones return with food and money. More often Korean units undertook relief actions including food distributions, dispensation of medical services and small-scale construction services, to win the 'hearts and minds' of the villagers while maintaining security parameters. According to Chae's

93. 'Mission Council Action Memorandum #129', 5 October 1966, 'Memos (B), Vol. 60, 10/66', Box 37, Vietnam Country File, LBJL. Throughout its involvement in the Vietnam War, South Korea sought, without success, to establish a 'combined command', in which American and Korean commanders would maintain equal standing and collectively make decisions regarding the execution of the war.

94. Larsen and Collins Jr, *Allied Participation*, 151.

95. 'Memorandum for Record: MACV Commanders' Conference, 22 January 1967', '#12 History File, 13 December 1966–26 January 1967 [II]', Box 10, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

96. 'Operation OH JAK KYO', 11 June 1967, '#18 History File, 1 June–1 July 1967 [I]', box 12, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

estimate, he had invested 70 per cent of the manpower under his command into these civic actions. In his mind, such strategy made the Korean forces stand out in contrast to the corrupt South Vietnamese forces, alien Americans, and demanding Communist forces.⁹⁷

One advantage the Koreans claimed to have over other forces aiding Vietnam was their understanding of the Vietnamese culture. Westmoreland once took a tour of a Korean forces' pacification site where soldiers repaired the pagoda of a Buddhist temple. He noted: 'There seemed to be an excellent relationship between the Koreans [a large number of whom are Buddhists] and the [Buddhist] Monks.'⁹⁸ Buoyed by such scenes of success, the Koreans were praised as a 'distinct asset' that has contributed 'magnificently toward pacification efforts'. Johnson was pointed to Phu Yen Province, south of Qui Nhon where the ROK's Tiger Division was based, as evidence of the Korean soldiers' effectiveness: 'the Viet Cong controlled 75 per cent of the rice growing land and 80 per cent of the people in 1965. Now [in 1967], the Province is nearly completely under the control of the Government of South Vietnam.'⁹⁹ Bunker in particular was impressed with the military aspect of the Korean units' pacification efforts:

In three different areas the Republic of Korea forces are conducting an experiment in which they send a ten man liaison team to a selected village. These soldiers assist in military training of the regional and popular forces and support the RD teams. This may result in improved Vietnamese performance, not only because of the additional training, but because of the example the Koreans hopefully will set.¹⁰⁰

The Koreans' success in pacification could be attributed, explained Shin Sang Chul, the South Korean Ambassador to Saigon, to the fact that they shared with the Vietnamese a similar 'custom' based on 'Confucian influence and belief in [the] strength and security of the family'. Korean soldiers also tried hard to be 'polite' to the villagers and demonstrated 'special respect' to the local customs such as 'refraining from disturbing graves in building of camps'. They showed 'special respect to elderly people [by] consulting them and providing refreshments to them after entering villages'. Finally, the Koreans showed sensitivity to traditional customs by 'refusing cigarettes to youth'.

97. Dong Wook Lee, 'Interview: Chae Myung Shin, The Former Commanding General of ROK Forces in Vietnam', *Wolganchosun*, August 2002, 352-67.

98. 'General Westmoreland's Historical Briefing, 11 November 1966', '#11 History File, 13 December 1966-26 January 1967 [I]', Box 10, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

99. Bromley Smith (Executive Secretary of the National Security Council) to Johnson, 16 August 1967, 'Vietnam, Memos to the President (Vol. 2), 8/3-27/67 (1 of 2)', Box 56, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

100. Ellsworth Bunker (US Ambassador to South Vietnam) to Johnson, 7 June 1967, 'Vietnam 8B(A) Bunker's Wkly Rpt to the President', Box 104, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

Vietnamese elders feared that an increasing number of young people were picking up the habit because of a wartime breakdown of traditional social mores.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Koreans, as part of psychological warfare, dropped leaflets that read, ‘Dear citizens! We, Koreans, are the same Asians as you. We preserve the similar traditions and customs as you. We respect the aged people, protect weak females, and love children ...’.¹⁰² Essentially, the Korean government argued that its soldiers had won the ‘hearts and minds’ of the South Vietnamese. That, of course, was one achievement that eluded American troops throughout the war. Impressed, Johnson inquired from aides, ‘Why not get Korean civilians into Pacification[?]’¹⁰³

There were also different views on Korea’s role in pacification. The US Army’s official history noted, ‘Korean pacification efforts have been the subject of a certain amount of controversy over the years’. In the early years of the war, Americans held ‘highly favorable’ attitude towards Koreans’ role in pacification. However, eventually, doubts began to be cast over whether Koreans were actually contributing to rebuilding the villages ravaged by the war or under the threat of Vietcong intimidation. The US Army noted that, although Koreans provided ‘excellent local security’, they did not receive the unanimous approval of their American allies for their ability to help the Vietnamese to become ultimately responsible for the security and reconstruction of their own communities. Otherwise, pacification was nothing more than another form of foreign assistance. Koreans were faulted for devoting ‘scant attention to upgrading Vietnam government territorial forces’. Therefore, there was ‘insufficient co-ordination and co-operation in dealing with the Vietnamese’. Some US officials also found the pride of the Koreans’ pacification campaign—civic actions including food distribution, medical services, and construction—‘inadequate’.¹⁰⁴ One of the reasons, as related by a Korean war correspondent, was that soldiers from his country often by-passed the village leaders and officials when distributing foodstuffs and other relief materials to the people, thereby undermining the authority of local leaders. He found this behavior arrogant and counterproductive to winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese.¹⁰⁵ Also there was the issue of ‘alleged corruption on the part of Korean officers and units’. More importantly, Koreans could not shed the image of being brutal to civilians suspected of being Communist sympathisers. The ‘neutralization activities’ of the Korean units were ‘shrouded in secrecy’, records the US Army history. Reading between the lines it is clear that the suspected enemy elements were treated in a manner that did not correspond

101. Text of Cable 25255 from Saigon, 11 May 1967, ‘Memos (A), Vol. LXXI 5/9-23/67’, Box 71, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

102. Robert W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: The US Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 218.

103. Text of Cable 25255 from Saigon, 11 May 1967, ‘Memos (A), Vol. LXXI 5/9-23/67’, Box 71, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

104. Larson and Collins, Jr, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 157-9.

105. ‘Panel Discussion: Issues in Vietnam-Korea Relations’, *SaSanggye*, January 1968, 200-01.

to official guidelines. Actually, South Korean soldiers reminded some Vietnamese of the Koreans who were part of the Japanese military that occupied French Indochina at the end of the Second World War. Regardless of the fact that Japan had colonised Korea and that those soldiers were forced into service, they were considered Japan's 'mercenaries'. Ultimately, these inadequacies and problems led to 'hamlet regression', which was the surest sign of the failure of pacification.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

The Korean soldiers in South Vietnam were there to impress their patron, the US. Certainly they did so. First, the Koreans were remarkably forthcoming with their troop dispatch, setting them apart from America's other allies. Ambassador Winthrop Brown once wrote,

We first asked for a small medical unit and got it. Then we asked for non-combat troops and got 2,000. Then we asked for a combat division and got that. Before the ink was dry on the agreement for the first combat division we asked for a second combat division and ultimately got that.¹⁰⁷

Second, Koreans impressed Americans with their combat effectiveness. Regardless of the accusations against Korean soldiers of brutalising the Vietnamese civilians, they earned high praise from their American allies. General Creighton Abrams, successor to Westmoreland as the commander of US forces, once compared the war effort in Vietnam to orchestral music: 'It is sometimes appropriate to emphasize the drums or the trumpets or the bassoon, or even the flute.' Koreans, he noted, played mostly one instrument—the base drum'. Notwithstanding the overwhelming and indiscriminate show of force that characterised the Korean units' combat style, in the eyes of American commanders, the net 'results' of their modus operandi was 'generally good', and that was 'what count[ed] in the end'.¹⁰⁸

Knowing that their actions impressed most of their American allies, Koreans were never squeamish about advertising the ferocity that invited accusations of brutalities against civilians. Johnson himself was told, 'the Korean forces have proven themselves to be a highly effective fighting force, without which, the Vietnamese Armed Forces (South) and other free world forces would be severely pressed to maintain control of

106. Larson and Collins, Jr, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 157-9; Cable 3169 from Saigon, 2 March 1966, 'Cables, Vol. XLVIII, 3/1-16/66', Box 28, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

107. Brown to Rusk, 2 November 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968, Korea*, 219.

108. Larson and Collins, Jr, *Allied Participation*, 153.

this important part of the eastern coastal plains'.¹⁰⁹ The Administration's attitude toward the contributions the Korean units were making in Vietnam was well captured in the following reassurance Johnson was given: 'there are lots of Americans who don't give a damn how much it costs to support foreign soldiers so long as it enables an American boy to stay home.'¹¹⁰ After all, as one Johnson aide insisted, 'the total cost to the US for equipping and paying' for Korean soldiers was 'peanuts compared to what it would be for a comparable number of Americans'.¹¹¹ The surest sign of product approval, of course, is continuing demand. In 1967, the US entered into negotiations to secure a third division from South Korea. The dispatch of the so-called light division, which was to be composed of 11,000 combat soldiers and about 5000 paramilitary logistics personnel, did not materialise because of the disagreement between Washington and Seoul over how much the US should pay the paramilitary personnel. Also, North Korea's capture of the American intelligence-gathering ship *Pueblo* and the failed commando attack on Park in January of 1968 heightened tension on the Korean peninsula and prevented Seoul from committing deeper to the Vietnam War.

The retreat of the alliance began in 1969 with the advent of the Nixon administration. The alliance was built on the agreement the South Korea's troop commitments in Vietnam would be rewarded with America's assistance to South Korea. This equation also meant that the weakening of Washington's military commitment to South Korea would cause a decrease in Korean involvement in the war. This is what had happened when Nixon announced what was known as the Guam Doctrine, which stated that, although the US would honour its treaty obligations, countries under Communist threat such as South Korea should assume primary responsibility for their own defence. In March 1971, eighteen months after the declaration of the Nixon doctrine, 20,000 US soldiers were withdrawn from South Korea. Seoul's vocal protest was placated with the promise of funds for the modernisation of Korean forces in the future. The US troop withdrawal from Korea, combined with the Vietnamisation of the war effort, and the Paris peace talks, shifted the gears of South Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War into reverse. Park understood these developments as the retreat of America's overall commitment in Asia and reacted to them by cutting down on large-scale operations by the Korean forces in Vietnam. For example, combat operations involving battalions or larger forces dropped from 300 in 1970 to 256 in 1971, and finally, to 54 in 1972. Small unit operations of the company and platoon level dropped from 130,294 in 1971 to 40,381 in 1972.¹¹² Also, in

109. Bunker to Johnson, 7 June 1967, 'Vietnam 8B(A) Bunker's Wkly Rpt to the President', Box 104, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

110. 'Memorandum for the President', 5 January 1968, '5D(1) Allies: Troop Commitments; Other Aid (General Material) 3/67-1/69', Box 85-91, Vietnam Country File, LBJL.

111. Jack Valenti (Special Assistant to the President) to Johnson, 25 February 1966, 'CO 151, 6/2/65 - 8/8/66', Box 49, EX CO 151, Confidential File, White House Central File, LBJL.

112. These figures are available in the website of the Institute for Military History, Defense Ministry, the Republic of Korea: <www.mnd.go.kr>.

the 70s, Korean soldiers who were sent to Vietnam were ‘lower quality than the “cream of the crop” of the entire Korean Army’ which Seoul contributed in the 1960s.¹¹³

The Pulitzer Prize winning chronicler of America’s debacle in Vietnam, Neil Sheehan, detected a hint of conspiracy in the Korean units’ inaction: Koreans were ‘reneging on their Hessian role because of secret instructions from Seoul to avoid casualties’. He related that at this point, Koreans ‘would not even keep open the road that was II Corps’ main supply route from the docks at Qui Nhon to the depots at Pleiku’. Therefore, the American commander had to ‘curse at the Korean generals for two weeks to get them to reopen the road (Highway) I’, relates Sheehan.¹¹⁴ Disappointing though it might have been to the Americans that Korean soldiers were winding down their involvement prematurely and conspicuously, the Seoul government saw no alternative. Actually, it was the logical thing to do. To the Koreans it was the US that first negated the quid pro quo exchange equation that held the alliance together. Furthermore, there was no reason for South Korea to protect the supply route that would soon see no supplies.

113. Larsen and Collins Jr, *Allied Participation*, 151.

114. Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 776-7.

New Zealand's Commitment of Infantry Companies in South Vietnam 1967

Ian McGibbon

New Zealand's infantry commitment to the Vietnam War began on 11 May 1967. On that day 68 mainly infantrymen of 'V' Company Group, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (RNZIR) completed a journey that had taken them from Terendak Military Camp in Malaysia to the British base at Changi in Singapore and thence, by Royal New Zealand Air Force C130 aircraft, to Vung Tau in South Vietnam. From Vung Tau Royal Australian Air Force Caribous flew them to the 1st Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat, along with a substantial amount of supplies that had accompanied them. In the next two days successive flights brought another 110 men to Nui Dat. Shortly after lunch on the 13th, their commander, Major John Mace (a Duntroon graduate who would end his career as Chief of Defence Staff), was able to report that his unit was complete in its company location.¹

The arrival of the troops at Nui Dat was the end of a difficult process for New Zealand policymakers, who had had to confront the problem of securing New Zealand's interests in a situation where resources were limited, commitments substantial and the future uncertain. Three main influences bore on the outcome: New Zealand's attitude to the Vietnam War; Australian-New Zealand relations; and practical limitations on New Zealand's military capacity.

New Zealand perceived the Vietnam War through the lens of the forward defence in Southeast Asia concept that had come to underpin its approach to security from the late 1950s. This, the Defence Council had agreed in 1965, 'was the best means of ensuring the effective defence of New Zealand during the period up to 1970'.² The key to this policy, in New Zealand's view, was to keep its two main allies, the United Kingdom

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1. See Lieutenant Colonel R.H. Smith to HQ AFV, 10 May 1967, HQ NZ V Force to Army HQ, Wellington, 15 May 1967, NZA C59/3, New Zealand Army Records, New Zealand Defence Force Headquarters, Wellington (hereinafter NZDFHQ).
 2. COS(66)101, 'Manila Meeting on Vietnam—October 1966, Briefs for Chief of Defence Staff', Annex A, 17 October 1966, MD 23/4/1, Ministry of Defence Records, NZDFHQ.

and the United States, involved in the region and pursuing a co-ordinated strategy.³ This involved co-operating with them in regional security arrangements, such as ANZAM and SEATO.

New Zealand's forward defence efforts in the mid-1960s were facilitated by association with Britain, its historic ally, mentor, and provider—an approach that accorded well with the attitudes of the very pro-British New Zealand public. The convenience of dealing with the familiar and the financial advantages that such association offered to a country whose relatively vulnerable economy was still heavily reliant on the British market were key influences in Wellington. The practical implications of this British orientation for the New Zealand armed forces were considerable. Always constrained by limited resources, they were greatly assisted by the British link. They were closely modelled on the British forces, based their operating procedures on British practices, and used mainly British equipment. The financial implications of changing this focus were daunting, and put New Zealand off trying to emulate Australia's efforts to bring their forces more into line with those of ANZUS partner and dominant power in the Pacific, the United States.

New Zealand forces were contributed to the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve from 1955—a Special Air Service (SAS) company, replaced by an infantry battalion in 1957, a frigate, a fighter squadron (periodically), and half a transport squadron provided a presence in Malaya and Singapore. The infantry, from 1964 designated 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1RNZIR), were based at Terendak Military Camp, towards the cost of which New Zealand made a proportionate contribution with Australia and the United Kingdom. With Australian and British battalions, 1RNZIR formed part of 28th Commonwealth Brigade. These forces' primary role initially was to provide a rapid response capability against an external threat to Malaya. As they were brought within the ambit of SEATO planning, this role subsequently became focused on the wider Southeast Asian region. As a secondary role, the Strategic Reserve battalions had taken part in the dying stages of the Malayan Emergency and from 1964 in Confrontation with Indonesia. In this latter conflict, 1RNZIR had served two tours in Borneo in 1965-66.

The problem for New Zealand was that this British framework was not secure. The Defence Council in 1965 had accepted as a 'political fact of life' that the British commitment in Southeast Asia would 'steadily decline'.⁴ This British shakiness seemed all the more reason for encouraging the continuing presence of the United States in the

3. On New Zealand's defence policy generally see Ian McGibbon, 'Forward Defence: the Southeast Asian Commitment', in Malcolm McKinnon (ed.), *New Zealand in World Affairs*, vol. II, 1957-1972 (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 9-39.

4. DC1/65, 'New Zealand Defence Policy 1965-70', 26 February 1965, MD 57/3/5.

region—an aspiration that immediately focused Wellington's attention on the situation in South Vietnam, where the United States had become deeply involved in sustaining the government in the face of the challenge presented by the North Vietnam-backed Viet Cong. As early as 1962 New Zealand, and other American allies, had come under pressure to provide visible support for the American effort in South Vietnam, at that time restricted to non-combatant support.

New Zealand had responded to such pressure with noticeable hesitancy. It was not that it rejected the premise upon which American policy in Vietnam was based. Doubts at first centred on the feasibility of achieving a successful outcome, not least because of the weakness of the South Vietnamese government. A small engineer detachment was sent in 1964 to carry out constructive tasks, but the deterioration in the situation soon forced consideration of a combat contribution. In their approach to this issue New Zealand Ministers demonstrated the lack of enthusiasm that would permeate their whole Vietnam policy and leave New Zealand, as one official stylishly noted towards the end of the involvement, 'the most dovish of the hawks'.⁵ Although their doubts about the outcome were eventually allayed by the extent of American commitment—by 1967 most policymakers in Wellington believed that the war could not be lost but that a satisfactory resolution was still a distant prospect—attitudes were dominated by an unwillingness to commit New Zealand to additional expenditure on defence, especially expenditure that would require the use of scarce foreign exchange. Personal attitudes may have played a part. Keith Holyoake, the Prime Minister, had not served in the Second World War, and there is some evidence that he 'felt a reluctance to send men into battle in light of his own lack of similar service'.⁶ A lack of enthusiasm for operating outside a British framework was also influential. This was in part because such a commitment was not likely to be favoured by public opinion (to which Holyoake was always very sensitive). 'Even as late as 1970', Frank Corner, New Zealand's Ambassador in Washington from 1967 to 1971, would later recall, 'the general run of non-ideological New Zealanders ... were still old-style British in their instincts ... they shared a certain style of British superciliousness towards Americans and American culture and foreign policies; and they still tended to link their fate with that of Britain.'⁷ Finally, the additional costs that would be involved because of the likely need to re-equip a unit for service in South Vietnam, even within an Australian context, were another inhibiting factor.

In May 1965 the government decided to make available an artillery battery. The need to do something was accepted, if only to ensure that the American commitment

5. Ralph Mullins to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 3 September 1970, PM 478/4/1, External Affairs Records, Archives New Zealand, Wellington (hereinafter ANZ).

6. Major General W.S. McKinnon, 'New Zealand Involvement in Vietnam', unpub. typescript, nd, but c. 1981 (copy in author's possession).

7. Frank Corner, 'ANZUS et cetera—June 1991', unpub. typescript, 11 (copy in the author's possession).

to New Zealand security provided by the ANZUS Treaty was not undermined. Strong counter-arguments by the Secretary of Defence, J.K. Hunn, who was later described by one participant in the decision as having a 'marked pacifist outlook', were ignored (and even flushed down the toilet by the acting Minister of Defence).⁸ The artillery option was in line with New Zealand's contribution in the Korean War, would allow New Zealand troops to support rather than be supported, would bring fewer casualties than infantry, and would not interfere with New Zealand's effort in Malaysia.⁹ As a result of this decision 161 Battery RNZA began arriving at Bien Hoa air base on 15 July 1965.

As the build up of American forces in Vietnam proceeded in 1965-66, the size of New Zealand's contribution was a source of embarrassment to the government. Compared with the 400,000 US troops in the country by early in 1967, New Zealand's V Force was a paltry 150-strong. The fact that Americans were prone to making pro rata comparisons had been highlighted when the visiting President Lyndon Johnson met the New Zealand Cabinet on 20 October 1966. Although not directly requesting an increase in New Zealand's effort, he maintained that the military requirement would be 'fully met if each participant would contribute one fifth of one per cent of their populations'¹⁰—which in New Zealand's case would have meant a force of about 5000 men. Whereas New Zealand had previously deflected American pressure by emphasising the contribution it was making to the common regional effort in Malaysia, this excuse for doing less than its partners in South Vietnam had weakened by the end of 1967. Confrontation having ended in mid-1966, 1RNZIR had returned to Terendak from Borneo in September. In discussion with New Zealand representatives during a seven-nation conference of Vietnam participants in Manila soon afterwards, the American commander in South Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, referred pointedly to the fact that neither the battalion nor an SAS detachment that had also served in Borneo were now committed; he was dismissive of concerns about weakening the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, not least because a unit deployed from it to South Vietnam would be only a few hours away and could be easily redeployed to Malaysia if necessary.¹¹

Among the government's advisors, there was no longer any strong challenger to the proposition that New Zealand should support the Vietnam effort. The lone contrary voice provided by Hunn had been removed with his retirement in November 1965. Both External Affairs and Defence officials favoured a positive response to the American

8. McKinnon, 'New Zealand Involvement in Vietnam'. McKinnon recalled that the head of the Prime Minister's Department, A.D. McIntosh, had informed him of this reticence on Holyoake's part.

9. On New Zealand's decision see Roberto Rabel, '“We cannot afford to be left too far behind Australia”': New Zealand's entry into the Vietnam War in May 1965', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, issue 32 (1999), <www.awm.gov.au/journal>.

10. David Dickens, 'New Zealand and the Vietnam War: Official Policy Advice to the Government 1960-1972' (PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1995), 238.

11. Note for File, by G.D.L. White, 1 November 1966, PM 478/4/6, ANZ.

pressure. But the government was, for the time being, distracted by the need to ensure its own survival, as a general election approached. In the campaign Holyoake disclaimed any intention to increase V Force, but the outcome of the election on 26 November 1966, in which the National Party was returned with only a slight reduction in seats, did indicate broad support for National's policy of assisting South Vietnam.¹² With this hurdle out of the way, the government was able to approach the question of a further contribution with more confidence. In determining what this contribution might be the Australia-New Zealand relationship—the second major factor in the New Zealand decision—was influential.

The geographical proximity of and similarity of cultures in Australia and New Zealand has traditionally ensured a basic identity of interests, values and outlooks that has pushed both countries in the direction of co-operation and co-ordination, not least because decisions in one are likely to have political impact in the other. The Anzac experience is a powerful unifying element. This dates from their joint effort at Gallipoli in 1915, when a New Zealand and Australian Division was formed. The mutual respect that developed between the New Zealand and Australian troops during their defence of the tiny enclave in which they were confined would facilitate co-operation between their two countries in later conflicts. Close professional linkages between the two countries' armies in particular were enhanced by the attendance of New Zealand officer cadets at Duntroon and Portsea.

Despite this co-operative stance at a service level, New Zealand's peacetime association with Australia was traditionally fraught with difficulties. This stemmed largely from the imbalance in size between the two countries. Determined to avoid being bullied by its neighbour, New Zealand valued its involvement in a British-based security system all the more because it provided, in the United Kingdom, an alternative to reliance on Australia.¹³ A 'rivalry in patriotism' was evident every time Australia and New Zealand went to war, excluding the mini-conflicts in Malaya/Malaysia. This ranged from a race to get to South Africa first in 1899 to a desire on New Zealand's part to beat Australia with its announcement of its decision to send a ground force to Korea in 1950. This was a rivalry within a British context, and one that was largely of concern to New Zealand, as the smaller country.¹⁴ But the prospect of British withdrawal

12. Dickens, 'New Zealand and the Vietnam War', 245. The National Party won 44 seats (down one on the previous election), the Labour Party retained its 35 seats, and the Social Credit Party took a seat from the National Party.

13. On this see Ian McGibbon, 'Australia-New Zealand Defence Relations to 1939', in Keith Sinclair (ed.), *Tasman Relations: New Zealand and Australia, 1788-1988* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987), 164-82.

14. See Ian McGibbon, 'ANZAXIS at War: Australian-New Zealand Relations During the Korean War', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *The Korean War 1950-53: A Fifty Year Retrospective* (Canberra: Army History Unit, 2000), 27-41.

from east of Suez had, by the mid-1960s, undermined this New Zealand approach and placed a premium on co-operation with Australia to reach a satisfactory solution to the problem of maintaining a presence in Malaysia and Singapore. There was a noticeable warming of relations, helped in part by the rapport that developed between Holyoake and his Australian counterpart Harold Holt, who spent six days in New Zealand in early February 1967 in a deliberate effort to improve the relationship.¹⁵

When it came to operating in an American dominated theatre without British involvement, the New Zealand desire to upstage Australia had, in any case, been conspicuously absent. There had, for example, been no race to emulate Australia's commitment of combat advisers to South Vietnam in 1962, New Zealand confining itself to sending a civilian medical team.¹⁶ Wellington was always less interested than Canberra in courting favour in Washington. As the focus shifted to the deployment of combat units, Australian action tended to be a catalyst for New Zealand decision because the difficulties likely to accrue from a failure to move in step with Australia were recognised in Wellington. Even if unenthusiastic about the war, public opinion in New Zealand would have found a failure to stand shoulder to shoulder with Australia difficult to accept. Conversely those responsible for developing New Zealand's Vietnam stance were always conscious that it would be easier to sell involvement in an unfamiliar area without the comfortable British framework by presenting it as an Anzac response.

In Vietnam Anzac co-operation had begun at Bien Hoa in 1965. New Zealand's field artillery battery co-operated closely with the Australian 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), which had also been deployed at Bien Hoa, and in 1966 moved with that unit to Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province to join the Australian Task Force, where it was attached to 1st Field Regiment RAA. In providing support for an Australian infantry battalion, it replicated the situation that had existed in Korea, where one battery of 16th Field Regiment RNZA (usually 163 Battery) had directly supported 3RAR and later other RAR battalions. During the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966 New Zealand gunners, as the affiliated battery with 6RAR, had earned new respect among Australian infantry for support that proved crucial to the survival of the 6RAR company involved.¹⁷

Both aspects—catalyst and co-operation—were apparent when, late in 1966, American pressure for enhanced contributions in South Vietnam grew. The mid-December advice that Australia had decided that the Task Force should be 'substantially augmented', by supplementing the strength of units already committed and adding further personnel to

15. See Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), 144.

16. Ian McGibbon, 'New Zealand's Involvement in the Vietnamese War 1960-65' (unpub. typescript, Ministry of Defence, 1974), 2-15.

17. See Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 323, 373.

headquarters and logistic elements, left the government in Wellington resigned to an increase in New Zealand's V Force as well. A failure to respond would be conspicuous, but at the same time the Australian decision also offered an opportunity to sell the idea of a further contribution to the New Zealand public as part of a co-ordinated Anzac action.

Alignment with Australia, it was recognised in Wellington, would also facilitate practical co-operation that would assist New Zealand in making a contribution. This was important because of the third primary influence on New Zealand's approach to the question of additional forces for South Vietnam—the limited means available. There were two main reasons for this incapacity. The first was New Zealand's relatively weak economic position, because of its small population, lack of raw materials, and narrowly focused economy based on trade with the United Kingdom in a limited range of products. A downturn in wool prices in early 1967 caused considerable difficulties.

This impacted in several ways relevant to the Vietnam decision. In particular, the government became even more reluctant than usual to spend foreign exchange on military commitments. Dollar expenditures were especially disliked. Any means of keeping the amount that needed to be spent to a minimum were regarded with favour, and association with the larger Australian force offered infra-structural savings, even if New Zealand always paid its way.

New Zealand's financial weakness—and the government's unwillingness to curtail the social security programme that swallowed a large proportion of government expenditure—meant that the armed forces that it was capable of sustaining were relatively limited. Traditionally, this problem had been overcome partly by borrowing equipment from the United Kingdom, partly by relying on non-regular forces. Small regular naval and air forces had been maintained. The Royal New Zealand Navy operated a small fleet of frigates, while the RNZAF's main strike arm was a squadron of Canberra bombers acquired in the late 1950s.

The Army was, until the late 1950s, based on the preparation of a Territorial Force-based infantry division of citizen-soldiers on the Second World War pattern for deployment in the Middle East. To this end compulsory military training had been reintroduced in 1949 in the dying days of the first Labour government. This scheme, which provided for three months' training for all eighteen-year-old males, was abolished in 1958, shortly after Labour got back into power. Three years later the succeeding National administration led by Holyoake revived compulsory training in a more restricted form: under the National Service scheme 2000 men were balloted annually to undergo a training program essentially the same as that of the initial scheme. This was to provide a Territorial Force-based brigade group, with another on a lesser state of readiness, and a logistic support group. By this time, however, emphasis had shifted to maintaining the 750-strong Regular Force infantry battalion stationed in Malaya as

part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Regular soldiers in New Zealand itself were serving in cadre positions in brigade group headquarters or units or in specialist corps rather than in units readily committable to Vietnam. The exception was the small 1st Ranger Squadron, NZ SAS.

The second fundamental reason for New Zealand's limited means of contributing in Vietnam was political. The government was resolutely opposed to the introduction of conscription for full-time service, as opposed to compulsory training, to broaden the manpower base available to the Army and increase its operational availability. Australia had taken this course in late 1964, and subsequently made conscripts liable for overseas service, a step that would lead to 17,000 of them serving in South Vietnam. Holyoake's government, correctly assessing the public mood, never showed any interest in attempting to move in this direction. New Zealanders in the 1960s were insufficiently imbued with a sense of clear and present danger to endorse such action, as they had done in both world wars.

With 1RNZIR seemingly unavailable because of its commitment to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, the Army's cupboard was therefore virtually bare when it came to consider an additional contribution to Vietnam in late 1966. To be sure, a special unit could have been formed in New Zealand, as had been done with 161 Battery in 1965, but this would have created major difficulties in sustaining both that battery and 1RNZIR. The recruitment of sufficient personnel for the battalion presented enough problems without introducing another competing unit.

One solution would have been to avoid the problem altogether—by contributing elements of the other two services. Such an approach was encouraged by the long-held assumption 'that forces of any type will be politically acceptable to our Allies'.¹⁸ Both the RNZN and RNZAF were anxious to get into the field, and both put forward options. The RNZN, for example, proposed deploying a frigate to serve with the US 7th Fleet or sending seamen to man American patrol craft. The main drawback of the former was the likely problems involved in a British-type frigate operating in an American naval environment (though the operations of HMAS *Vendetta* in 1969-70 would prove that these problems, which had of course been faced during the Pacific War of 1941-45, were not insurmountable). When for mainly cost reasons the New Zealand government indicated that it would not want a New Zealand frigate involved in shore bombardment, American interest in such a contribution fell away. Nor did the RNZAF's suggestion that New Zealand provide crews for Canberra bombers find much support among Cabinet Ministers reluctant to have New Zealand associated in any substantial way with the bombing campaign in South Vietnam, given the greater likelihood of inflicting civilian

18. COS(66)101, 'Manila Meeting on Vietnam—October 1966, Briefs for Chief of Defence Staff', Annex B, 17 October 1966, MD 23/4/1, NZDFHQ.

casualties in such operations.¹⁹ The likely cost in foreign exchange of these naval and air options was a further disincentive to the government.

From the outset most attention focused on the Army's capacity to provide a further unit, not least because it already had a unit in Vietnam. An Army contribution, it soon became evident, would also be cheaper than the other service alternatives and present fewer problems of logistic and other support. It also offered political advantages, in terms of the Anzac link, over the other services, whose units or personnel would have to operate more directly with the Americans.

Although consideration was given to the possibility of sending detachments of SAS, engineers or armoured personnel carriers from New Zealand, an infantry contribution was soon accepted as the most appropriate. The pressing need for infantry in South Vietnam had been made clear to New Zealand officers visiting the theatre. More importantly, a capacity to provide an infantry unit was apparent—if New Zealand could vary its commitment to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. There was a precedent in the deployment of the Strategic Reserve battalions in Borneo in 1965–66.

The possibility of using 1RNZIR as the basis of a New Zealand contribution in Vietnam had been discounted initially because it was already committed in Borneo, later because of the likely diplomatic and political issues obstacles. These latter were rooted in the overriding desire in Wellington to do nothing that might undermine British involvement in the region. Any variation in the arrangements, unless suggested by the British, as in the Borneo deployment, could serve as a pretext for a British withdrawal of their own forces from the Strategic Reserve for good. There was, too, the problem of the Malaysian government's attitude to the deployment in Vietnam of forces based on its soil. Finally, the Singapore government was also likely to be sensitive to the transit of New Zealand troops through the British base at Changi to Vietnam, if that conduit was used.

Despite these negative considerations, the possibility of using the forces in Malaya was brought to the foreground in December 1966. Impetus was provided by Holt's suggestion that the Australian and New Zealand battalions at Terendak might be rotated into Vietnam on six-month tours to provide a third battalion for the Task Force.²⁰ Such an arrangement offered several advantages for New Zealand: the battalion was already in the region, acclimatised and trained with the benefit of recent albeit relatively limited combat experience, and of a size that would lessen the problems of ensuring national identity. There had already been unofficial indications that a rotation along the lines proposed by

19. They did, however, allow the participation of several New Zealand forward air controllers from December 1968.

20. Canberra to Wellington, 1131, 7 December 1966, Acting Secretary of External Affairs to Prime Minister, 14 December 1966, PM 478/4/6, ANZ.

Holt might be acceptable to the British military commanders in Malaysia.²¹ Although the idea was quickly dropped in Canberra—because of the possible effect on the British, the likely morale problems from injecting short-term personnel into the Task Force, and a belief that six-month tours would be too short to allow effective performance—the New Zealand authorities looked more closely at possible options for sending all or part of 1RNZIR to Vietnam. The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak's 'surprisingly forthcoming response' to an Australian request to deploy its Canberra squadron from Butterworth air base in Malaya to South Vietnam seemed to indicate that Malaysian objections might not be a major obstacle to deploying 1RNZIR.²²

The idea of sending the whole of 1RNZIR to South Vietnam did not get very far. In the first place, New Zealand authorities accepted that, if it were committed on either a permanent or temporary basis, another battalion would have to be deployed to meet SEATO commitments. Otherwise New Zealand would be effectively withdrawing from the Strategic Reserve with possibly serious consequences regarding the United Kingdom's continuing presence. But finding such a battalion would present major problems: doubts about the legality of compelling National Servicemen to serve overseas ruled out using an existing Territorial Force battalion for the purpose, while recruiting a specially constituted battalion did not seem feasible in light of the problems being experienced in manning existing units overseas. Moreover, to sustain such a commitment a second, relief, battalion would have to be raised in New Zealand while the first was still in Malaya, causing 'acute accommodation problems'. Another drawback foreseen in such a scheme, especially if 1RNZIR went to Vietnam on a relatively short tour and dependants remained at Terendak, was the likelihood of marital problems if a battalion of unaccompanied men sent to Malaya (as had occurred when 1RNZIR went to Borneo leaving unaccompanied SAS personnel and battalion families in the camp). On the other hand, to hold a replacement battalion in New Zealand for dispatch to Malaya if and when needed was bound to lead to a decline in the efficiency of 28 Commonwealth Brigade because of its inability to exercise effectively. Moreover, any rapid deployment under such an arrangement would depend upon storing the battalion's equipment in theatre ahead of time, with consequent logistic problems.²³

Quite apart from the drawbacks of a replacement battalion, the deployment of 1RNZIR to South Vietnam permanently would also create practical and morale problems.

21. See Minute by R.H. W. [Wade], 21 November 1966, PM 478/4/6, ANZ, reporting that the commander of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, Brigadier T.D.R. McMeekin, had pointed out off the record that since he now had a Gurkha battalion under command the temporary absence of either of the Australian or New Zealand battalions would not present a problem in terms of meeting Commonwealth Strategic Reserve responsibilities.

22. Kuala Lumpur to Wellington, 876, 22 December 1966, PM 478/4/6, ANZ.

23. CGS to Minister of Defence, 30 January, 1 February 1967, MD 23/4/1, NZDFHQ.

The troops' tour of duty in South-east Asia would be reduced from 24 months to twelve, bringing major recruiting problems to sustain the unit. An annual turnover of 1400 men would be required to sustain the battalion on active service in South Vietnam, given an anticipated 60 per cent wastage rate. This was far above the existing enlistment rate. The families of 1RNZIR's married men at Terendak would have to return to New Zealand, posing accommodation problems. Furthermore, the troops had certain expectations about their service, not the least of which was that their two-year engagement would allow them to import a car to New Zealand at its end.

These negative considerations ensured that attention quickly focused on the possibility of providing a much smaller unit for Vietnam. There were indications that rotation of units from Terendak to South Vietnam would be acceptable to Canberra.²⁴ The New Zealand Chief of Defence Staff Lieutenant General L.W. (later Sir Leonard) Thornton had been assured by his Australian counterpart, General Sir John Wilton, that IATF would welcome a New Zealand company, would use it for more than just base protection duties, and 'would ensure it did not get given wrong or unsatisfactory tasks'.²⁵ There was a reasonable assumption that Australia would assist in the support of such a unit on the same basis as it did in the case of 161 Battery. Moreover, such a contribution, which could be sustained by sending successive companies, could be made without completely compromising 1RNZIR's position in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. All this left the Chief of the General Staff, Major General W.S. McKinnon, convinced that 'the company rotation plan would be by far the easiest'.²⁶

Holyoake accepted this advice. He was unmoved when the visiting Holt, early in February, expressed reluctance to see a New Zealand sub-unit withdrawn from the Strategic Reserve (perhaps fearing that this would open the way to American pressure for use of part or all of the Australian battalion as well). Nor was he swayed by Holt's pointed assertion that Australia had had no difficulty in using conscripts in South Vietnam.²⁷ On 20 February 1967 the Cabinet agreed in principle to the contribution of at least a company of 184 men (160 for the unit and 24 reinforcements).²⁸ This provided a firm basis for army-level talks with Australia with a view to firming up the proposal. The plan to insert a New Zealand company was not entirely straightforward. To operate with Australian battalions, standardisation would be necessary. Their similar historical approaches had not prevented a number of differences developing between the armies of the two countries. These related to unit size, composition, equipment, and standard operating procedures. A New Zealand company would have to conform with Australian

24. See Canberra to Wellington, No 1167, 15 December 1966, MD 23/4/1, NZDFHQ.

25. Minute by Thornton, on CGS to Minister of Defence, 30 January 1967, MD 23/4/1, NZDFHQ.

26. CGS to Minister of Defence, 30 January 1967, MD 23/4/1, NZDFHQ.

27. Dickens, 'New Zealand and the Vietnam War', 252.

28. CM67/5/27, PM 478/4/6.

practice in these areas. If the contribution were to be made in timely fashion, a degree of Australian help would also clearly be needed, especially to obtain the necessary equipment.

In the ensuing discussions, the Australians confirmed that they would provide logistic support on the same basis as for 161 Battery, and would provide clothing and personal equipment. The main outcome of the discussions was a substantial increase in the size of what would now be a company group. This was to accommodate a ten per cent supplement to Australian infantry companies in Vietnam over their war establishment of 123—1RNZIR had operated in Borneo with 90-man companies—31 men for an operational support element which would include a mortar section and an assault pioneer section, twenty men for logistic and administrative support, and 24 reinforcements.

The diplomatic formalities were also completed without serious difficulties. Both the British and Australian governments formally indicated their agreement to the proposed action.²⁹ When approached, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Razak was at first most anxious about the implications of the deployment. 'After some cogitation, and with still undisguised qualms,' High Commissioner Hunter Wade reported to Wellington, 'he nevertheless finally said that of course Malaysia would not stand in New Zealand's way ... He gave the impression of agreeing to something that he did not at all like ...'³⁰ In order to allay Malaysian concerns, much emphasis was placed on the fact that the company, and the one that would replace it after six months, would comprise men whose engagements were ending and hence would return to Malaysia from South Vietnam only temporarily before proceeding to New Zealand.³¹ The Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew agreed that the deployment of the company could be made, with discretion, through Changi.³² The South Vietnamese government was the last of the interested parties to be informed.³³

With all bases covered, the Cabinet had little problem in agreeing, on 6 March 1967, to the addition of 210 men to 'V' Force, increasing its establishment from 150 to 360. This decision involved sending 40 personnel from New Zealand either to fill gaps in 'V' Company or to replace specialists in 1RNZIR.³⁴ To allay domestic concerns the government decided to match the combat offering with a small non-combatant

29. London to Wellington, 1031, 24 February 1967, Canberra to Wellington, 257, 24 February 1967, PM 478/4/6. On the Australian response see Minute by Defence Committee, 23 February 1967, and Cabinet Minute (Decision No 82) of same date, A4940, C4521, Cabinet Secretariat Records, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

30. Kuala Lumpur to Wellington, 160, 28 February 1967, PM 478/4/6.

31. Wellington to Kuala Lumpur, 231, 8 March 1967, PM 478/4/6.

32. Singapore to Wellington, 115, 6 March 1967, PM 478/4/6.

33. Memorandum for Cabinet, 'Vietnam: Military Assistance', 3 March 1967, PM 478/4/6.

34. CM67/7/30, 8 March 1967, PM 478/4/6.

contribution, as a result of which a joint services medical team left for South Vietnam in April.³⁵

While the troops selected for 'V' Company carried out specialist training from 1 April, a four-man engineer party went from New Zealand to prepare the company area in Nui Dat. Every effort was made to downplay the significance of the deployment from Terendak. 'V' Company ceased to be part of 28 Brigade when it left Terendak Camp on 8 May. It did not, however, completely sever links with Malaysia. It was intended that casualties would be evacuated to Terendak or the British Military Hospital in Singapore, and that deceased soldiers would be brought back to be buried at Terendak.³⁶

On arrival in Vietnam 'V' Company was attached initially to 6RAR, which was about to be relieved by 2RAR. It was already deployed in the field in the important Horseshoe position when 2RAR arrived on 30 May.³⁷ As that battalion's fifth rifle company, it settled in quickly, helped by the relatively quiescent conditions. Interviewed a few years afterwards about his experience in Vietnam, Mace 'stressed that these six months were a very quiet period with little of major importance occurring'.³⁸ It was not until early September that the company suffered its first, and only, fatal casualty—as a result of a mine explosion.³⁹

Well before the company's tour was completed, the provision of its replacement was complicated by the government's decision to make available a second infantry company in response to renewed American pressure for greater Allied assistance in South Vietnam. Direct approaches from President Johnson in July were reinforced when his envoys Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor met with the New Zealand Cabinet in Wellington on 1 August 1967. Their message was clear: America's allies needed to do more. Clifford emphasised the importance of even a small increase by pointing out that 'one additional New Zealand soldier might produce fifty Americans'.⁴⁰ That Holyoake was resigned to a further commitment is revealed by his subsequent efforts to prepare the public for such an eventuality. He made a point of hinting that expansion of 'V' Force was under consideration and that New Zealand would not flinch from such action if necessary.⁴¹ Behind his stance lay recognition that the situation in the region had fundamentally altered since the decision to commit 'V' Company. Even before that unit had reached

35. Dickens, 'New Zealand and the Vietnam War', 258.

36. See Major General COS, FARELF, 'Move of V Company Group', 31 March 1967, NZA C59/3.

37. Major K.E. Newman (ed.), *The ANZAC Battalion: A Record of the Tour of 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment 1st Battalion, The Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (The ANZAC Battalion) in South Vietnam, 1967-68* (Brookvale: 2RAR, 1968), vol. 1, 12.

38. John Henderson, 'ROH Interview with New Zealand Army Officers Who Have Served in Vietnam', unpublished typescript, Ministry of Defence, n.d. (c. 1969), 2 (copy in author's possession).

39. Captain C.E. Brock, *A History of the First Battalion Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment* (Singapore: IRNZIR, 1971), 10.1-2.

40. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 152.

41. See, e.g., *Dominion* (Wellington), 5 October 1967.

South Vietnam, Holyoake had been shocked, when meeting British Foreign Secretary George Brown on 18 April, to learn of plans to slash British force levels in Malaysia and Singapore by half by 1971 and to end the British presence altogether by the mid-1970s. Holyoake, 'with all the force at my command', urged a reconsideration of these plans, which fundamentally differed from assurances he had received as recently as February that any changes to the British presence would be no more than minor adjustments.⁴² The need to bolster the American resolve to stay in the region seemed to have been enhanced.

Once again New Zealand's decision on a Vietnam commitment was precipitated by Australian action. When Holyoake visited Canberra at the beginning of October 1967, he learned from Holt that Australia intended to provide an additional infantry battalion and some tanks. Holt indicated that he would make an announcement to this effect as soon as the Australian Parliament resumed sitting in about two weeks' time.⁴³ Holyoake's advisers wasted little time in pointing to the importance of co-ordinating any New Zealand decision with that of Australia. As Secretary of Foreign Affairs George Laking pointed out, the appearance of a joint response would have political advantages; if, on the other hand, New Zealand announced its decision shortly after Australia, it 'could convey the impression that New Zealand was being dragged along in the wake of its larger allies'.⁴⁴ On 9 October the Cabinet agreed in principle to an additional contribution to the Allied effort in South Vietnam.⁴⁵ While External Affairs sought, unsuccessfully, to secure a delay in the announcement of the Australian decision so that Holyoake too could make his announcement in Parliament—New Zealand's parliamentary session was resuming a week later than Australia's—the military authorities found themselves in an urgent new consideration of potential contributions.

As in the previous decision, the options were limited. The operational capability of 1RNZIR had been severely affected by the dispatch of V Company to South Vietnam: this commitment had effectively absorbed the capacity of two of the battalion's four rifle companies. To send another company would be to reduce 1RNZIR to a headquarters and about 300 men, rendering it essentially a training depot for the sub-units in South Vietnam. Major General R.B. Dawson, who had replaced McKinnon as CGS at the end of March, warned that this would not be a credible contribution to 28 Brigade.⁴⁶ Such a step might also complicate efforts to deal with the question of a continued Australian and New Zealand presence in Malaysia-Singapore following the projected British

42. 'Record of Meeting ... 18 April 1967'; NZ Ambassador, Washington, to Minister of External Affairs, Wellington, 19 April 1967, PM 434/8/1, ANZ.

43. 'Record of Discussions between the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers and Australian and New Zealand Officials: 2-3 October 1967', 3 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

44. Secretary of External Affairs to Prime Minister, 6 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

45. CM67/39/30, 10 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

46. CGS to CDS, 20 September 1967, MD 23/4/1.

withdrawal, and perhaps even hasten plans for that withdrawal. Nor were the Australian military authorities keen on the removal of another company from 1RNZIR. When Thornton discussed the matter in Canberra in early October with Wilton and Australian CGS Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, he found the idea ‘not at first very warmly received’, though they did agree in the end to support a further company on the same basis as ‘V’ Company.⁴⁷

On the other hand, sending another company was a convenient method of expanding New Zealand’s commitment and relatively cheap. Together with an SAS detachment from New Zealand, it would cost about £122,000 to deploy and another £314,000 annually to maintain. As a surprisingly co-operative Treasury pointed out, this was not a large amount when considered in relation to the £7.7 million spent on New Zealand forces in Malaysia and South Vietnam overall. Considerations of economic diplomacy may have influenced the Treasury’s stance. ‘It is assumed’, the Secretary to the Treasury, Noel Davis, informed his Minister, ‘that the utmost use will be made of any increased New Zealand contribution to Vietnam in future trade negotiations with the United States’.⁴⁸

When it met to consider New Zealand’s response on 16 October 1967, the Cabinet quickly settled on the dispatch of another infantry company, despite the implications for 1RNZIR and the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. To save money, it rejected the proposal to send an SAS detachment. The naval authorities at last secured some encouragement in their struggle to have a frigate sent to Vietnam, being authorised to open talks with their American counterparts on the possibility.⁴⁹ In the event, they soon ran up against the obstacle that the Americans regarded such assistance as having a relatively low priority. Naval hopes of a Vietnam effort were finally dashed.

New Zealand’s decision to send another infantry company was announced at 4.30 pm on 17 October. This timing was carefully arranged to make it simultaneous with Holt’s statement to the Australian Parliament, when it resumed for its afternoon sitting. There was a hint of the old competitive spirit in the attitude of officials in Wellington about the likely media response to the announcements in the United States, with fears being expressed that New Zealand’s would be completely overshadowed or ignored. But, significantly, there was no attempt by Holyoake to steal a march on the Australians by getting New Zealand’s decision out first—as had motivated Holyoake’s predecessor Sidney Holland when ground force contributions for Korea were announced by both countries in July 1950. On that occasion Holland had rushed to beat Australia to the

47. CDS to Minister of Defence, 6 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

48. Secretary to Treasury to Minister of Finance, 11 October 1967, MD 23/4/1.

49. CM67/40/4, 18 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

draw, achieving his goal thanks to the time difference between the two countries.⁵⁰ Overhanging the resolution of the Vietnam issue in 1967 was the need for Australia and New Zealand to find a solution to the problem posed by Britain's projected departure from the region. Provocative action on New Zealand's part would not have assisted this process. On the contrary, Holyoake had everything to gain by emphasising the Anzac context of New Zealand's Vietnam effort: his statement noted that the additional forces would serve 'as an integral part of the Australian Task Force', and referred to the two countries being 'as ever ready to stand together'.⁵¹ His own warm relations with Harold Holt were also significant. In any case, preemptive action might have drawn attention to the relative smallness of New Zealand's contribution. The United States was deploying another 40,000 troops, and Australia 1700, but New Zealand was offering a mere 150. These would bring New Zealand's overall strength in South Vietnam to 546, compared with the United States' 525,000 and Australia's 8000.

However it was announced, New Zealand's relatively meagre response was hardly likely to gain it any political leverage in the American capital, notwithstanding President Johnson's expressions of gratitude. Ambassador Frank Corner was resigned to the fact that 'we matter little at high levels in Washington, or are taken for granted, or both'.⁵² In London, the decision probably merely strengthened British resolve to withdraw from Southeast Asia, or eased the consciences of those who felt that New Zealand and Australia had been earlier misled about Britain intentions, though British officials 'determinedly nonreacted' to Holyoake's announcement.⁵³ On military grounds the British Commander-in-Chief, Far East, General Sir Michael Carver, thought that New Zealand was 'getting the worst of both worlds', since it would have neither an operationally effective unit in Malaysia nor a clearly identifiable New Zealand unit in South Vietnam.⁵⁴

Designated 'W' Company, the second New Zealand company went forward to South Vietnam in mid-December 1967, a month after the replacement company for V Company. Like the first, this second 'V' Company was committed on a six-month tour, as previously planned, but it was intended in future to send replacement companies on twelve-month tours. This would bring them into conformity with the twelve-month tour that 'W' Company embarked on.⁵⁵ This longer period of service was facilitated by the fact that most of 'W' Company was made up of men who had recently arrived at Terendak as part of the half-battalion replacement system then in place. In short, they were just beginning their 24-month period of engagement. While this facilitated their

50. See Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, vol. I, *Politics and Diplomacy* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 97-9.

51. Wellington to all Diplomatic Posts, C12, 17 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

52. Washington to Wellington, 943, 3 November 1967, PM 478/4/6.

53. London to Wellington, 5074, 20 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

54. Singapore to Wellington, 475, 17 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

55. Deputy Secretary of Defence (Army) to Minister of Defence, 20 October 1967, MD 23/4/1.

deployment for a longer period, it meant that they only had a few weeks to acclimatise before moving forward to Nui Dat;⁵⁶ several weeks' further training would be needed in South Vietnam before they were ready for operational duty.

The provision of 'W' Company opened the way to the formal integration of the New Zealand units with an Australian battalion. Initially, it was envisaged that 'W' Company would be attached to a different battalion (3RAR) to that with which 'V' Company was serving (2RAR), but that eventually both companies would be brought together, probably in 3RAR in March 1968.⁵⁷ Almost immediately, this intention changed, and when it arrived at Nui Dat 'W' Company joined 'V' Company with 2RAR.

By this time agreement had been reached by the Australian and New Zealand army authorities that 2RAR should become an Anzac battalion. Thornton, in October, had put forward to Wilton and Daly the idea of a battalion of two Australian and two New Zealand companies. This made no headway, the Australian generals insisting that a five-company battalion 'would suit local tactical requirements'.⁵⁸ With such a structure the battalion could operate with four companies while leaving one company to protect the patrol base and supporting artillery unit. Behind the Australian generals' insistence on three Australian companies may also have been recognition that Thornton's preferred arrangement would probably open the way for New Zealand calls for command of the battalion to be rotated between Australian and New Zealand officers. It was intended that one of 2RAR's four Australian companies would be withdrawn about March 1968, allowing 'W' Company to be integrated into it. When 4RAR replaced 2RAR in mid-1968, it would take only three rifle companies to South Vietnam. New Zealand officers would fill a number of positions in the headquarters of the battalion, including that of second-in-command. Integration was complete apart from New Zealand national administration, for which a small New Zealand Component, 1ATF, was created and co-located with the battalion. The new Anzac unit, formally designated 2RAR/NZ(ANZAC),⁵⁹ came into being on 1 March 1968.

Although a pragmatic solution to New Zealand's problem of making an additional contribution, the arrangement did have some serious disadvantages. One was in the field of co-ordination. Creating a cohesive Anzac unit was rendered more difficult by the lack of opportunity to practise working together before deployment. New Zealand's units prepared for Vietnam in a different place from the Australian component of the battalion—in cases where the change over coincided with the commitment of a new RAR battalion—or joined one already involved in operations. The commander of the

56. Wellington to Singapore, No 617, 20 October 1967, MD 23/4/1.

57. DC(67)M20, 2 November 1967, MD23/4/1.

58. CDS to Ministry of Defence, 6 October 1967, PM 478/4/6.

59. New Zealand had initially suggested '3RAR/1NZ'; it agreed to the addition of '(ANZAC)' but later asked for the removal of the '1'.

last 'V' Company concluded that the 'opportunity to train together would certainly have made a difference to that very important element of mutual understanding between the two parts of the Battalion'. He also noted that 'because of the tempo of operations in Vietnam, there was almost no time to get to know one another even socially'.⁶⁰ While officers, many of them graduates of Duntroon or Portsea, had few problems in fitting in with their Australian counterparts, there is some evidence that at lower levels the two nationalities may have found the path to a successful partnership less easy, especially in the early stages before mutual respect was engendered by shared battle experiences. A New Zealand commentator who visited South Vietnam in mid-1967 claimed to have found 'considerable bad blood between the two nationalities'. Resentment among some New Zealand troops at their treatment was, he suggested, exacerbated by their belief that they were professionally more competent than the mainly conscript Australian unit they were serving alongside.⁶¹ Australian taunts about New Zealand's tendency to operate on the cheap also caused ill-feeling: visiting Nui Dat in late 1967, P.K. Edmonds, the New Zealand Chargé d'Affaires in Saigon, found some New Zealand other ranks 'inclined to be rankled by Australian comments to the effect that they are "cheap soldiers" and that the New Zealand authorities are not sufficiently concerned with them to avoid spoiling the ship for a ha'penny worth of tar'.⁶²

The biggest drawback of the arrangement from New Zealand's viewpoint was the fact that its effort in South Vietnam was largely submerged. This increased the Army's desire to raise New Zealand's contribution to a battalion as soon as circumstances permitted. The communist Tet Offensive launched on 30 January 1968 seemed to provide an opportunity. With the Americans under pressure, the advantages of making a 'spontaneous gesture of solidarity' were recognised in Wellington.⁶³ Dawson pressed for the dispatch of 1RNZIR's HQ and signals and mortars units to constitute a battalion, pointing to the 'great advantages of obtaining national identity', administrative benefits, and the fact that 'the morale of the New Zealand personnel serving in the Task Force would be immeasurably increased'.⁶⁴ Some indications had been received that 1ATF would bend over backwards to assist this process, even fleshing out a New Zealand battalion if necessary.⁶⁵ As ever the problem of finding the men without some form of compulsion proved an insuperable obstacle. David Thomson, the Minister of Defence, was at first tempted by the possibility of withdrawing 161 Battery to provide the means,

60. Colonel Brian Monks, quoted in Jerry Taylor, *Last Out: 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's second tour in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 80.

61. See *The Australian*, 26 September 1967.

62. NZ Chargé d'Affaires, Saigon, to Secretary of External Affairs, 3 January 1968, MD 23/4/1. See also Henderson, 'ROH Interview with New Zealand Army Officers Who Have Served in Vietnam', 55.

63. Memorandum for the Cabinet Defence Committee, 'Additional Forces for Vietnam' (forwarded by Secretary of Defence to Minister of Defence, 16 May 1968), MD 23/4/1.

64. CGS to CDS, 29 February 1968, MD 23/4/1.

65. Chargé d'Affaires, Saigon, to Secretary of External Affairs, 3 January 1968, MD 23/4/1.

but soon lost interest when the likely time needed to negotiate such an outcome and, above all, the cost of a full battalion deployment became apparent.⁶⁶ By April 1968 the idea was effectively dead, ensuring that the pattern of infantry commitment established in 1967 would persist. Over the next three and a half years three further replacement 'V' Companies and three replacement 'W' Companies brought to nine in all the number of New Zealand infantry companies that served in South Vietnam with the Anzac battalion, the Australian component of which alternated between 2RAR, 4RAR, and 6RAR. 'W' Company was withdrawn in November 1970 and 'V' Company in December the following year.

New Zealand's commitment of infantry companies in South Vietnam in 1967 was reactive rather than proactive. It moved only when American pressure for contributions made a commitment unavoidable, not least because of likely Australian action. The government's lack of enthusiasm for the war, its unwillingness to bite the bullet of political unpopularity that the provision of a substantial force would entail, and its constant concern about the financial implications of any overseas effort—all ensured that New Zealand's effort in South Vietnam would be very limited. In doing anything at all, it depended on Australia's assistance and co-operation. The formation of the Anzac battalion reflected a warming of Anzac relations at a governmental level. Even if the arrangement may have caused problems for some of the New Zealand troops in the field, it was a successful response to the practical problems of deploying New Zealand sub-units in an unfamiliar environment. With concurrent British moves to withdraw from the Southeast Asian region undermining the traditional basis of New Zealand's defence policy, such co-operation in meeting military requirements augured well for the future, when Australia and New Zealand would face new challenges in ensuring their regional interests.

66. Bangkok to Wellington, 109, 23 February 1968, Kuala Lumpur to Wellington, 29 February 1968, Minute by Thornton, 20 March 1968 on CGS to CDS, 29 February 1968, MD 23/4/1.

Meeting the Challenge of Training and Preparing Elements of 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, for Service in South Vietnam, 1967–1971

Rob Williams

The French withdrawal followed by the Geneva conference's 'temporary' partition of Vietnam at the 17th Parallel, together with the subsequent developments in Indo-China, resulted in a dramatic shift in New Zealand's stance towards security in Southeast Asia. This was evident in 1954 when New Zealand joined the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan in signing the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEACDT) and thereafter in joining the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). By so doing New Zealand accepted a security commitment to the region to be formalised shortly thereafter by its adoption of the strategy of 'Forward Defence in Southeast Asia'.

This essay draws on the following sources:

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- *The First Battalion Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment Journal*, 25th Anniversary Commemorative Edition
- Correspondence with Brigadier R.M. Gurr OBE, Comd 28 Comwel Inf Bde Gp and 28 ANZAC Brigade, and interviews with:
 - Major General B. Meldrum CB OBE, Dep Comd V Force 1971-72
 - Brigadier R.T.V. Taylor MBE, 2ic 4RAR/ANZAC Battalion 1969-70
 - Lieutenant Colonel J.D. McGuire, OC 'Victor 5' Company, 1970-71
 - Lieutenant Colonel M.N. Ritchie, Admin Officer NZ Component 1970-71
- Access to correspondence between Brigadier R.V. Taylor and Dr C.J. Pugsley, Department of War Studies, The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst
- My own experience during the period as:
 - BM 28 Comwel Inf Bde Gp, October 1965-January 1968
 - CO 1 Bn Depot, Burnham, New Zealand, December 1968-October 1969
 - CO 1 RNZIR, Singapore, November 1969-December 1971
 - ACDS Ops/Plans and as a member of the ad hoc ANZUS Staff Planning Committee, August 1979-December 1981

Both the ANZUS Alliance (1951) and SEATO became the prime elements in New Zealand's defence policy and the subsequent adherence to the obligations and principles of both these treaties were significant factors in determining New Zealand's political philosophy and subsequently the extent of its military involvement in South Vietnam.

During the lull in the Vietnam conflict in the late 1950s New Zealand's regional security role was focussed primarily within a Commonwealth context, particularly with respect to Singapore and Malaya and was evident in the deployment of elements of all three services to the area, viz. a Special Air Service Squadron, 1 New Zealand Regiment (to become 1RNZIR), a naval frigate, a Canberra Strike Squadron and a Transport Squadron RNZAF.

By the early 1960s and thereafter when the conflict in Vietnam again flared up, and as the military and political situation steadily worsened, the consequent escalation of American involvement resulted in considerable pressure from Washington for its ANZUS allies either to commit or increase their military contribution.

New Zealand's response was never as robust as that of Australia and was predicated on an underlying scepticism at the highest political levels about the credibility of the American view that a military solution was achievable in South Vietnam. Added to this was the general view that New Zealand as a small country with very limited defence resources (and taking account of its already significant commitment to Singapore/Malaya and the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve) was not really able to make a military contribution that would assist materially in the conduct of the war.

Indeed apart from a Civilian Medical/Surgical team followed by a troop of Engineers in 1964 to assist in reconstruction work, it was not until May 1965 that the New Zealand Government, having confirmed the importance of supporting its ANZUS allies, approved the dispatch of an Artillery Battery (161 Battery, RNZA, of 120 men) to South Vietnam. This decision marked the first occasion that New Zealand would enter combat without the United Kingdom, and in so doing reflected the renewed significance that the United States and Australia had now assumed in official security doctrine.

In essence the New Zealand policy that evolved for South Vietnam had been dictated by alliance needs, with the primary goal being to preserve cordial relations with both the United States and Australia and thereby ensure that New Zealand's ultimate security guarantee remained intact. To achieve this goal the Government was quite prepared to forgo its doubts about military intervention, and support US policy, but at the minimum possible cost in terms of its military commitment and resources, financial effort and domestic political impact.

This essay aims to place New Zealand's commitment to the war in South Vietnam in perspective, bearing in mind the constraints imposed by SEATO obligations and New Zealand's participation in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Particular reference will be made to the infantry contribution, by examining:

- the availability, training and preparation of those elements of 1RNZIR to be deployed; and, thereafter,
- the consequences of the deployment policy so adopted.

Status of 1RNZIR within the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve.

New Zealand involvement in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (28 Comwel Inf Bde Gp) saw 1RNZIR in Malaysia reach a professional peak in 1967. Tactical skills had been honed at unit level by on-going operations on the Thai/Malay border, and thereafter by the deployment of 1RNZIR on two tours of Borneo in Confrontation with Indonesia in 1965-66.

The ending of Confrontation in mid-1966 allowed 28 Comwel Inf Bde Gp of which 1RNZIR, 4th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and 1 Scots Guards were then the Infantry component, to focus on and train for its primary role as the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve for the SEATO alliance. This resulted in the conduct of a wide range of formation exercises based on the insurgency scenarios envisaged in the various SEATO Contingency Plans applicable to the SEATO Protocol States, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam, in all of which 1RNZIR featured as one of the vanguard 'fly in' units in the event of any of these contingencies being activated. At the time, therefore, these exercises were relevant and directly applicable to operations then being undertaken in South Vietnam.

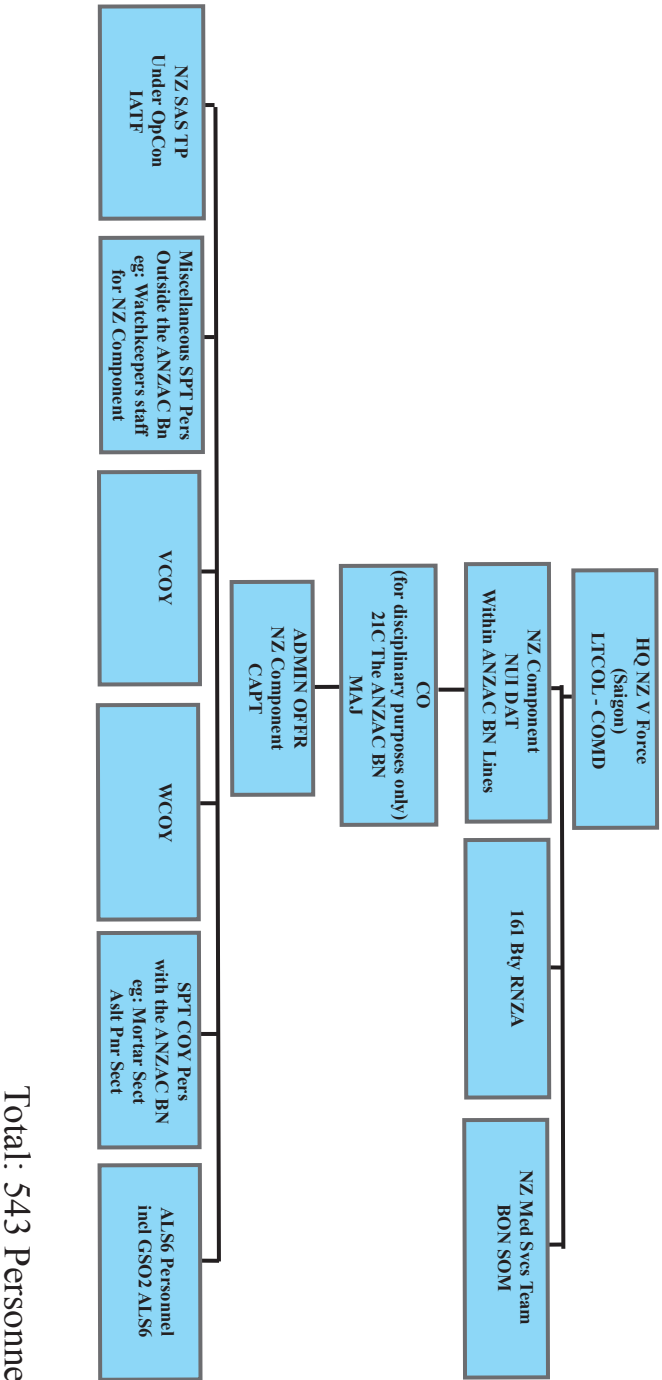
In summary 1RNZIR was a highly-trained , combat-ready unit, well able to fulfil the roles envisaged in the various SEATO contingency plans and, if need be, combat operations in South Vietnam.

Increased Troop Levels in South Vietnam

Following Australia's decision to increase the size of its Task Force in South Vietnam in 1967 the New Zealand Government in turn authorised the deployment of a reinforced Rifle Company to South Vietnam rather than 1RNZIR as a Unit. This reinforced Rifle Company, known as 'Victor One', at a strength of 160 personnel, had in addition to the standard company HQ and three platoons, a Mortar Section, Assault Pioneer Section, a First Reinforcement and a separate administrative element to be known as 'the NZ Component' with the task of managing the personnel administration of all New Zealand personnel in the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF). The deployment was to be for six months from May 1967 when 'Victor One' would be relieved in November 1967 by 'Victor Two'—also for a six-month tour. In turn 1RNZIR's establishment was reduced from 720 to 560.

New Zealand Force Structure, South Vietnam

Figure 1.



In meeting this commitment 1RNZIR drew upon two Rifle Companies to form 'Victor One' and thereafter the remaining two Rifle Companies to form 'Victor Two'. Following the two six-month tours by 'Victor One' and 'Victor Two' it was agreed that to become fully familiar with the terrain, the nature of the operations in South Vietnam, as well as to conform with the tours of duty being undertaken by the Australians, a twelve-month tour would become standard policy.

November 1967-December 1971

For 1RNZIR the period November 1967-December 1971 was dominated by two events, the British decision to withdraw all their forces from East of Suez by November 1971, and the increased military commitment to South Vietnam.

The first of these events, the British announcement of their impending military withdrawal from the region, confirmed the start of the demise of SEATO, and resulted in a downgrading of the status and priority of SEATO Contingency Plans, which from a New Zealand viewpoint meant the 'combat-ready 1RNZIR' would now be available for deployment to South Vietnam. It also caused the dismemberment of 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group by the withdrawal of all the United Kingdom elements (comprising nearly 50 per cent of the Brigade strength) which, together with the associated decision to vacate Terendak Camp by November 1969, faced Australia and New Zealand with an early decision about the role and future location of their forces in Malaysia.

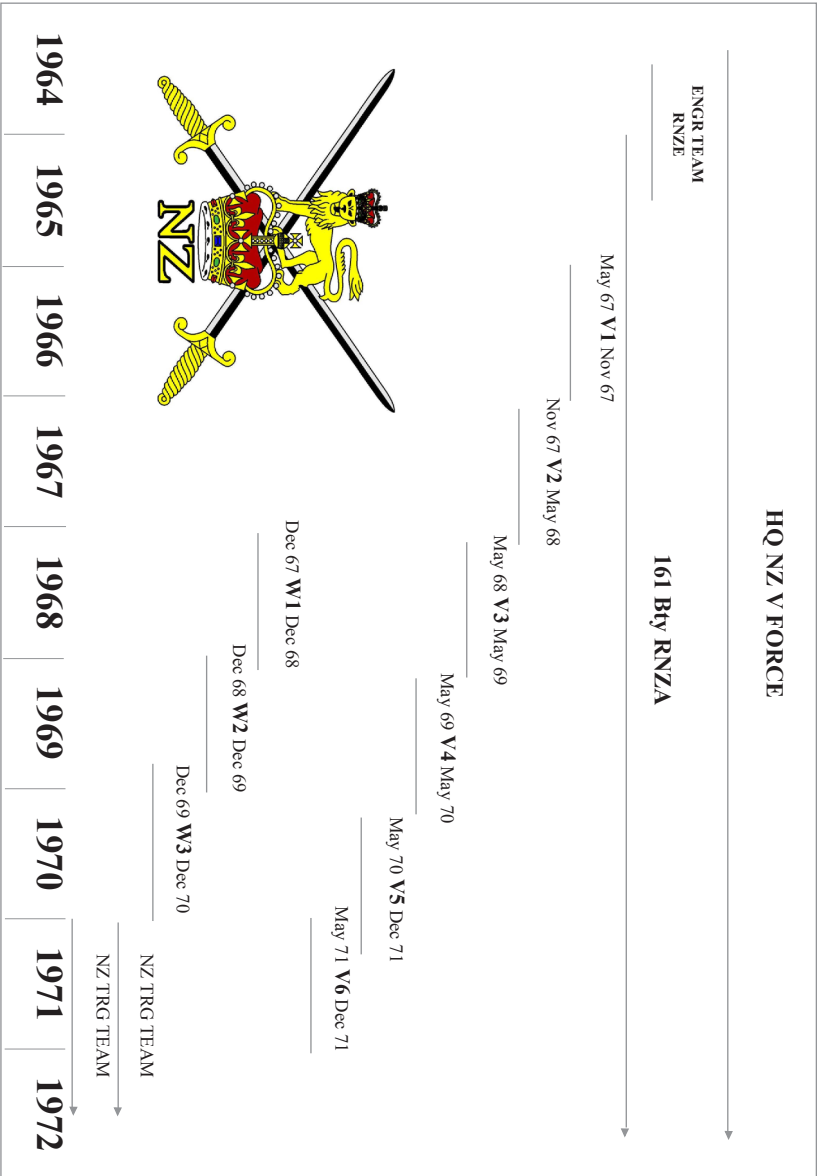
An increased military commitment to South Vietnam now became possible. The government decision to deploy a second reinforced rifle company led to speculation which at first had the Unit HQ of 1RNZIR going to head up an ANZAC Battalion. Although such a unit was subsequently formed it was not to be commanded from 1RNZIR. Instead, in December 1967 'Whisky One' Company was deployed to join 2RAR in South Vietnam where 'Victor Two' was already serving.

In March 1968 the formal establishment of the ANZAC Battalion made further demands on 1RNZIR's strength as a number of appointments were required to be taken up by unit personnel. The subsequent change to one-year tours for each of the Rifle Companies (which resulted in an adjustment to the relief system from New Zealand) together with the rotation of 1RNZIR's Officers and NCOs through either the ANZAC Battalions, the New Zealand Component, HQ 1st Australian Task Force or the Australian Logistic Support Group (1ALSG), became the focus of the Unit's activities.

Nevertheless, despite these demands, training associated with this commitment to South Vietnam provided a continuous professional challenge for 1RNZIR. Successive companies undertook extensive training programs which culminated in testing operational exercises designed to assess their preparedness for active service.

Figure 2.

Deployment Schedule: South Vietnam 1964–72



The six month overlap arising from the deployment of ‘Whisky One’ (the second Rifle Company) in December 1967 and ‘Victor Three’ in May 1968—both for one year tours—this resulted in each ANZAC Battalion thereafter having to cater for a Company ‘relief’ during its tour—and as a consequence a ‘veteran’ company, having served six months, coming under Command of the next incoming ANZAC Battalion for the balance of its tour. Under the New Zealand Force structure in South Vietnam, the 2ic Anzac Battalion was the Commanding Officer for disciplinary purposes for all New Zealand personnel in IATF. The overall strength deployed in theatre represented ten per cent of Regular Force strength of the New Zealand Army and at no stage did New Zealand introduce conscription.

The Move to Singapore

By December 1969 28 Comwel Inf Bde Gp had been disbanded and Terendak Garrison handed over to the Malaysian Army. By this time, as agreed by Australia and New Zealand, the remaining ANZAC elements of the now defunct Commonwealth Brigade had been withdrawn to Singapore and relocated at Changi Barracks and Neeson Garrison.

For 1RNZIR this move to Singapore resulted in the unit being quartered away from its principal training areas, and as a consequence much time was to be spent in travelling into Malaysia to reach distant training grounds. Neeson Camp, however, provided excellent Base facilities and in particular had its own rifle ranges (to 600 metres) adjacent to the camp.

Withdrawal from South Vietnam

In 1970 there were further changes in the Vietnam commitment with ‘Whisky Three’ Company being withdrawn without replacement in November 1970. In its place 1RNZIR was then required to assist in the raising, training and deployment to South Vietnam of the first New Zealand Army training team. This reduced commitment did, however, result in a measure of stability returning to 1RNZIR. The Unit establishment was raised to 560, three rifle companies were re-established and Admin/Sp. Company reverted to separate sub-units.

In May 1971 ‘Victor Five’ returned and was replaced by ‘Victor Six’. 1RNZIR moved to its new home in Dieppe Barracks in Sembawang, Singapore, and in November a change of government in the United Kingdom led to a review of the decision by Britain to withdraw from the Far East. Under the auspices of the Five Power Defence Agreement, ANZUK Force HQ with 28 ANZUK Brigade (of which 1RNZIR became part) and 28 Logistic Support Force under command was established with effect from 1 November 1971.

ANZAC Battalions stemmed from the long-standing ANZAC relationship and the New Zealand Army's interoperability with the Australian Army both organisationally and in terms of tactical doctrine.

The Officer Relationship

The similar background, training and experience of the New Zealand Officers selected for 'Victor' and 'Whisky' companies compared favourably with their Australian counterparts and were a significant factor in the successful integration of the companies within the ANZAC Battalions. Virtually all these Officers were either RMC Duntroon or Portsea graduates. They were 'Australian Thinkers'. All the Majors were 'psc' graduates—a number from the Australian command and staff college at Queenscliff. In essence virtually all the officers were 'known to' or 'by' their Australian counterparts—they were friends and contemporaries.

Conclusion

While New Zealand was successful in meeting its two rifle company commitment to the ANZAC Battalion in 1ATF the adoption of this sub-unit deployment policy was not without cost:

- When reduced to an establishment of 400, 1RNZIR became, to all intents and purposes, non-operational and had difficulty in functioning within a formation environment.
- Effectively, 1RNZIR had become an advanced training and reinforcement depot with its prime role being servicing of the ATF commitment.
- Although the integration of each of the 'Victor' and 'Whisky' companies into their respective ANZAC battalions was invariably successful, there was at that time disappointment that New Zealand's contribution was limited by the manpower resources of a small standing army, and as a consequence, was for a number of reasons (not least political expediency), unable to field and thereafter sustain a nationally identifiable contribution at Unit or Battalion level.
- It remains an inescapable fact, however, that the small Regular New Zealand Army was, and certainly since the end of the Second World War, always had been, 'a sub-critical mass', having at that time only one regular battalion on the ground.

In order therefore to address this limitation and give a perspective to the military value of New Zealand's infantry contribution to the Vietnam War, a comment made by Brigadier R.I. Thorpe (himself a 2ic of 2RAR/NZ Battalion) has a certain relevance when considering the reality of the New Zealand Army being a 'sub-critical mass':

Finally, the withdrawal of 'Victor Six' in December 1971 ended 1RNZIR's involvement in South Vietnam. Altogether six 'Victor' companies and three 'Whisky' companies served in South Vietnam and 29 Officers and men died there. At its peak, in November 1968, New Zealand servicemen, in South Vietnam, for the most part infantry, numbered 543 and a total of 3890 troops, all regulars (although not all infantry) served there between June 1964 and December 1972.

Meeting the Challenge—A Retrospective Appraisal

Tactical Orientation

The period prior to any military commitment to South Vietnam by New Zealand had been a time of intense study into counter-insurgency and unconventional warfare by the New Zealand Army. Doctrinal changes had taken root and all training focused on a limited-type war against a Vietnamese guerrilla and main force enemy. The climax was unquestionably to be South Vietnam, but instead of the expected Battalion commitment, this was restricted primarily to 161 Bty RNZA and two reinforced rifle companies from 1RNZIR, being part of an ANZAC Battalion in 1ATF.

The Training Cycle

At the soldier level getting to South Vietnam was intensely competitive. From enlistment a recruit undertook Basic and Infantry Corps Training over a period of five months. This was followed by a four-week Tropical Warfare course in Fiji and thereafter came intensive platoon and sub-unit training at 1 Bn. Depot in Burnham, which also included a wide ranging series of live firing exercises. Not surprisingly, this extensive and comprehensive training period resulted in a high wastage rate arising from general unsuitability of some recruits, medical and physical deficiencies, domestic and personnel problems causing a failure rate which was seldom lower than 40 per cent. In total a recruit could expect to spend up to eight months in training before he became eligible to be sent as a reinforcement to 1RNZIR. Once there he undertook a minimum of a further three months, theatre orientation, sub-unit and unit training before serving in South Vietnam.

Integration with the ANZAC Battalions

Despite the peacetime environment in Malaysia and Singapore the prospect of active service in South Vietnam served to induce the operational imperatives of urgency and realism, which are often hard to reproduce in a peacetime training environment.

The success achieved thereafter in producing fit, well trained and operationally effective rifle companies which were easily able to integrate well within their respective

If there is one element in the New Zealand military ethos that is worth emphasis, it is, to me, the attitude that, in the international field where we have always served and planned to serve, we are always a small increment in a larger force, and therefore can only make our mark through quality—and I think that amongst regulars there has been the recognition that quality does not fall like manna on the chosen but results from serious study and hard training.

Postscript

In a subsequent review of the New Zealand Army's involvement in the Vietnam War it was concluded that 'never again' would the Army allow itself to be committed to operations at less than unit level. It is pleasing to note that this decision has been reflected in New Zealand's current involvement in East Timor.

ANZAC Battalions: Australian Experiences and Perspectives

Bob Sayce

Introduction

In 1962 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II approved an alliance between the then New Zealand Regiment and the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). Subsequently, after reorganisation of the New Zealand Regiment, the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1RNZIR), was allied to the RAR on 15 March 1968.¹ In the First Australian Task Force (1ATF) in Vietnam, the close affiliation and eventual integration of sub units of 1RNZIR and 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), were officially recognised, and on 1 March 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion became the first ANZAC Battalion in the Vietnam Campaign.² Something similar had been established during the First World War, when camel-mounted ANZAC Battalions were formed as part of the Imperial Camel Corps in Palestine in 1916.³

As a unit in 1ATF, 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion handed over to 4 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion on 1 June 1968. On 21 May 1969, 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion assumed its new title until it was replaced in the rotating cycle of the three RAR Battalions by 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion on 15 May 1970. Once more 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion took over operational responsibility from 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion at midnight on 23 May 1971.

From 16 October 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion became 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion Group to cover the withdrawal of 1ATF from Nui Dat and shortly afterwards, from South Vietnam.⁴ Upon the embarkation of the Battalion on HMAS *Sydney* on 8 December 1971, the title disappeared from the order of battle. (The 'D' Company Group

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1. Major A.R. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion, 1970-71* (Sydney: Printcraft Press, 1972), 13.
 2. Major K.E. Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion in South Vietnam, 1967-68* (Sydney: Printcraft Press, 1968), 7.
 3. Captain R.L. Sayce and Lieutenant M.D. O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth* (Sydney: Printcraft Press, 1972), frontispiece. (Bill Crooks researched this information during the preparation of the book. There is a memorial statue in the garden between Savoy Place and Victoria Embankment in London.)
 4. David Horner, *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 276.

from 4RAR that remained to provide protection to 1 Australian Logistics Support Group at Vung Tau until 29 February 1972 did not have any New Zealanders on its strength.)⁵

What was an ANZAC Battalion?

An ANZAC Battalion's role was the same as that of any Australian infantry battalion operating in IATF: 'To seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture him, to seize and hold ground and to repel attack, by day or night regardless of season, weather or terrain.'⁶ However, where the ANZAC battalions varied from their fellow battalions was in their structure and even this changed as the campaign progressed.

The first 'V' (for Vietnam) Company ('V' Coy) from 1RNZIR deployed from Malaysia to South Vietnam and joined 6RAR on 13 May 1967. The company then came under command of 2RAR when the main body arrived at the end of the month. Initially the battalion comprised five rifle companies and the additional New Zealand Mortar and Assault Pioneer Sections. Given the larger strength of the ANZAC Battalion it was not long before it was given the task of holding the Fire Support Base (FSB) at the Horseshoe. 'A company-sized position established by 5RAR early in 1967 on a crescent-shaped hill located approximately 8000 metres south-east of the IATF base' at Nui Dat.⁷ Indeed this task seemed all too frequently to be allocated to subsequent ANZAC Battalions on the basis of their additional rifle company strength and the ANZAC companies became familiar with this area overlooking the village of Dat Do and the minefield stretching to the south.⁸

The first two Victor Companies ('V', 'V2') deployed to South Vietnam for six-month tours. Then in December 1967, after the Australian government's decision to commit a third infantry battalion to South Vietnam, an additional New Zealand company and its fair share of Support Company Sections was deployed to join the ANZAC Battalion. Designated Whisky Company ('W'), it arrived from Malaysia in December 1970. For a short time, 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion had six rifle companies, but in February 1968 'D' Coy was disbanded.⁹ From then on the subsequent tours of duty for 'V3', 'V4' and 'V5' were for twelve months. Changeover for 'W', 'W2' and 'W3', which also served for a year, remained off-set to the Australian Battalion elements which generally changed over in May each year. This meant that the ANZAC Battalions were fortunate in having one rifle company with six months current operational experience in country while the remaining elements deployed into theatre. The disadvantage was that the

5. Jerry Taylor, *Last Out: 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's Second Tour in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 249.

6. *The Division in Battle*, Pamphlet No. 8, *Infantry* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1969), 1.

7. Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 12.

8. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.

9. *Ibid.*

particular Whisky Company had to adjust to the operational style of two battalions and perhaps did not identify quite so closely with a battalion as did the Victor Companies who did their tour with essentially the one ANZAC battalion.

Actually, 'V6' was in training to replace 'W3' towards the end of 1970.¹⁰ When the decision was made to reduce IATF by one Australian Infantry Battalion in October, it was also decided not to replace the third Whisky Company.¹¹ 'W' completed its tour on 10 November 1970 and rejoined 1RNZIR in Malaysia. This then reduced the strength of the ANZAC battalions back to four rifle companies.

'V6' replaced 'V5' in May 1971 and served with 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion until the Battalion's withdrawal from South Vietnam in December 1971. Overall, 1RNZIR provided a total of nine Rifle Companies with support and administration elements from May 1967 to December 1971. Given that 'V' and 'V2' served only six-month tours, the net figure balances out at eight rifle companies (for twelve-month tours), the equivalent of two RAR Battalions, each of four rifle companies. This was a sizeable and timely contribution from a staunch ally. It reduced the load on the training system in Australia where the designated ANZAC Battalions trained three, not four, rifle companies. Exercises had to be written and conducted taking this into consideration so that Battalion Headquarters was properly prepared to command the four companies it would have on deployment.

The ANZAC Battalions started in May 1967 with five rifle companies, and except for December 1967-January 1968 when there were six rifle companies in 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion, continued until November 1970 to be the largest unit in IATF. Just as well too, for it covered the build up to and tapering down from the most intense period of ground combat of the campaign during 1968 and 1969. It was a savage reduction that effectively cut the number of rifle companies in IATF from thirteen to eight from the end of 1970. Although the level of enemy activity had reduced, the responsibility of the Commander IATF for the security of the province had not and the area to cover remained the same. The task just became harder for those that remained!¹²

Preparation and Training

As the Australian Army expanded rapidly from the middle to the end of the 1960s, the Royal Australian Infantry Corps found itself hard pressed to meet its growing overseas commitments and man its fair share of training and staff obligations at home. 3RAR and 4RAR were on operations in Malaysia and Borneo during Confrontation with Indonesia

10. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 92.

11. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.

12. Frank Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 145-6.

from 1964 to 1966. The 1st Special Air Service (SAS) Company was expanded to become the SAS Regiment,¹³ and 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9RAR were raised. Selected Australian infantry officers, warrant officers and senior NCOs were posted to the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) which more than doubled in strength with the raising of a new Medium Range Reconnaissance Battalion, 2PIR, in 1965.

Infantrymen also formed the backbone of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) and the Jungle Training Centre (JTC) at Canungra. 'The Regiment now entered a period of rotation between areas with three Battalions in Vietnam, one in Malaysia and the other five in Australia, all moving on one or two year cycles ... Units often could not return to their 'home' city after a Vietnam tour because other units had of necessity occupied their barracks. Families were unable to establish permanent homes.'¹⁴

Such was the case with the three RAR Battalions that formed the basis of rotational relief of the ANZAC Battalions. Second, 4th and 6th Battalions RAR all started training for their first deployments to Vietnam from Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane but after their return to Australia from Vietnam each had moved to join 3TF in the newly-constructed Lavarack Barracks in Townsville. There were some distinct advantages in moving into newer barracks, in close proximity to sister battalions and supporting arms.¹⁵ Task Force staff provided excellent support to the battalions in training. Good training areas were readily accessible and the tropical environment assisted with acclimatisation for Vietnam.

One draw-back was the lack of tanks in 3TF and it was not feasible for northern battalions to travel to Puckapunyal to train with them.¹⁶ However, there was an exception. In late 1967, 'B' Company, 6RAR, was deployed to Puckapunyal to participate in Exercise MIGHTY MOUSE to test infantry-tank co-operation in a battlefield setting before the first tank squadron from I Armoured Regiment deployed to Vietnam.¹⁷ Early in 1970 that same 'B' Company was to participate in Operation MATILDA, the largest Australian armoured operation since the Second World War.¹⁸ Ironically, all of the ANZAC Battalions fought with the tanks in support during the campaign, including some very successful attacks on bunker systems. The lack of any training with Australian tanks did not deter 'V6' and 'C' Squadron tanks from successfully assaulting a major

13. D.M. Horner, *SAS: Phantoms of the Jungle* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1989), 70-2.

14. Horner, *Duty First*, 187.

15. Taylor, *Last Out*, x.

16. Ibid; Major General R.N.L. Hopkins, *Australian Armour* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1978), 276, 290.

17. Major L.D. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion History 1967–1970* (Singapore: Times Printers, 1972), 6.

18. Ibid., 116; Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 277.

bunker system defended by 274 VC Regiment in June 1971.¹⁹ High praise too was given by the Armoured Corps to the ANZAC Battalion for the last action with 'C' Squadron, in late July 1971, on Operation IRON FOX.²⁰

It had taken just a couple of hours to drive from Enoggera Barracks to JTC prior to the battalions' first tours, for sub-units to undergo the mandatory training in tropical warfare techniques for all soldiers deploying to Vietnam. Subsequently, it took the best part of a day to fly and drive from Townsville to Canungra for the battalions' preparing for their second tour. This just added to the pressure on the battalions re-training to return to Vietnam.

Unit cadres trained companies under the close supervision of the JTC Battle Wing staff using a syllabus approved by Directorate of Military Training (DMT) in Army Headquarters. Reports on their performance were sent to both DMT and the Command Headquarters responsible for the unit.²¹ The training at JTC was really the first step in the objective development and assessment training program for Battalions. The reports were very detailed and proved to be a good foundation on which to continue training at a collective level.²² Sometimes the reports resulted in leadership appointment changes.²³ Not all battalions had the opportunity to undergo the structured training system prior to their first tour of Vietnam due to the circumstances of their raising, manning and embarkation but the ANZAC Battalions were fortunate to be able to follow the structured training path laid down by DMT prior to both deployments with relatively few variations to the norm.

Each battalion had to ensure that certain members successfully undertook designated, mandatory courses. It imposed a heavy load on already busy battalions and was subject to some debate as to whether a more flexible approach would have been more beneficial.

Sub-unit collective training was undertaken by battalions initially then at battalion level by Task Force and Command HQ-sponsored exercises and finally by an AHQ exercise, directed by HQ 1st Division, normally at Shoalwater Bay. Unfortunately, the monsoon season in northern Queensland coincided with the period in which the final exercise was conducted for the Townsville-based battalions. Despite eleven inches of rain in March 1969, 6RAR managed to complete successfully Exercise BRIGHT ARMOUR

19. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 43.

20. Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 296.

21. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam* (Singleton: Directorate of Infantry, 1973), 17.

22. Taylor, *Last Out*, 113.

23. J.M. Church, *Second to None* (Sydney: Army Doctrine Centre, 1995), 39; Taylor, *Last Out*, xi; Gary McKay, *Delta Four: The Australian Riflemen in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 8.

at Shoalwater Bay.²⁴ However, due to extensive flooding in north and central Queensland following ‘The Wet’ in March 1971, 4RAR’s final test, Exercise MONARO MALL, was conducted in the Mount Stuart and High Range training areas. While this caused administrative challenges, it proved to be useful conditioning for the monsoon season in Vietnam.²⁵ The conduct of the final exercise led to a feeling within many battalions that they were being assessed as opposed to being exercised.²⁶ However, the preparation was worth the immense amount of time, effort and separation invested.²⁷

The three battalions worked closely together during their preparation; normally the battalion next due to deploy to Vietnam was supported in its training exercises by the battalion that would eventually relieve it in Vietnam. An excellent working relationship developed between 6 and 4RAR. 6 RAR had already provided enemy, control and umpire staffs to support 1RAR for their test exercise GRASS PARROT at Shoalwater Bay early in 1968. Almost without a break they provided similar support to 4RAR for its test exercise BELL BIRD in March 1968. In the words of the 6RAR second tour history: ‘Thus began a mutual respect between 4RAR and 6RAR that was to see both Battalions through the difficult period of handing and taking over in Vietnam in May 1969.’²⁸ This close cooperative support continued during the build up of 4RAR for its second tour early in 1971 and the CO recalls: ‘We wrote the first [battalion-level] exercise ourselves and 6RAR ran it for us.’²⁹ Indeed, each battalion had assisted one another with similar training support. In March 1969, 2RAR first supported 6RAR prior to their deployment and were in turn, assisted by 4RAR which had returned to Australia in May that year.^{30 31}

During their tours of duty in Vietnam the ANZAC Battalions took over the same lines in the Nui Dat base that they had occupied on previous tours. This familiarity of layout assisted with the planning of handover/takeovers. Battalion staff officers ensured that the Australian Battalion and New Zealand Companies succeeding them were on the distribution list for operational reports, intelligence summaries and other relevant documents.³² Commanding Officers of the relieving battalions all visited Vietnam on a reconnaissance, usually about six months before the unit was due to deploy. In some cases officers from RAR Battalions and 1RNZIR had also visited Vietnam on familiarisation visits from the mid-1960s on. Informal correspondence between opposite numbers in

24. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 25.

25. Taylor, *Last Out*, 118.

26. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam*, 17.

27. Horner, *Duty First*, 279.

28. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 6.

29. Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.

30. Church, *Second to None*, 36-9.

31. Taylor, *Last Out*, x.

32. *Ibid.*, xi.

each unit was encouraged by commanding officers and proved to be very helpful prior to handover.³³

It might have been even better to have had the designated rifle company from 1RNZIR train with the RAR Battalion during its warm up and test exercises.³⁴ However, the New Zealand companies next in line for rotation became adept at using and adjusting to the RAR/ANZAC Battalion Standing Operating Procedures during their training exercises in New Zealand and Malaysia.³⁵

There were similarities in recruiting and training Australian and New Zealand infantrymen in the late 1960s. Australia and New Zealand both had National Service though it was tapering off in New Zealand. However, the Australian battalions and the New Zealand battalion did not experience any difficulties encouraging their conscripts to extend or enlist in the regulars for service in Vietnam.³⁶ With the exception of 2 RAR preparing for its first tour, the battalions did not have more than 50 per cent conscripts in their manning.³⁷

Regular and Selected Servicemen had to complete recruit training followed by a further ten weeks of Corps training before being selected for possible specialist training.³⁸ Corps training was frequently conducted within the Australian battalions with the advantages outweighing the disadvantages. While it was being conducted experienced members of the unit would be undergoing promotion or specialist training courses. Development of these skills then enabled the manning of leadership appointments or specialist positions in Support or Administration Companies. Time available to complete all of the training courses was truncated due to various demands in both armies which meant long hours in the field and increased separation from family and friends in order to complete all the essential individual and collective training necessary for a unit or sub-unit about to go to war.³⁹

Australians conducted training in their homeland but the New Zealanders had to conduct their final training exercises in Malaysia. They were afforded good support by 28 ANZUK Brigade but 1RNZIR had certain responsibilities in relation to their ANZUK commitment as well as providing 50 per cent of its rifle companies to the ANZAC Battalion in Vietnam.⁴⁰ This called for a fine balance in priorities and demonstrated the New Zealanders' flexibility and strong commitment to the ANZAC concept.

33. Ibid., x.

34. Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.

35. Ibid., viii; Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 95.

36. Taylor, *Last Out*, 67; Lieutenant Colonel Brian Avery, *Our Secret War* (Rosebud Vic.: Slouch Hat Publications, 2001), 193-3.

37. Horner, *Duty First*, 189; Jerry Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.

38. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam*, 17.

39. Taylor, *Last Out*, 66-7; Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 30; Church, *Second to None*, 41.

40. Taylor, *Last Out*, 66-7

Typical examples of well trained Kiwis were to be found in the rifle section soldiers from 'V6'. All were regular volunteers with a minimum engagement (contract) of three years. They had completed the normal eight weeks of basic training plus RNZIR Corps training of ten weeks and the vast majority had a number of specialist skills, such as signaller, medic, tracker, demolition handler or Support Company specialist platoon qualifications.⁴¹ It is also interesting to note that not all Kiwis serving in Victor and Whisky companies were from the Infantry Corps, yet they mastered infantry skills very quickly. Self preservation is a wonderful motivator! Generally Kiwi infantrymen had completed more individual training courses than the average Australian rifle section member. Up to 50 per cent of the Diggers were National Servicemen who had undergone similar periods of basic and Corps training but did not have the opportunity or time to undertake further training. It was not unusual for most specialist training to be invested in regular soldiers.⁴² However, all infantry National Servicemen were volunteers for service in Vietnam and they acquitted themselves so well that it was difficult to distinguish them from their cohort of Regular soldiers.⁴³

Although continents apart for this final training, the infantrymen of both armies were preparing for war in a familiar environment following very much the same doctrine and were building on the close-country, tropical experience of their predecessors in Papua New Guinea, Malaya and Borneo. Many of the soldiers and some officers had experienced operational service during Confrontation or during an earlier tour of Vietnam.⁴⁴ While serving in Malaysia after their tour in Borneo a number of officers and some warrant officers from 4RAR were able to put into practice during exercises with 28 ANZUK Brigade, experience picked up during familiarisation or previous operational tours of Vietnam. In addition, they provided training assistance on Australian equipment, organisation and methods to the Kiwi troops going to Vietnam.⁴⁵ This was appreciated but some of the New Zealand Companies would have preferred to have taken their British General Purpose Machine Guns that they had used successfully in Borneo to Vietnam. However, this was not to be as it would have added to the logistics burden.⁴⁶

41. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 94-5.

42. Taylor, *Last Out*, 10.

43. *Ibid.*, 15.

44. *Ibid.*, xii, 251; Church, *Second to None*, 33.

45. Avery, *Our Secret War*, 182.

46. Ross Miller, Platoon commander, 'V3', 1968, notes to the author, August, 2002; Taylor, *Last Out*, 75.

Light-hearted Logistics

Australian soldiers have been traditionally good scroungers. Historically it seems that they have rarely been provided with sufficient resources by governments willing to commit them to conflict but reluctant to provide the necessary funds to equip them adequately for the task.⁴⁷ However, the New Zealanders suffered even more in that regard, so had become past masters at the art. Even Australians had to be vigilant!⁴⁸ More than one Australian Commanding Officer was convinced that every Kiwi relative of each soldier serving in Vietnam had somehow been provided with a pair of Australian Boots General Purpose!

On the other hand, American soldiers, by any standards, tended to be luxuriously supported by an automatic replacement and write-off logistics system for certain equipments. It worked on the basis of the type of unit, the intensity of operations it was accessed to be involved in and assumed losses. While it was true that unlike the rest of the allies in Vietnam, Australian and New Zealand forces paid their own way,⁴⁹ this cornucopia of war supplies, driven by US military motivation to ensure their fighting men lacked for nothing and backed enthusiastically by a massive American armament industry, was a godsend.

American units were both clever and generous when faced with an unending supply of new weapons etc on a regular basis. They tended to keep the new ones and give/trade their older ones to the Australians and New Zealanders. Slouch hats were popular and New Zealand Green Berets were always sought after.

Hence with both nationalities seeking to outdo one another on bartering, the ANZAC Battalions ended up with a lot more than their entitlement of weapons as well as a water truck, and a forklift. Even the ANZAC Battalion Commanding Officer's personal weapon was not on the Battalion's entitlement!⁵⁰ The additional weapons such as .50 caliber and general purpose machine guns enabled fixed field defences at Nui Dat and the Horse Shoe FSB to be left in place while the normal issue weapons could be used on patrol out from the bases.⁵¹ These were kindly handed over to successive Battalions. The early war Q accounting system was not too strict and there appeared no real need to take such temporary surpluses on charge. ANZAC excellence at scrounging did become

47. Gavin Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Series 1 (*Army*), Vol. I, *To Benghazi* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952), 39-42; S.J. Butlin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Series 4 (*Civil*), *War Economy, 1939-42* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1955), 256-8.

48. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 132.

49. Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam*, vii.

50. The weapon, a short barreled armalite, is on display in the Vietnam Campaign Section of the Australian War Memorial.

51. Taylor, *Last Out*, 24.

a little embarrassing towards the end of 1971 when 1ATF withdrew from Nui Dat and bequeathed the remaining ANZAC Battalion Group with yet more surplus equipment. By this stage of the campaign Q accounting had become stricter and the poor QM staff had to take on charge a considerable amount of equipment for which the Battalion had no entitlement but in true ANZAC spirit the Kiwis helped relieve the Australians of some of this burden!

Operational Matters

ANZAC Battalions operated across the same geographic areas as the other RAR Battalions in 1ATF from 1967 to 1971. Operating in Bien Hoa Province, they provided protection in the 'Rocket Belt' out from the US logistics bases at Bien Hoa and Long Binh and screened the eastern approaches to Saigon. In Long Khanh Province they operated adjacent to Thai Forces working out of their FSB at Bearcat and on operations with the US 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment out of their FSB at Blackhorse just north of Phuoc Tuy Province. From their Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) around 1ATF FSBs at Nui Dat and the Horseshoe feature in the centre of the province, they ranged from the east in Bin Tuy Province and in the Mao Tao Mountains, west across Phuoc Tuy through Xuyen Moc, the Hac Dich to the Thi Vai/ Nui Dinh Hills and into the marsh lands of the Rung Sat. East from Long Son Island, through the central population belt of Baria, Long Dien and Dat Do. South to the Long Hai Hills and into the Long and the Light Green areas to the east, and to the edge of the Vung Tau Special Zone to the south west.

It is worth noting that these areas were those administered by the Republic of Vietnam. The enemy, however, had divided the area up differently and referred to the western area as Chau Duc and the eastern part as Xuyen Moc. Long Dat with the Minh Dam Secret Zone nestled in the Long Hai Hills, Ba Ria and Vung Tau comprised the southwestern sectors. This kept the intelligence sections busy interpreting precisely where a particular place referred to in enemy documents was actually located on allied maps.⁵²

The nature and type of operations undertaken were also the same as those of sister battalions in 1ATF. Search and destroy and reconnaissance in force operations usually meant extensive patrolling and ambushing in an area of operations in up to company strength depending on the assessed enemy strength. Cordon and search, route and harvest protection around populated areas brought the battalions in from the bush and closer to the village people. Protecting the sappers engaged on land and mine clearing tasks was a lot more demanding than ever appreciated. The anguish, futility and frustration

52. John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', vol. VII (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), maps 138 and 141.

experienced by all infantrymen and sappers who suffered a disproportionate number of casualties having to clear mines lifted from our own minefield by a resourceful enemy is best summed up by Major Peter Belt, an ANZAC Battalion company commander: 'After the initial shock I think it was the anger and frustration that was worst. If it had been a contact we could've fought the enemy on equal terms. Now we'd taken casualties without being able to retaliate.'⁵³ However, the Commander IATF during 1969 recalls that an Australian Defence scientist, Mr George Cawsey, sent to Vietnam to study the mine problem, thought that 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion and the sappers had won the 'Mine Battle'. Their thoroughness, and their development of skills to search, detect, isolate, identify and lift was only gained through patience and intelligence but had come at a high price in terms of casualties.⁵⁴

A new task for any infantry battalion was to undertake a stay-behind ambush; normally an activity reserved exclusively for the SAS Squadron. It was an ANZAC tracker platoon that first conducted a successful stay-behind ambush party in the abandoned FSB Dyke in April 1969; and in November that year a subsequent ANZAC tracker platoon conducted profitable small group patrols with the SAS in the area near Binh Gia.⁵⁵

Over time, Australian and New Zealand infantrymen had grown accustomed to living and operating in the physically and mentally demanding labyrinth of close tropical foliage, interspersed with rice paddies, dense secondary growth, rocky hills and mangrove swamp. In Phuoc Tuy Province there were less-dangerous animals than in the jungles of Malaysia and Borneo but a few more enemy than previously experienced. Illness, disease and infection were likely to take a severe toll if hygiene was not practised carefully and malarial suppressives taken religiously by all members of the force. During decades of participating in counter-revolutionary warfare in Southeast Asia, Australians and New Zealanders had learnt much about the area and its inhabitants and were not entirely uncomfortable adjusting to the environment. They knew from the experience of the Malaya and Borneo campaigns that by working closely with a host government dedicated to halting the spread of communist revolutionary warfare, employing the right strategies at national level and using the appropriate tactics at operational level they could win. Their job was to concentrate on the operational side and do it well. And they did!⁵⁶

Without a firm foundation on which to build, all the preparation, training and integrated structures were not necessarily going to produce an effective fighting unit.

53. Horner, *Duty First*, 267-8.

54. Discussion, Major General C.M.I. Pearson and the author, 12 September 2002.

55. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 91.

56. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 165-7.

Fortunately Australian and New Zealand infantrymen share certain characteristics, such as initiative, self confidence, endurance, tenacity, courage, aggressiveness, and reliability. Perhaps it is something to do with the fact that both are from relatively young nations where the respective environments can be harsh and unforgiving and people depended on one another to survive in the early days. Both armies are relatively small; there is no one else to blame—you cannot hide, and mateship breeds its own loyalty.

Much has been written over centuries about loyalty to sovereign, country and regiment, but Jerry Taylor, who served in both 2 and 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions, best sums it up when referring to fear, something that all infantrymen experience in battle (some are just reluctant to admit it): ‘It’s loyalty to the group, comradeship, what we in Australia call ‘mateship’, that really causes men to overcome fear. So the stronger that loyalty is, in my view, the better men fight. In the end, it’s mainly a function of morale.’⁵⁷

In the ANZAC Battalions this mateship extended between Diggers and Kiwis. Each was aware that we were from separate nations but the ‘Antipodeans’ shared an inherited loyalty over many decades that encompassed one another and neither an Australian nor Kiwi individual, section, platoon or company would be prepared to let the other down in battle. They were united on this aspect of dependability—after all, it was their own unit.

This did not mean that there was not a strong competitiveness between the two in or out of the bush, particularly when it came to singing and drinking, as an Australian section commander recalls:

Kiwis—they could play harder in town than we could, but having said that, when we got into trouble with the 3rd of the 33rd (3 Battalion, 33 NVA Regiment on 21 September 1971) they were the company reacted to come and assist us ... When they arrived, they really looked the part. They looked like they meant business, and the thing I liked about them was even though they were made up of Maoris and Pakehas—they were us. New Zealand/Australians, Australians/New Zealanders. They were trained under the same system as we were and I had nothing but confidence in their ability.⁵⁸

This respect was mutual, for when the bodies of the Diggers killed during the battle were carried past the Kiwis securing the track from the bunker system to the extraction point they faced inwards and shouldered arms. It was, in the words of Jerry Taylor, ‘an eloquent and moving gesture: the tribute of warriors to fallen comrades’.⁵⁹

57. McKay, *Delta Four*, 118.

58. *Ibid.*, 222.

59. Taylor, *Last Out*, 232.

No Kiwis or Diggers were ever taken as Prisoners of War during the campaign, though in at least one fight this was pretty close!⁶⁰ However, the ANZAC Battalions took more than their share of enemy POWs. During numerous encounters the ANZAC Battalions over successive tours directly accounted for over 800 enemy killed and took in excess of 100 POWs while suffering a loss of 68 Australians and 27 Kiwis killed in battle, a ratio that was better than most.⁶¹

As a Counter Revolutionary Warfare campaign, most of the battles fought were at section, or platoon level, sometimes company and occasionally at battalion level. There were instances with our allies and in 1ATF where more senior commanders were tempted to become directly involved with the sub-unit in contact.⁶² This had to be finely balanced and not impose on a junior commander fully occupied fighting the battle at hand.⁶³

Just as there is usually some difference that characterises each rifle company in the manner in which they operate within their own battalion, so too are there differences between battalions and armies of other nations. These differences may be brought about by a numbers of factors, morale, leadership, experience, cohesiveness, training, fitness, the will to win—the list is long.

The Tracker Platoon of 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion operated closely with Americans, New Zealanders and Australians during the intense period of operations during 1968-69. In various terrain from thick bamboo-clumped jungle, rice paddies and relatively open savannah bush. In the dry and the monsoon wet. On foot, by boat, with armoured cavalry and inserted by Hughes 500 and UH 1H Huey helicopters.⁶⁴ It was a broadening experience that qualified them to make a fairly balanced assessment after fighting alongside many different sub-units from different armies.

The Trackers were impressed by the firepower and logistic support provided to the US Army forces but unimpressed by the noise and general disorganisation exhibited at squad, platoon and company level. Not surprisingly, they were much more comfortable operating with their own ANZAC companies.

Australian rifle companies were steady, stealthy and determined; some more conservative than others and some moved as fast as was tactically feasible. Their field hygiene was good and they were encouraged to exercise good fire discipline. The Diggers demonstrated great endurance during sustained operations and were tenacious in battle.

60. Lieutenant J.R. Webb, *Mission in Vietnam* (Singapore: Times Printers, 1969), 122-3.

61. Author's calculations from records available. 2RAR/NZ(ANZAC) Battalion first tour statistics include the period before they became the first ANZAC Battalion in the campaign.

62. Church, *Second to None*, 5, 159.

63. *Ibid.*, 159-60.

64. Webb, *Mission in Vietnam*, 93.

On the other hand, the New Zealand rifle companies were relatively fast, a little noisier but the Kiwis tended to assimilate more with their surroundings. They were comfortable with the notion of being warriors. The New Zealand platoons could keep up with a tracker dog on a hot trail and with one memorable exception, provided immediate support from their MG in a contact.⁶⁵ More often than not MG fire in support was provided from both flanks. Such aggressive action chewed up ammunition and after one contact when the RAAF were unable to re-supply them, the Kiwis resolved to carry more, up to 1200 rounds of linked ammunition per GPMG was not unusual. This probably explained why they had such good appetites, to keep the energy levels up!

Both Australian and New Zealand platoons and companies quickly perfected the use of claymore mines in ambush. It was one of the ANZAC Battalions that first successfully used the multiple firing device for claymores developed by an RAE officer regularly attached to the companies. They were not reluctant to employ fire support, particularly from 101, 104, 107 and 108 Field Batteries, RAA, who provided direct support to the ANZAC Battalions. Indeed, successive ANZAC Battalions relished using additional fire support, employed it effectively and established excellent working relations with all of the supporting arms.⁶⁶

Effectiveness

Why did the ANZAC Battalions work so effectively together in battle?

They were of similar background, training, and experience. Australian Forward Observers (FO and FO Ack), New Zealand Mortar Fire Controllers (MFC), Mortar Numbers, Assault Pioneers, drivers and occasionally Signallers, were integrated in supporting Australian and New Zealand companies. They were proud and were not going to let each other down when the going got tough.

As the campaign progressed it was arranged for the New Zealand Army Major who was selected to be the Second in Command (2ic) of the next ANZAC Battalion to join the RAR Battalion in Australia during the last two or three months of the work up prior to deployment to Vietnam. This was a good arrangement and it helped him to settle into the unit, become familiar with the procedures and get to know members of the battalion and be recognised for the important role he was to play for not only was he the 2ic but the New Zealand Component Commander. It was no token appointment. On two occasions in 1969 and 1970 when the Commanding Officers of 6 and 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions were wounded in action, their New Zealand 2ics took over and

65. The Machine Gunner was charged by his platoon commander for failing to provide immediate covering fire when the tracker platoon commander and a 'V3' Kiwi section commander were fired upon when examining a fresh track during Operation CAPITAL, November, 1968.

66. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 146.

commanded the Battalions on operations until they returned to duty. There were some administrative restrictions regarding Australian administrative correspondence but this was sorted out by having the documents approved by the Commanding Officers from their sickbeds-duty first!^{67 68}

One critical observation from an experienced Australian Regimental Sergeant Major noted: 'The New Zealand companies integrated reasonably well, with the exception of disciplinary control. We had the ludicrous situation where the CO could make decisions affecting the lives of New Zealanders but could not discipline them. That duty fell to the 2ic.'⁶⁹ However, given the Australian Army's own experience in the Boer War with disciplinary powers conferred to commanders from another ally, this situation was undoubtedly recognised but understood and accepted in the interests of overall unity and cooperation between the two armies.⁷⁰

A number of the command appointments in an ANZAC Battalion were more challenging than the equivalent appointments in an RAR Battalion. At the top, the Australian Commanding Officer had the support and counsel of a carefully selected New Zealand 2ic. The 2ic of both Support and Administration Companies were New Zealanders and on one occasion, the Intelligence Officer and Sergeant were New Zealanders too. In the Mortar and Assault Pioneer Platoons there was always at least one or more New Zealand Section and Signals and Transport Platoons harboured some New Zealand soldiers from time to time. Not surprisingly, a firm, fair and tactful approach seemed to be the most effective way of leading such a group. The ground rules were laid down and any deviations by Diggers or Kiwis dealt with exercising common sense backed up by the military disciplinary systems in place for both Armies.⁷¹

Most of the officers had trained together at RMC Duntroon or OCS Portsea and got on well together. However, to be selected to command a New Zealand rifle company, the officer had to have attended Staff College. This usually meant that the Kiwi OCs tended to be more senior and experienced than their Australian counterparts who had often been granted temporary major rank on assuming command of their company, just one consequence of a rapidly expanding Army. To balance this, it was not uncommon for the Australian to be serving his second tour of the campaign, so he was not lacking when it came to operational experience. It is interesting to note that when researching official documents for his book *In The ANZAC Spirit*, the author observed that operational reports written by New Zealanders contained more descriptive detail and tended to

67. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 67.

68. Church, *Second to None*, 161.

69. Horner, *Duty First*, 365-6.

70. A.K. MacDougall, *ANZACS: Australians at War* (Sydney: Reed Books Pty Ltd, 1991), 12-13.

71. Taylor, *Last Out*, 77-8.

refer more to individuals than similar Australian reports.⁷² Perhaps this was due to their additional staff training and the more personal nature afforded a smaller army.

In the 22 years of active service from the start of the Korean War to the end of the campaign in Vietnam, no member serving in a battalion of the RAR had been awarded a Victoria Cross despite the fact that infantrymen had carried the brunt of fighting in many fierce actions during a number of campaigns.⁷³ Outstanding feats of bravery and leadership were recognised by awards and in this campaign 'V3' was the most highly decorated NZ sub-unit since the Second World War.⁷⁴ And while no Kiwis or Diggers were awarded the Victoria Cross while serving in an ANZAC Battalion they certainly lived up to their twin regimental mottos of 'Onward' (1RNZIR) and 'Duty First' (RAR) throughout the nearly five years they fought side by side against a common foe. One ANZAC Battalion Commanding Officer recalled with justifiable pride that 'V4' 'was the top scoring New Zealand company of the war'.⁷⁵ And on another occasion when one of his Australian Company Headquarters of five men engaged 100 approaching enemy, he noted that 'The whole Battalion gave and expected that sort of commitment'.⁷⁶

In a different ANZAC Battalion, a New Zealand platoon from 'V3', with an Australian Tracker team attached, was ambushed as they came across a bunker system. The lead section commander was killed, the rest of the section wounded or pinned down and the New Zealand Platoon commander wounded. There was no FO or MFC so the Australian Tracker Platoon commander called on the New Zealand Platoon Sergeant to do a left flanking assault while he went forward to where the Australian Gunner signaller was located to call in fire support. The artillery fire was accurate and the assault by the remaining malaria-depleted sections under the platoon sergeant was successful in routing the enemy from the bunkers. Swift, cooperative and aggressive action regained the initiative. Everyone just did their job. These few examples of many ANZAC actions were the personification of 'Onward' and 'Duty First' in ANZAC Battalions. They sought no accolades but fought fiercely to live up to the reputations established by their grand-fathers at Gallipoli and their fathers in Greece and Crete.

Was the integration of Australian and New Zealand infantrymen into ANZAC Battalions really effective or was it just diplomatic utterances when senior commanders referred to them? For a start the comments came from both nationalities and were given freely. It may have been even more enlightening to have the benefit of what the 'The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-

72. Discussion between Brian Avery and the author, August, 2002.

73. Horner, *Duty First*, 349.

74. Ross Miller, platoon commander, 'V3', 1968, notes to the author, August, 2002.

75. David Butler, 'Reflective Thoughts and Proud Moments', 6RAR Newsletter [late 1990s].

76. Horner, *Duty First*, 347-8.

1975' might note in this regard. It is disappointing that the volumes intended to cover the period of the most intensive ground combat fighting of the campaign during the ANZAC Battalions' service in Vietnam are yet to be published more than 30 years after the withdrawal. No official history of New Zealand's participation in the campaign in Vietnam has been completed, although the Department of Internal Affairs War Histories Section has commissioned Dr Ian McGibbon and a number of professional writers to rectify this. Some reference to the companies that went to Vietnam from 1RNZIR when based in Singapore is made in the 1RNZIR 25th *Anniversary Journal*, under 'Vietnam Years'.⁷⁷ Fortunately a number of books have been written about the ANZAC Battalions by Australians, and *Mission in Vietnam* was edited by a New Zealand platoon commander from 'V3'.

In the foreword of the first pictorial history of an ANZAC Battalion, the Commanding Officer, then Lieutenant Colonel N. R. Charlesworth, wrote: 'The integration was and will continue to be a great success and to me, it has been a great honour to command the first ANZAC Battalion.'⁷⁸ Again when commenting on the experience of its second tour, the editor of the pictorial history noted that 'the ANZAC integration has been a great success, 2RAR is proud to have been part of it, and particularly proud to have formed the nucleus of the first Battalion'.⁷⁹ In the foreword to John Church's account of 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's second tour, General Sir Phillip Bennett, who had himself been CO of 1RAR on their second tour operating alongside an ANZAC Battalion, wrote in broader terms: 'Personal accounts such as this do much to provide a more accurate understanding of what active service meant for some 50,000 young Australians and New Zealanders who proved conclusively that they were second to none and worthy to be honoured with the name ANZAC.'⁸⁰

In 1969, the Commander of 1ATF, then Brigadier C.M.I. Pearson, wrote: 'In the latter period [of 4RAR history] the major change has been the absorption of the New Zealand element into the Battalion. I believe such a close integration of soldiers of two nations into one unit has never been as successful as in 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Bn.'⁸¹ More recently, he recalled that on 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's introductory operation their performance had been outstanding. He believed that the integration of the two New Zealand rifle companies had been successful, particularly in the field.⁸²

Brigadier B.A. McDonald, Commander of 1ATF during 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's second tour in 1971, wrote prophetically in the foreword to the pictorial

77. Ibid.

78. Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 7.

79. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.

80. Church, *Second to None*, ii.

81. Webb, *Mission in Vietnam*, vi.

82. Discussion, Major General C.M.I. Pearson and the author, 12 September 2002.

history of the Battalion's second tour: 'This book ... gives a valuable insight into the close integration of the Australian and New Zealand elements of the Battalion which, in my opinion, was most successful and which augurs well for the future military associations of our two nations'.⁸³ The then CO, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Hughes, believed that 'The special ANZAC relationship was an added spur to our Battalion'.⁸⁴

Early in December 1971, as the last ANZAC Battalion departed Vietnam, the CO 4RAR sent the following signal to CO 1RNZIR: 'Today I reluctantly lose 'V' Coy and return them to your command. The ANZAC tradition has been well maintained and added to by 'V' Coy. All ranks 4RAR send greetings to 1RNZIR with special reference to their many friends in 'V' Coy.'⁸⁵

In the history of the RAR summarising the demanding contribution New Zealand and Australian Infantrymen made to the Vietnamese campaign, David Horner wrote: 'The part played by the infantrymen of the RNZIR as members of the ANZAC Battalions, and the RNZ Artillery, was a significant one, and highlighted once more the sharp fighting edge of the New Zealand soldier. But most of all, the war demonstrated yet again that Australian infantrymen, properly led, are among the best in the world.'⁸⁶

Perhaps the last accolade should come from the letter written by Major General L.A. Pearce, the Chief of the New Zealand General Staff, to Lieutenant General M. F. Brogan, the Australian Chief of the General Staff, as the ANZAC Battalion was departing Vietnam:

Since this will mark the end of approximately six years of close association of Australians and New Zealanders ... I would not wish the event to pass unrecorded. In looking back over the statistics I find that we have had some 3000 soldiers serving in the Republic of Vietnam over the period. However, statistics mean little. What has meant a great deal is that once again our soldiers have served alongside Australians. Again they learned to appreciate the staunch qualities of the Australian soldier and, in operating towards common goals in an exacting environment, gained much from this mutual experience. While it is of some regret that we were not able to contribute a New Zealand Battalion, I know our Infantry took great pride in and shared the achievements of the ANZAC Battalions in which they served ... This withdrawal from the Republic of Vietnam sees the closing of yet another chapter in the history of our combined military endeavour which began on the Gallipoli Peninsula. We are proud that we have been associated with you in Vietnam.⁸⁷

83. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, Foreword.

84. Taylor, *Last Out*, xiii.

85. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 201.

86. Horner, *Duty First*, 279-80.

87. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 201.

All of the foregoing comments were written by experienced senior commanders with first-hand experience of the ANZAC infantrymen. No strangers to battle themselves, they were not prone to bestowing praise lightly. However, integration of two proud fighting units is like a marriage. For it to be successful both sides have to work at it. There were difficult and delicate situations which had to be worked through. And they were—with the minimum of disruption and a fair amount of goodwill.⁸⁸

The ANZAC Spirit Lives On

The integration of Australian and New Zealander infantrymen into the ANZAC Battalion provided the New Zealand Government with a vehicle to increase its commitment to the war in Vietnam without the enormous drain on their limited Defence resources that fielding their own Battalion in addition to the Field Battery would have imposed.

Provision of trained, regular New Zealand Rifle Companies eased the manpower and training burden on the Australian Army at a time when it was stretched to meet all of its commitments. It allowed the Australian Government to maintain a three Battalion Task Force in Vietnam throughout the most intense ground combat period of the campaign. The effectiveness of the successive ANZAC Battalion operations proved that even though training separately, Australians and New Zealanders operating with an integrated chain of command could combine together to once more be a formidable fighting force—‘Second to None’. This was attested to by successive Commanders of IATF and more recently by Lieutenant General D. S. McIver, a former 2ic of an ANZAC Battalion, who recalled:

The second tour of 4 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion was operationally successful. The command relationships which had been established previously and were employed successfully on this tour of duty have provided the basis for more recent deployments of military forces from our two nations on a range of international commitments. I believe that the association worked well and the Battalion as a whole has every right to be proud of what it achieved and the way it set about those achievements.⁸⁹

Much was made by politicians and a great deal written and filmed by the media earlier this year when Alec Campbell passed away. He was reported to be the last ANZAC and the last known veteran of the Gallipoli campaign. More accurately, the Veterans’ Affairs Minister Danna Vale said that with his death Australia had lost its last living link to the birthplace of the ANZAC spirit.⁹⁰ General Sir Ian Hamilton, the Allied Commander of

88. Horner, *Duty First*, 366.

89. Taylor, *Last Out*, 77-8.

90. Don Woolford, article in the *Canberra Times*, 17 May 2002.

the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force at the Dardanelles in 1915 said: ‘Before the war, who had ever heard of ANZAC? Hereafter, who will ever forget it?’⁹¹

As Major General Pearce wrote in 1971, the campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula was just the start of the ANZAC military endeavour. Australians and New Zealanders continued to serve along side one another on active service through the Western Front in the First World War, the Middle East, Greece, Crete and the South West Pacific in the Second World War and thereafter in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. In all respects, throughout the decades, successive generations of Diggers and Kiwis have upheld the reputation of the soldiers who first created the ANZAC spirit with their audacious tactics, swift aggressive action and a laconic approach which belies their grim professional determination not to be beaten by the enemy, nor the task at hand.

Indeed Field Marshal Sir William Slim described the ANZACs best when he wrote: ‘In my life I have fought with and against many kinds of soldiers, but I have never seen any who carried themselves more nobly in battle, more daringly or more stout-heartedly, than those men of ANZAC.’⁹²

The last ANZAC is far from dead. By my reckoning, some 7000 Australian and New Zealand veterans served in 2, 4 and 6 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions during the period of the campaign in Vietnam. Precise numbers are difficult to ascertain as some soldiers from both armies served more than one tour. While it is true that many have passed away due to various causes since the end of 1971 and those that remain may not be as fit or agile as they were 30 years ago, there are plenty of genuine ANZACS alive now. And just to reinforce that fact, 4 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion will be holding its next reunion in February 2005, in New Zealand.

91. Doug Conway, article in the *Canberra Times*, 17 May 2002.

92. Sayce and O’Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, frontispiece.

The Role and Impact of Civil Affairs in South Vietnam 1965–1971

Barry Smith

Introduction

While this essay will focus on the role and activities of the 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit in Phuoc Tuy Province in South Vietnam, it is important to understand that the Civil Affairs Unit's activities occurred within a context wider than just a single Australian Army unit. During the 1960s and early 1970s, civic action projects were undertaken on an ever-increasing scale throughout South Vietnam by Australian, US and other countries' armed forces.¹ In the Australian context, the 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit was not the first Australian Army Unit to conduct civic action projects in South Vietnam, or in Phuoc Tuy Province where the Unit was located, nor was it the only Australian services unit to perform civic action projects after it arrived in South Vietnam in June 1967.² But when pacification became a strategic Australian Army goal following US Government policy,³ the Civil Affairs Unit held the formal responsibility for coordinating civic action projects in South Vietnam as well as conducting the majority of individual civic action projects.

Terminology

This essay is titled 'Civil Affairs'. In the military context, the term 'civic action' is described thus:

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1. For example, the US Army had civil affairs mobile training teams in Vietnam from 1962 and three civil affairs companies from 1966; Jeff Clarke, A Survey History of Civil Affairs Units and Teams in South Vietnam 1960-1971, unpublished paper supplied to author by US Department of the Army, Chief of Military History and the Center of Military History in October 1989, 8, 12, 13.
 2. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950–1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), describes several civic action projects conducted by Australian infantry battalions prior to the arrival of the 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit in June 1967: see, e.g., 152, 172-4, 390.
 3. For a description of the politics and processes which led to the establishment of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) organisation and increased US emphasis on pacification as a strategic goal, see Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (London: Picador, 1989), 629-57.

The purpose of military civic action program is to utilise armed forces' resources for constructive civilian activities such as assisting in health, welfare, and public works projects, improving living conditions, alleviating suffering and improving the economic base of the country. In addition, the program seeks to gain the support, loyalty and respect of the people for the armed forces and to emphasise the concept of freedom and worth of the individual.⁴

The term 'civil affairs' can be thought of as being armed forces involved in the running of civil administration: 'Civil Affairs' is concerned with the relationship between the armed forces, the local authorities and the people, with particular reference to areas where armed forces personnel are stationed or conducting operations. This relationship, depending on Government policy, may vary from liaison, advice and assistance to the local civil government to the exercise of complete legislative, executive and judicial power by the armed forces. The civil affairs policy for each area of operations should be established at the highest national level.⁵

Supreme command of Phuoc Tuy Province in South Vietnam was vested in an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) officer (Lieutenant Colonel) who directed the operations of all Vietnamese military forces in the province as well as all civilian administration. The Australian Civil Affairs Unit's major efforts were on civic action projects, with lesser involvement in civil affairs. There were direct links between Civil Affairs Unit members and their counterpart local Vietnamese administration officials, but in terms of the definition of 'civil affairs' the Civil Affairs Unit's involvement was limited to some personnel holding positions as advisors on the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) organisation which carried the formal responsibility in the province of advising the Vietnamese Government on administration matters.

Beginnings of Civic Action by the Australian Army

In 1965, members of 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), were conducting small numbers of civic action projects in Bien Hoa Province, and Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) members were performing one-off projects at various locations around South Vietnam, wherever they happened to be located.

When 1ATF was established at Nui Dat in mid-1966, a nucleus group of ex-AATTV members formed informally under Captain Bob Rooney and began carrying out civic

4. *The Division in Battle*, Pamphlet No. 11, *Counter-Revolutionary Warfare* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1965), 86.

5. *Ibid.*, 73.

action-type projects to assist the local population. Rooney was succeeded by the energetic and flamboyant Major John Donohoe, the self-styled ‘Man from WHAM’ (‘Winning Hearts and Minds’). The group operated beside the US Army’s 14th AA Platoon, 2nd Civil Affairs Company, which was in Phuoc Tuy Province when 1ATF was established at Nui Dat.⁶ This US Platoon stayed in Phuoc Tuy for about another eighteen months although there was never any formal command or activity links between the US and Australian units.⁷

1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit

The 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit was raised at Middle Head, Sydney, in April 1967, and moved to Nui Dat in South Vietnam in June 1967; it remained in Vietnam until November 1971. On the Order of Battle, it was a Headquarters Australian Force Vietnam (HQ AFV) unit and not a 1ATF unit. Civil Affairs’ Commanding Officer (CO) had direct access to Commander Australian Force Vietnam (COMAFV) and, on operational matters, worked closely with Commander 1ATF. It was funded by South East Asia Treaty Organisation funds through the-then Department of External Affairs; and it had no interaction, formal or otherwise, with US Civil Affairs personnel. Civil Affairs CO reported the unit’s activities monthly to II Field Force (US), and provided weekly reports to (CORDS) in Baria but there was no feedback received and no formal tasking or alignment of policies or activities, despite the ongoing presence of a small number of US civil affairs personnel in Phuoc Tuy,⁸ nor was there any delineation of formal responsibility for civic action projects in the province.⁹

Changed Role and Structure Over Time

Between 1967 and 1971 changes occurred in the Civil Affairs Unit’s role and structure. From its arrival in mid 1967, the Unit had had close involvement in Task Force military operations, particularly assistance with crowd management and liaison with local officials during cordon and search operations. Another example was the creation of a new village called Suoi Nghe beside Route 2 north of the Task Force base. While not popular with the local populace who were required to move there, the establishment of Suoi Nghe was for security reasons, to allow the relocation of Vietnamese civilians from the area in the north of the Province known as Slope 30.

6. Of the US 2nd Civil Affairs Company, based in Long Binh in III Corps which also had units in Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, Tay Ninh, Long An and Hau Nghia Provinces: Clarke, History, 26.

7. While the formal record shows the 14th AA Platoon was attached, the Civil Affairs Units first Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel John F. McDonagh, told the author that the two units operated virtually independently.

8. Clarke, History, 26. General Peter Gratton, discussion with author, October 2002.

9. Gratton, discussion with author, October 2002.

With the improvement over time in the province security situation, and with the increased emphasis on pacification which developed after the US created its CORDS organisation in 1967, the Civil Affairs Unit's activity focus moved quickly to greater numbers of, and in many cases larger and longer-term, civic action projects by the Unit itself, and the coordination of civic action projects by other Task Force and non-Task Force units.

Pacification as a concept and practice in Vietnam had been around in a small and fairly ineffective way for about twenty years and so was not a concept developed by the US for Vietnam. Australia had recent and direct experience from Malaya and Borneo of a successful pacification program. It can be described as shielding populated areas with troops, pacifying these areas by earning the trust and loyalty of the people, then pushing out their boundaries until ultimately support and recruitment bases for enemy forces were gone. While pacification had been part of US operations before 1967, Westmoreland had opposed expanding pacification activities when this was suggested in the US in 1965 because of his view that the war could be won by attrition. Other political forces in Washington prevailed, and emphasis on pacification increased significantly with the establishment of CORDS.¹⁰ Australia's emphasis changed accordingly.

One could speculate that Westmoreland's attitude to pacification was mirrored by at least some Commanding Officers of 1ATF units who were reluctant to provide troops to work on civic action projects because they felt their own operations to be of higher priority. While at the one level this is perhaps understandable, at another it is not. One could ask why these COs were not briefed, or briefed more convincingly, about the emphasis on pacification either before leaving Australia or while in Vietnam? Indeed, their own experiences might have been expected to show them how effective pacification could be.

But 1ATF's emphasis increased nevertheless. The Commander of 1ATF in 1969-70, Brigadier S.P. Weir, was firm in requiring 1ATF units to increase the resources they put into civic action projects. A successful example is the two-room school built by 5RAR in the hamlet of Ong Trinh on Route 15 in 1969-70.¹¹

Aims of Civic Action

Civic action had long-term political and military objectives. Its primary aim was to win the support of the South Vietnamese people for their government in Saigon; a subsidiary aim from the Australian viewpoint was to obtain goodwill towards Australian forces in SVN and Australia generally.

10. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 558, 629, 632, 636, 652, 653.

11. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gratton, report, '5 RAR Civic Action project—Ong Trinh, January 1970', AWM 100 R723/1/7, Australian War Memorial.

While it is not unusual for Australian service units to undertake projects which benefit the local populace, civic action in South Vietnam had little to do with altruism and much to do with politics and securing the military objective of defeating the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army in South Vietnam.

Principles of Civic Action

Civic action was based on a number of underlying principles, calculated to achieve maximum impact on the civilian population:¹²

- A project originated by the local people and then adopted by the armed forces is much more desirable, and has a much greater chance of success than one developed elsewhere, even though the latter seems obviously superior to an outsider.¹³
- A project must have a fairly short completion time or have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate its effectiveness.
- Results should be observable, measurable or tangible. They should also lend themselves to publicity designed to inspire emulation by other military units.
- Results should make visible to the public eye the benefits that spring out of an association of the military authority and civil government. Credit for results should be attributed to both the local military and the local civil administration.
- Each project should be initiated in the name of the Ministry having jurisdiction over the particular function, assisted by local military units or persons.

1st Civil Affairs Unit Structure

Headed by officers at Lieutenant Colonel rank, the Unit consisted of a headquarters/administration group plus operational detachments with specific responsibilities:

Engineer Detachment

- typically constructed market places, windmills (fourteen were constructed in all), school rooms, market buildings, fences, medical dispensaries.
- Two major projects, one each at the beginning and end of the Civil Affairs Unit's presence in South Vietnam were the establishment of Suoi Nghe village, starting late 1967, and Project 399 at the end of the Task Force's existence in Phuoc Tuy

12. *The Division in Battle*, Pamphlet No. 11, *Counter-Revolutionary Warfare*, ch 6, 53.

13. In Vietnam, if the populace felt a sense of ownership, and the project was subsequently damaged by the VC, then the outcome would presumably be antagonism towards the VC. Creating a sense of ownership involved encouraging the local population to suggest projects, and to actively participate in their construction to the maximum extent possible after the Civil Affairs Unit provided the necessary materials.

Province which was the construction of 600 houses for Regional and Popular Force soldiers around the Province.

Medical Detachment

- heavily involved in operations known as Medical Civil Aid Programs (MEDCAPS), conducted daily in provincial villages;
- by 1969, MEDCAPS were incorporated into what were called Integrated Civil Aid Programs (ICAPS), conducted several nights per week, when a medical team would stay overnight in a village and treat anyone who turned up for treatment. A movie screen would be erected nearby and those in the queue for treatment, and other villagers, would watch the films. Often, a whole of a village would turn out to either watch proceedings or to obtain medical treatment. Not surprisingly, they watched films chosen because of their themes which promoted South Vietnam at the expense of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces;
- major programs like the cleft palate program—identifying people with cleft palates and arranging two-stage corrective surgery;
- Dental Civil Aid Programs (DENTCAPS) carried out by units other than Civil Affairs.

The Civil Affairs Medical Detachment coordinated all MEDCAPS and DENTCAPS conducted by 1ATF units. The Medical Detachment's head was also the Province CORDS advisor on medical matters.

Education Detachment

- typically advised on where new schools could be built, provided educational supplies and library books to village schools, and conducted English language classes, which were very popular;
- during 1969-70 when Civil Affairs was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gratton, the Education Detachment also became responsible for youth and sports activities in Phuoc Tuy. At this time, the Education Detachment OIC was also the Province CORDS advisor on Education, and the Detachment's 2IC was the Province CORDS advisor on youth and sports matters;
- ran a scout group for local Vietnamese youths.

Liaison Detachment

- consisted of Vietnamese-speaking Australian officers who were graduates of the RAAF School of Languages in Victoria;
- responsibility was to be out and about every day talking and listening to the civilian population, assessing where projects might be warranted, preparing feasibility studies, and generally developing close contacts at village level;
- widely known and accepted by local Vietnamese and spent most of their time in local villages;
- delivered mail from VC prisoners of war incarcerated around the country to the prisoners' families in Phuoc Tuy, and collected mail and gifts from the families for the prisoners and which were eventually delivered them to the prisoners;
- supervised food and commodity distributions, for example, after the Battle of Binh Ba in early June 1967;
- gave Vietnamese language presentations to former Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) personnel who defected to the south under the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) program (defectors were known as 'Hoi Chanh'), and delivered solatium payments to local Vietnamese families when these compensation payments were decided upon;¹⁴
- provided interpreting services when visitors to the Task Force required an Australian interpreter. For example, politicians and journalists visiting from Australia often preferred Australian interpreters to both guide them around the province and do their interpreting.

Agricultural Detachment

- advised on, and provided supplies for, projects such as rice, sorghum and other crop growing;
- responsible for animal husbandry projects when these developed from about 1969 onwards. A typical project would be to supply the means including animals for local civilians to start their own chicken or pig farms.

Vung Tau

A small Civil Affairs section was established at Vung Tau. It consisted of a Liaison Officer and interpreter and operated mostly on contract labour.

14. Solatium was a US policy adhered to by the Australian Army whereby non-battle injury or damage to Vietnamese civilians or their property saw the civilians receive money as compensation. There was a formal scale of damages and extent of injuries to which were attached particular levels of payments.

Other units' involvement

Other units to make significant contributions to civic action programs included 1 Field and 17 Construction Squadrons, Royal Australian Engineers, and 1 Psychological Operations Unit.

Expanded role

By 1969, the CO Civil Affairs was responsible for co-ordination of all military civic action by Australian troops in Vietnam, including Vung Tau and Phan Rang where the RAAF had units, and Saigon. The major focus of civic action efforts remained Phuoc Tuy.

Wind-down period

In February 1971, when the Australian Army had over four years' experience in the conduct of civic action, Civil Affairs CO Lieutenant Colonel K.P. Outridge wrote his end-of-posting report. In it, he observed that while there were numerous examples of successful civic action projects, there were also failures, with consequent lessons to be learned:

The most apparent danger in the Military Civic Action field is a too aggressive Australian involvement in Vietnamese affairs. There is a tendency for Australians, being certain of their own 'excellence', to exercise an aggressive policemen'ship and push Australian type 'solutions' to correct a Vietnamese 'muddle'. Australians generally are inclined to ignore the environment from both the cultural and economic point of view. Neither cultural change nor improvement in economic environment can be achieved in the short term; this aspect is particularly important when one considers the uncertainty of duration of Military Civic Action involvement in an area.¹⁵

Examples of failings were:

- apathy by local administration officials towards projects;
- 1ATF generosity in school maintenance had led to local Parents and Citizens committees' disinterest towards their own involvement in school maintenance. This was a classic example of an outcome if the local population was not sufficiently involved in projects;

15. 'Report on Civic Military Action: Mar 70 – Feb 71', 23 February 1971, AWM 100 176/1/84.

- past over-involvement by Australia in medical aid projects, which did not lead to encouraging Vietnamese self-reliance. (When this was recognised, a program of progressive Australian withdrawal had been implemented to increase Vietnamese self-reliance with tangible, positive results.);
- Lack of training on project maintenance, leading again to over-reliance on Australian personnel and to mechanical breakdowns, e.g., windmills.

Outridge identified a number of solutions:

- local officials had to have major involvement in identifying and approving projects within local administrative systems;
- related to the above point, a means needed to be found to get local officials to take a leading role in project design, contract letting and supervision of contractors;
- provision of local funds for projects as an indication of the depth of local interest;
- all requests for projects to be handled through the normal province administrative system; concurrence at province level by itself was insufficient;
- delays in deciding whether to adopt projects were acceptable as they provided the opportunity to gauge the depth of local interest;
- once a project had been accepted, there should be no procrastination in its execution.

The common thread of many of Outridge's conclusions was that the natural enthusiasm of Australian personnel to help a group less fortunate than themselves had resulted in over-reliance by the Vietnamese on Australian support and action, an over-reliance characterised variously by apathy, inaction, sometimes greed and an inability to maintain mechanical items.

Enemy Contact

When 1ATF arrived in Phuoc Tuy Province in mid-1966, the military security situation was poor. Most roads could not be traveled by single vehicles, and some required fully escorted convoys before they could be traversed.

By 1969-70, this situation was much improved. Although by the nature of their operations Civil Affairs staff were vulnerable to enemy action should the VC have wanted to do so, overall there was little hostile action against Civil Affairs personnel. There were minor incidents including an ambush in Hoi My village when Civil Affairs personnel sustained gunshot wounds, but overall there were no fatalities or serious wounds.

Attacks against Civil Affairs projects were rare. The VC damaged the water reticulation system on Long Son Island, just days after the system came into operation, but this type of incident was the exception and not the rule.

In 1990, during interviews with a number of former senior Viet Cong officers, I asked the then Chairman of the Peoples' Committee in Vung Tau, Mr Nguyen Minh Ninh, who advised that he had been the deputy commander of D445 battalion at the battle of Long Tan, why the VC did not target Civil Affairs unit members and projects when such targeting would not have been difficult. He replied that from the VC viewpoint, the projects were helping the local population. They were public works and so the VC left them alone. Having said that, Mr Nguyen showed little knowledge of Australian civic action, explaining that his was a 'soldiers' unit and civic action was something to be handled by local (VC) forces.¹⁶

Effectiveness of Civic Action

The key question in regard to civic action is how effective was it in achieving its goals of winning the support of the local population for the Saigon regime, and winning good will towards Australia.

Vietnamese villagers obviously had to decide how to demonstrate political loyalties from the perspective of their circumstances, which might typically be a mixture of the following and which might differ between villages:

- historical loyalties; e.g., to the Viet Minh, and whether these carried through to this conflict;
- traditional approach and loyalties of their village; for example, Hoa Long village was regarded as being pro Viet Cong;
- may have had close, even direct family links with the VC, the ARVN or both;
- trying to make a living, and to raise and educate children;
- trying to keep their family safe from the war surrounding them, particularly when the security situation in many villages saw a strong ARVN/US/Australian presence during the day but not the same degree of security at night;
- powerless to have any real impact on political or military events;
- aware that the local administration, both civilian and military, was corrupt and inefficient and not able to provide protection.

Other influencing factors were the Phoenix program (targetted assassination of members of the Viet Cong Infrastructure) which at times destroyed goodwill as did aspects of the solatium practices which were not always well received.

In these circumstances, and recognising Outridge's conclusions referred to above, one could not conclude that civic action by Australian forces by itself caused any change in popular support for either local ARVN forces or the Saigon political regime. Former

16. Interview with Mr Nguyen Minh Ninh, 23 April 1990.

Unit CO Peter Gration believed from the outset that in the environment the Australian Army found itself operating in, the primary goal of winning support for the ARVN and local and Saigon governments was incapable of achievement.¹⁷

In terms of the secondary goal of achieving good will towards Australia, it would be safe to conclude that this was achieved although civic action may not have been the sole contributing factor here. In 1968, former Civil Affairs Commanding Officer John McDonagh noted that the policy of restricting recreational access by Australian troops to local villages, and the good standards of behaviour shown by those troops who did enter villages was a contributing factor to attitudes towards Australia.¹⁸ Positive reactions to Australian personnel during the period of 1 ATF's presence in Phuoc Tuy attest to the popularity and genuine good regard in which Australians were held.¹⁹

Conclusion

The experience of civic action in Vietnam provided valuable lessons for the Australian Army. Four and a half years was sufficient time for basic principles to be bedded down. Effective techniques were refined. Mistakes were identified. Lessons were learned.²⁰ The impact of civic action on the populace was able to be assessed.

17. Gration, discussion with author, October 2002. By building Phuoc Tuy Province up economically and establishing the rudiments of local government through such means as building roads, improving transportation, developing health and education facilities and generally assisting the development of the local economy, Australia was creating a climate in which the Government of South Vietnam could have worked to achieve its own aims, but that Government proved incapable of doing so.

18. Lieutenant Colonel J.F. McDonagh, 'Civil Affairs in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam, 1967-68', *Army Journal* No 231 (August 1968), 3-15.

19. See, e.g., Gration's report, 5RAR Civic Action project – Ong Trinh, January 1970, which describes the relationships forged between 5RAR personnel in Ong Trinh Hamlet during the construction of the school there in 1969-70: AWM 100 723/1/7. Also, many Civil Affairs Unit members enjoyed positive relationships with a range of Vietnamese officials, contractors and civilians.

20. Gration believes the experience of civic action in Vietnam belies the principle of military civic action that a project must have a short completion time. Quoting outcomes of longer-term projects such as the school built by 5RAR in Ong Trinh, and the road construction carried out by 1 Field Squadron, he believes that in terms of human interaction and forging relationships between providers and recipient, long term projects with participants working alongside each other produces positive outcomes.

The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam

John Hartley

The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam was a unique contribution to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Indeed there had never been another unit like it, and it is doubtful that there will ever be one again. This essay describes how it came about and what it did, and tries to make an assessment of what it achieved.

During 1962 the number of American advisors deployed in South Vietnam grew from 1000 to over 11,000. At the same time the US sought to have troops from other countries join them, not so much for the military assistance they could provide but for the political support that their presence would demonstrate. In May, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific, in a visit to Australia, informed the Chiefs of Staff of a specific proposal for an Australian contribution. Admiral Harry D. Felt believed it would be based on individuals or small groups serving with infantry battalions or as instructors. Discussions had already taken place between Washington, Saigon and Canberra, and it was quickly agreed that Australian military assistance should take the form of training in jungle techniques. On 24 May, the Minister for Defence announced that Australia would commit up to 30 military instructors to provide instruction in jungle warfare techniques, village defence and related activities such as engineering and communications. Their role was to 'assist in training the ground forces of South Vietnam'. The contingent was to be commanded by Colonel F.P. Serong.

Considerable discussion took place as to where the contingent would deploy. The preferred Vietnamese option was to have all the Australians centred on one establishment, namely an old French walled camp on the outskirts of Quang Ngai. The American commander preferred to see Australians filling American billets throughout Vietnam. The eventual outcome that Colonel Serong proposed was for the Team to be divided into a number of identifiable groups to operate within the American advisory structure.

Three groups would be located in I Corps which consisted of the five northern provinces and one group would be located immediately south in II Corps. This initial disposition would shape the concentration of the Team for the next eight years. The type

and scope of training varied however. One group was responsible for training regular soldiers, another for training regional troops for operations within a province and a third for training village defenders, border forces and trail watchers. This last group trained forces, which were recruited and paid by a US organisation, code-named the Combined Studies Division (CSD), which was a para-military wing of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The fourth group, located in II Corps, was based at the Ranger Training Centre that specialised in jungle, mountain and swamp training.

The selection and preparation of the first contingent set the pattern which, with some variations, would be followed throughout the war. Team members assembled at the Intelligence Centre, initially located at Mosman, Sydney, where they were briefed on a range of topics which related to counter-insurgency operations in Indochina. Maoist theory, Viet Cong methods and the lessons from the French defeat were studied. Later contingents would do three weeks of colloquial language training. Following training at the Intelligence Centre, the contingent was sent to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra where members were put through a series of field exercises: navigation, harbouring, ambush and counter-ambush, patrolling and shooting. This was also a chance to become fit and to relearn the lessons of living in the jungle. It was also the opportunity to learn instructional techniques and three training methods, in particular, that would surface regularly in Vietnam: sneaker ranges, shooting galleries and the use of demonstration platoons.

On the 12 July, while still at Canungra, members were told that their recently given title, Australian Army Component—Vietnam, would change to Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. It appeared that the departments of Defence and External Affairs felt that ‘Component’ somehow reduced the notion of an Australian identity. ‘Training’ was added to emphasise that the Team was not to be involved in operational tasks. The absurdity of this notion would soon be made plain.

The Team left by QANTAS from Mascot on 29 July 1962. They were farewelled by a small, lonely, anxious group of families and friends. Australia’s entry into the Vietnam War was barely noticed by the media or the public.

The first contingent soon settled into its training routines. Many were surprised by the often-displayed ineptitude of infantry battalions, including those with considerable combat experience. Marksmanship was poor, weapons were badly maintained, security at the halt and on the move was rarely practised, fire and movement was unheard of and the night was given over to campfires for the cooking of chickens which had been taken from villages and carried alive all day. Real improvements took time. Introducing an innovation from Canungra or from their Malayan experience was a slow process. Not only had the Vietnamese camp hierarchy to be convinced but also the American advisor who had very often-developed training plans in English and Vietnamese. And while

the Vietnamese appeared to take quite readily to new ideas once they were approved, there was always the sense that once back in operational situations, the lessons would be forgotten.

The advisors found themselves in an anomalous position because they had been directed not to become involved in operations. To do their job properly they felt they had to accompany units on operations in the same way that their American counterparts did. It would take two years of lobbying before this would change. In the meantime, advisors were increasingly deployed as observers. One early such deployment involved Captain Adrian Clunies-Ross. He accompanied a ranger battalion and is reported to have found the experience somewhat unnerving. The battalion deployed by helicopter—a reasonably new experience. The helicopters were lined up on the ground, each having been crowded by about eleven or twelve slightly built soldiers. As the rotors began to turn, Clunies-Ross saw a Vietnamese soldier try unsuccessfully to get into the first three helicopters before finally scrambling aboard his own. Subsequently he found out it was the battalion commander who was almost left behind.

Advisors soon appreciated the quagmire that characterised Vietnamese politics. No one could remain immune. The outcomes of coup and counter-coup soon pervaded all levels of involvement. And nowhere was this more obvious than in the central highlands where the CIA's Central Studies Division was attempting to mobilise Montagnard groups to counter increasing Viet Cong influence.

Captain Barry Petersen, a veteran of the Malayan anti-terrorist campaign, was tasked to supervise and develop Montagnard paramilitary groups in the central highlands based on Ban Me Thout. He established a special relationship with the Rhade and H'mong tribes, learning their language and eventually gaining their trust to such an extent that they bestowed upon him the honour of a tribal chief.

Through skill, courage and determination, Petersen was able to raise, train and lead a force of over 1000 Montagnards who wrought havoc on the Viet Cong, inflicting heavy casualties and generally disrupting infiltration and, more importantly, restricting their ability to extend their influence within the Montagnards. His task, however, was made almost impossible by the resentment and distrust that the Montagnards generally had for the Vietnamese from whom they wanted independence. In September 1964, in a sudden flare up, a number of South Vietnamese special forces were killed and many disarmed. Petersen, through skilful diplomacy, and because he had gained the trust of so many tribal elders, was able to achieve a peaceful solution. But his very success raised Vietnamese suspicions and he was eventually required to leave the country.

By mid 1964 a new era began unfolding. It was becoming obvious that the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) was not able to defeat the Viet Cong. The Team was increased to 83 advisors and they would now be employed in the field in advisor

teams at battalion and lower levels. Typically, a battalion team consisted of a captain, a lieutenant and two sergeant specialists. Warrant officers from the Training Team replaced the lieutenant. Tasks varied but generally included advice to the battalion and company commanders concerning operational planning, the provision of US air, artillery and helicopter support and advice on logistics and training. Advisors also reported on the standard of their unit and thus provided an independent assessment from that of the Vietnamese. In 1967 armoured and artillery corps warrant officers were attached to cavalry and artillery units.

Vietnamese battalions were smaller than their Australian counterparts, often numbering less than 400 men. Frequently commanded by a captain, they were tightly controlled with the lowest manoeuvre element being a company. In the early years, operations were usually limited to a few days and little ground was covered.

The average soldier was about 19 years of age, slightly built but capable of great endurance. Education was good by prevailing standards, their needs simple and their humour infectious. Leadership, certainly up to the period of the Tet Offensive in 1968, was poor. Officers were selected by a system that emphasised education and the officer who siphoned off funds, intended to buy rations for his troops, was not uncommon. Such corruption, however, was partly a product of custom and of pitifully low rates of pay in a country with an alarming rate of inflation.

Giving advice was a delicate function. Sometimes it was offered by example; at other times it was broached directly with the commander. Confidence and rapport had to be established with a Vietnamese counterpart. Timing was important; there was little to be gained by giving advice during a contact or firefight. Much depended on the personality and experience of both parties.

Advisors were also posted to sectors—to the provinces and districts—where for the first time they were responsible to province and district senior advisors for military matters. Their duties included accompanying Regional Forces on operations and training these forces as well as the village-based Popular Forces, overseeing security arrangements and providing liaison with ARVN and subsequently US forces that might be operating in the province. Although it was not intended, advisors inevitably became involved in civilian affairs, including rice control, population control measures such as curfews and roadblocks, and other security measures.

A regular association also started with the United States Special Forces. Colonel Serong sought to reduce the number of advisors in training camps and to rotate advisors so they might also serve in special forces' detachments. In mid 1964, a Special Forces camp for about 400 soldiers was built in central Quang Nam Province. Two Australian advisors were posted there. The camp was initially supplied by aerial delivery. One live cow, which had been dispatched with two parachutes, landed safely with a pair of US

parachute wings stamped on its rump. A few days later a heavy D6 bulldozer was to be used to clear an airstrip, which would mean a considerable improvement to the life of the outpost and was thus eagerly anticipated. The C130 flying direct from Okinawa duly appeared and after several passes dropped the dozer, attached to eight parachutes, into the jungle some 800 meters away. ‘Sorry about that’, radioed the pilot as the aircraft headed back towards Okinawa.

Disappointment was short lived as half the occupants, including Warrant Officer Collinson of the Royal Australian Engineers, rushed to retrieve the dozer, as did a group of Viet Cong. Everyone was very excited. The bulldozer was found to be cratered and stuck in the mud of a swamp. Shots from the Viet Cong pinged against the metal as Collinson climbed aboard and with help unhooked the parachutes and broke away the crate. He then started the engine and, using the blade, worked the machine out of the mud. Amid considerable shouting and confusion, a system gradually evolved. The Vietnamese with the other Australian advisor formed a protective ring around the bulldozer, with an American sergeant in front to check the route, Collinson—seemingly oblivious to the bullets which cracked around him—crashed through the jungle until he reached the camp some eight hours after the dozer was dropped. Nine of the force were wounded. Collinson, the hero of the moment, began grading the airstrip fifteen minutes later.

The strength of the Team fluctuated. Although authorised at 100 (fifteen officers and 85 warrant officers), the Team was in the early days invariably about ten per cent under strength, and it was only in 1968 that its complete strength was consistently met. The inability of the posting system to meet the full strength was a constant source of embarrassment to various commanders as the Americans were forced to find the shortfall. Until mid 1970, when the authorised strength of the Team was substantially increased, the only major change to its deployment was the move into advisory positions within the Territorial Forces in the Delta in November 1968. The increase from June 1970 saw the Team continue its obligations in the northern provinces as well as the Delta but also allowed for expansion into Phuoc Tuy Province. It peaked at 227 men which included 78 corporals. This allowed for the establishment of a number of Mobile Advisory Training Teams, which were based on two warrant officers and four corporals who included a sapper and a medic.

Task Force commanders had been attempting for some time to have more Australian advisors in the province. Their argument was based on the idea that if Australian advisors were to replace American advisors then they could exert more pressure on the Vietnamese in Phuoc Tuy. This would place the Australian commander in a more powerful position in relation to furthering the counter insurgency effort in the province. Australian advisors could be expected to follow similar battle procedures to the Task Force and thus facilitate operations between the Task Force and local territorial forces.

Finally, although not stated, the captain and warrant officer advisors, by virtue of their rank and nationality, regardless of the organisation to which they belonged, would automatically be in a subordinate position in a way that American advisors would never be.

Team commanders invariably resisted pressures to concentrate in the province. They pointed out that the Team was firmly entrenched in the American advisory structure, especially in I Corps. Here they exercised considerable influence, relative to their size, not only in the 1st and 2nd Divisions but also in the training centres, in Special Forces and in the CSD. They were demonstrating a national presence on a broader basis than could be achieved by the Task Force. They were also gaining a level of experience not likely to be available to them in Phuoc Tuy. Their spread also meant that the Department of Defence was gaining information of war in Vietnam generally which would not have been available otherwise. Finally, both the Vietnamese and the Americans argued for the retention of the Team wherever it was deployed. Indeed more advisors were sought, not fewer.

A second objection was based on the expectations of Task Force commanders concerning the ability of advisors to influence their counterpart Vietnamese officers. The loyalty of advisors was to the Vietnamese and the province senior advisor. They took their orders from the senior advisor and could only hope to influence the Vietnamese if parallel orders were issued through the Vietnamese chain of command. The advisor had to try to understand the Vietnamese problems and to help them achieve agreed outcomes within the limitations that confronted them. Problems and solutions seen by a highly trained, well equipped and supported Task Force, in a foreign country, whose soldiers only fought the war for one year, and who did not have families or a social structure to consider, could be quite different from the problems and solutions as they appeared to the Vietnamese. If the advisor was seen by the Vietnamese to be controlled by the Task Force, he could have his credibility questioned and thus no longer be of use as an advisor.

Before 1970, the Team numbered about ten to fifteen advisors in Phuoc Tuy Province. It was ironic, that as the Task Force began to withdraw, the Team built up until the whole of the Team concentrated in the province just as the Task Force departed.

So what impact did the Team have? This is a difficult judgement. In I Corps, for instance, with some exceptions, the ARVN had attained a level of confidence where advice, certainly at unit and sub-unit level, was no longer necessary. But equally, combined operations were becoming increasingly complex and advisors found themselves involved more and more in liaison type duties. There is little doubt that advisors had a positive impact on many Vietnamese commanders and especially on the minor tactics that were the hallmark of our own performance.

In the Territorial Forces, and the Regional Forces in particular, our warrant officers were especially suited. Their environment was the rifle company which they knew well. They were seasoned man-managers and knew how to get things done. Unfortunately they could not be spared from other duties until mid-1970 by which time it was probably too late. They did, however, make a notable contribution in the Delta where their sound military knowledge, freshness of approach and skill in minor tactics paid dividends.

Service with special forces added a further dimension. They were accepted on equal terms by the elite units of the US Army. In the lonely outposts, on long patrols and accompanied by soldiers who were not even accorded the status of citizens, and all the time isolated from the reassuring support of their countrymen, they performed with distinction.

Veterans of the Team express two deep-felt concerns or regrets. The first concern relates to the wide variation in resolve and performance within the units they were supporting. Suspicion, divided loyalties and self-interest resulted in a jumble of organisations, fragmented effort and a grossly unequal sharing of sacrifice. Despite exemplary performance by some units, and a genuine opposition by many in the South to any form of communism, it seemed to many of us that the South Vietnamese would never come to grips with the war they were fighting. In part this was the result of the lack of widespread appeal of the Vietnamese government when compared with the revolutionary fervour of the other side. Another may have been the self-defeating influence and presence of allied forces which appeared to many to have replaced the French. Other reasons probably included the favouring of Catholics, the corruption of leaders, the inefficiency of many officers and the effectiveness of the enemy. While war weariness and casualties were offered as reasons, the other side suffered similarly but did not reduce their resolve.

The regret, indeed tragedy, was the apparent abandonment of the South Vietnamese by the allied withdrawal. Although the South's forces were more capable in 1969 than they had been seven years earlier, their foe was also stronger. The haste of the withdrawal and the inability of the South to fill the gaps, particularly once America withdrew its guaranteed air support, represented a major blow to those advisors who saw their former units submerged in the eventual debacle.

The natural tendency of the Training Team was to stress individual skills, small unit activities, patrolling and night operations. Although small in numbers, they represented a major investment, containing enough officers almost to man a battalion and the full warrant officer complement of the nine-infantry battalions of a division. Of the 990 who deployed, 33 were killed and 122 wounded. The Team was highly decorated: 113 Imperial honours were awarded, including four Victoria Crosses as well as 245 American and 369 Vietnamese awards. The Team also received the US Army's Meritorious Unit

Commendation and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation. The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam did all that was asked of it and much more than anyone expected. The range of its experience stands alone in Australian military history.

Advisors and Optimism: The Kennedy Administration and US Military Assistance Command Vietnam

Charles Morrissey

From 1950 through 1975, the training of independent South Vietnamese armed forces was consistently identified by the United States as a prerequisite to the establishment of a viable non-communist Vietnamese state. Yet US military and political leaders' unevenness in systematically addressing the South Vietnamese military's deficiencies led to the evolution of armed forces that were unequal to their Communist counter-parts. As a result of this and the determination of US policy makers to contain the spread of Communism, American involvement in Vietnam was steadily expanded. The ultimate ineffectiveness of the military training program greatly contributed to the US's inability to foster and maintain an independent non-communist South Vietnam.

During the presidencies of Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the US sought to resolve South Vietnam's internal problems and secure its independent future through increased economic and military aid. It was on 12 February 1955 that the United States Military Assistance and Advisory Group Indochina (MAAG) assumed from France primary responsibility to train, organise and equip the Vietnamese National Army—what would later become part of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF)—into an effective fighting force. From 1954 to 1960 MAAG's focus was on creating a non-communist Vietnamese military in the image of the US Army. While this enabled the South Vietnamese military to improve itself along conventional lines, it did little to allow for the acquisition of counter-insurgency skills that would prove so necessary in the late 1950s and early 1960s. President John F. Kennedy inherited from Eisenhower a situation in Vietnam where America figured as the primary external participant. Kennedy quickly grasped the link between South Vietnam's continued existence and US credibility.¹ By the end of his first year in office, he had made Vietnam a primary Cold War battleground.

1. This fact was not lost on Kennedy who explained to special assistant for national security affairs Walt Rostow 'that Eisenhower could stand the political consequences of Dien Bien Phu and the expulsion of the West from Vietnam in 1954 because the blame fell on the French: I can't take a 1954 defeat today.' See Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 308.

In late 1961, Kennedy confronted a deteriorating military situation in Vietnam. Although the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's (ARVN) numbers had increased, its performance against the Viet Cong had not measurably improved. Guerrilla activity, since the December 1960 establishment of the Hanoi-backed National Liberation Front (NLF), had risen markedly. Saigon's solution to combating greater insurgent activity was requesting increased US funding for ARVN expansion. While there had been little support in US military circles for providing South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem additional military aid for force expansion, this was the course of action to which Kennedy agreed.² Reviewing the military situation in late December 1961, I Corps Senior MAAG Advisor, Colonel Wilbur Wilson, wrote to MAAG chief Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr stating:

In summary this analysis indicates that we are not currently losing the fight with the Viet Cong, but neither are we winning. As our resources increase and training improves in ARVN and CG, we should win more of the actions with the Viet Cong. In addition, we must influence ARVN units to be more aggressive and take greater tactical risks.³

The conclusions in Wilson's report are not dissimilar to findings of previous MAAG personnel. In sum, the military and security problems facing the US and South Vietnam in December 1961 were little changed from years past. What had changed—with little obvious effect on improving its military or political stability—was the level of American aid flowing into South Vietnam. Frustrated with this minimal progress, Kennedy would re-double US efforts in South Vietnam to end what was essentially a stalemate.

The net result of 1961's Vietnam fact-finding missions, debate within the Kennedy administration and decisions on courses of action for Vietnam, was a sizable increase in the number of US military advisers, the introduction of air mobility to ARVN operations, more military and economic aid for South Vietnam and US military personnel being permitted to participate alongside the South Vietnamese in combat operations against the Viet Cong. What did not change was the Saigon government's ineffective control of the countryside, its low level of domestic popular support, or the South Vietnamese armed forces' numerous deficiencies. The only area that saw any measurable improvement was that of Viet Cong operations and recruitment. Although the events of late 1960 and 1961

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2. Memorandum from the Secretary of Defense's Assistant for Special Operations (Lansdale) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 21 July 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereinafter *FRUS*), *Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1988), 237-8.
 3. Memorandum from Colonel Wilbur Wilson to Lieutenant General McGarr, Chief MAAG, Personnel, Intelligence, Training and Operational Matters of Interest to I Corps, 26 December 1961, Wilbur Wilson Papers, Box 1, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA (hereinafter MHI).

clearly illustrated that the ARVN needed to augment its counter insurgency skills, and also its conventional war fighting abilities, little real progress was seen in these areas. The US senior military leadership suggested that the South Vietnamese should fight their own war but at the same time when asked how the war could be turned around, they proposed the introduction of large numbers of American combat troops.⁴

Seeking to stabilise South Vietnam, in 1962 Kennedy increased the number of US military advisers there to 12,000 and also significantly increased the amount of US military aid bound for South Vietnam.⁵ The heightened US military presence in South Vietnam underscored an increased emphasis and level of optimism with which Kennedy and his advisers approached Vietnam in 1962. In 1962 Kennedy also re-structured the US military command in South Vietnam to allow both for better coordination of US assets in-country and for an increased emphasis on counter insurgency. A key element in these changes was the strategic hamlet program, developed to sever the Viet Cong from their base of support, the South Vietnamese peasants. Together, these Kennedy administration initiatives did enjoy some success in slowing the political and military erosion in South Vietnam. This success, however, proved temporary.

In February 1962 Roger Hilsman, Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, updated Washington policy makers on South Vietnam. Hilsman noted that VC military strength in South Vietnam had reached 25,900 with an additional 100,000 ‘supporters and sympathizers’.⁶ On the subject of the ARVN, Hilsman argued that it was too ‘tied down in static defensive positions’. He added, however, ‘no amount of regular troops used offensively would solve the Viet Cong problem unless the villagers themselves are protected and the Viet Cong thus cut off from their source of supplies and recruits’.⁷ To achieve the goal of cutting the VC off from the villagers, Hilsman proposed a three phased plan that included creating ‘zones of strategic villages [strategic hamlets]’. His plan also saw the ARVN ‘adopt[ing] the strategy and tactics used by the Viet Cong’. Engaging in the three-phased military operation the ARVN would go on the offensive

4. See for example, Draft Memorandum of the Conversation of the Second Meeting of the Presidential Task Force on Vietnam’, 4 May 1961, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1, 118-19; ‘Memorandum on U.S. Forces in South Vietnam, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’, 10 May 1961, in Neil Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers: As Published by the New York Times* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 130-1; Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, 18 September 1961, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1, 301-04; Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First 25 Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 150-1; Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of Defense McNamara, 8 November 1961, in Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, 153-5.

5. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1996), 87-100.

6. Paper Prepared by the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman), 2 February 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 73.

7. *Ibid.*, 75.

eventually destroying the VC.⁸ Although not everyone embraced Hilsman's program, both Kennedy and Diem agreed to it.⁹ The program was to meet with little success.

To rectify a number of the problems experienced by the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Kennedy ordered the establishment of a new command, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). The new command, officially established on 8 February 1962, would supervise logistic and operational support for the ARVN.¹⁰ The creation of MACV also came about as a result of dissatisfaction with Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr's performance as MAAG commander; by 1962 he had largely fallen out of favour with his superiors. Voicing his concerns about McGarr's performance, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy wrote Kennedy stating, 'McGarr has been inadequate'.¹¹ General Edward Lansdale, Secretary of Defense's assistant for special operations, also criticised McGarr's efforts, writing that he was 'fighting the war with memos, with the result that he has lost much of his influence with Diem, Thuan, etc. I urged Thuan to work with him more closely and Thuan pointed to a big stack of papers and said: that's what I got the last time I asked for some help.'¹² Since 1954, MAAG had prepared the South Vietnamese military primarily for conventional warfare, placing little emphasis on counter guerrilla tactics. Kennedy and his advisers recognised that the increased strength of the Communist insurgency and the corresponding increase in the number of guerrilla attacks required a new US military approach—particularly one that placed more emphasis on counter insurgency operations. Military Assistance Command Vietnam would coordinate the expanded US military personnel and aid destined for South Vietnam, allowing MAAG-V to focus solely on training and advising the ARVN, especially in the area of counter insurgency.

Intentional or otherwise, the establishment of MACV marked the emergence of a shift away from the US military's primary training and advisory role towards a more participatory one. Despite these changes, the ARVN's military proficiency progressed only slightly.¹³ Confronted by a continued lack of progress, the US military leadership might have questioned the logic of increasing the American military commitment there. They did not. The policy of US military expansion in Vietnam suggests a belief among the senior military leadership that the Vietnamese problem had a solution—apparently

8. Ibid., 83-6.

9. For criticism on Hilsman's program see Memorandum on the Substance of Discussions at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, 9 February 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 113.

10. MAAG remained in charge of advising the ARVN until this function was assumed by MACV in 1964.

11. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, 15 November 1961, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1, 606.

12. Letter from the Secretary of Defense's Assistant for Special Operations (Lansdale) to General Samuel T. Williams, 28 November 1961, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1, 688.

13. See John Paul Vann's comments on ARVN progress in Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 91-4.

a military one—even though evidence from their own experience, evaluations and intelligence sources suggested otherwise.

Military Assistance Command Vietnam's headquarters was physically located at Than Son Nhut air base outside of Saigon. General Paul D. Harkins was named as the first commander of US Military Assistance Commander, Vietnam (COMUSMACV). He officially assumed command of MACV on 8 February 1962.¹⁴ After being appointed COMUSMACV, Harkins, a self-declared 'optimist', became notorious for refusing to acknowledge any and all evidence of ARVN shortcomings. While COMUSMACV, he tolerated no criticism of the South Vietnamese military and dispensed stiff punishment to anyone who dared to do so.¹⁵ Harkins' optimistic assessments of the situation in South Vietnam was a continuation of a tradition begun by former MAAGs Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel and Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, both of whom ignored negative reports while steadfastly believing that things would resolve themselves. Commenting on Harkins' view on South Vietnam, United Press International correspondent Neil Sheehan likened it an 'impenetrable fantasy'.¹⁶ Another author labelled Harkins' reporting to Washington as 'Alice-in-Wonderland[esque]'.¹⁷

Harkins' strategy for eliminating the VC was to draw them out in conventional battle and then overwhelm them with superior US firepower.¹⁸ The problem with this was that the VC avoided, whenever possible, set-piece battles. If Kennedy's intention in placing Harkins at the head of the new MACV organisation was to improve the effectiveness of the US military mission in South Vietnam, he had made an unfortunate selection. Harkins' refusal to investigate the reported faults of the ARVN ensured that little was done to correct them. His unwillingness to adopt any strategy other than a conventional one meant that little progress would be made in successfully countering the unconventional tactics of the Viet Cong. Moreover, this meant that most of the problems that had led Kennedy to establish MACV remained largely unresolved.

14. For the MACV terms of reference see Telegram from the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff (Lemnitzer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt), 6 January 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 14-16.

15. General Harkins' unwillingness to heed any criticism of the RVNAF was later made clear at an 11 May 1964 meeting in Saigon. Minutes of the meeting noted that on the issue of 'setting up a reporting system on combat effectiveness and morale of RVNAF' General Harkins 'expressed some concern lest it involve critical reporting by the advisors upon their opposite numbers and that the substance of such reports might get back to the Vietnamese'. See Memorandum of a Meeting, Saigon, 11 May 1964, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, vol. 1, 310. On Harkins' cheer-leader type relationship with the South Vietnamese, David Halberstam writes that 'although Harkins was a General, his job was not so much to command fellow soldiers, but to get along with Diem and Nhu, extraordinarily difficult and suspicious allies with most unmilitary minds'. David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 179.

16. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 542.

17. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), 143.

18. Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 124.

Compounding these difficulties was the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) structuring of MACV, which created a number of problems that undermined its ability to transform the ARVN into an effective and autonomous military force. Furthermore, allowing MAAG to continue functioning after establishing MACV injected a degree of confusion into the US military's Vietnam command structure. The establishment of MACV did enable a greater focus on counter insurgency, but its complicated and unusual command structure made its functioning problematic. That the JCS did not establish MACV as a theatre command, that they did not immediately replace MAAG with MACV and that they tolerated duplicate chains of command, suggests that a degree of ambivalence existed within the senior US military leadership's overall approach to Vietnam. This ambivalence was to be one of the war's permanent features.

As Harkins was busy establishing himself in his new command, Admiral Harry D. Felt, commander-in-chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) and Harkins' superior, cabled the JCS laying out the situation in Vietnam as he saw it. He explained that the 'main VC military body has not been defeated; conversely it is numerically stronger than ever before, and militarily/politically the VC is very active'.¹⁹ He further noted that the Viet Cong's method of operation often undercut any advantage the ARVN possessed in firepower. To counter this VC method of operation, the Kennedy administration had encouraged a greater application in training and employing counter insurgency tactics. This desired shift in strategy was undercut by the lack of interest that many US military leaders had for counter insurgency. General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1960-61), saw Kennedy as 'oversold' on unconventional warfare. General George Decker, Army Chief of Staff (1960-62), argued, 'any good soldier can handle guerrillas'. An anonymous US Army officer's statement on the subject, 'I'm not going to destroy the traditions and doctrine of the United States Army just to win this lousy war', perhaps best sums up the reluctance to embrace the counter insurgency strategy that Kennedy encouraged.²⁰

Previously the Army had expended little effort on the development or application of a counter-insurgency doctrine. This is borne out by the fact that no mention of it was made in Army Field Manuals until 1962.²¹ The first official Department of Defense study on counter insurgency concluded that 'the tactical doctrine for the employment of regular forces against insurgent guerrilla forces has not been adequately developed, and the Army does not have a clear concept of the proper scale and type of equipment

19. Telegram from Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (Felt), to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 22 February 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 167.

20. See Michael Lind, *Vietnam the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 103-04.

21. See Department of the Army, *FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations—Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1962).

necessary for these operations'.²² Major General Victor H. Krulak, United States Marine Corps (USMC), commented on problems with the US military's counter-insurgency strategy, noting that 'in the face of speeches to the contrary, the counterinsurgency issue that faces us today *is* different, is *not* compatible with existing organizational concepts, it *does* need a fresh look'.²³ On the US counter insurgency program, Larry Cable writes that it 'arose not from an accurate appreciation of the nature of guerrilla war nor from the process by which guerrillas were suppressed, but rather from the capabilities of the forces developed for the purpose of fighting a mechanized opponent ...'.²⁴ Overall, the Army's response to Kennedy's requests for a greater emphasis on counter insurgency 'was a negative one'.²⁵ This fact ensured that the ARVN would continue to encounter difficulties in engaging the VC, as they were being trained and structured to fight a conventional war against an unconventional enemy.

Among the problems that the ARVN faced in 1962 was an escalating desertion rate. One memorandum concluded that 'when the battle casualties are added [to the desertion numbers] the total losses are expected to increase to the point where an overall increase in the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese armed forces is doubtful'.²⁶ This situation was made all the worse by many ARVN officers' unwillingness to take the initiative against the Viet Cong for fear that casualties sustained would earn them Diem's disfavour. American military advisers were concerned about the dependency that the ARVN was developing on artillery and air mobility as it lessened their willingness to conduct foot patrols, which were necessary for establishing contact with the enemy. Moreover, the increased firepower that the ARVN had access to was of little use against an enemy that mostly refused to engage in conventional fire fights. Inadequate training also continued to undercut the ARVN's combat effectiveness.²⁷ These inadequacies came to be best catalogued and articulated by US military advisor, Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, working with the ARVN 7th Division.

22. Robert A. Doughty, *The Evolution of US Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-76* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1979), 25. Doughty concludes that although the US Army made an effort in the CI area, 'most tactics for counterinsurgency remained extensions of, or resembled, small unit tactics for a conventional battlefield'. *Ibid.*, 26.

23. Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak) to the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Gilpatric), 26 March 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 277. Emphasis in original.

24. Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 136.

25. Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 37.

26. Memorandum from the Vice President's Military Aide (Burriss) to Vice President Johnson, 30 March 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 284.

27. Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975), 35-7.

After arriving in 1962 as a new member of the military advisory mission, Vann soon discovered that despite the infusion of massive amounts of American aid and a considerable effort on the part of MAAG ‘few of the regulars [ARVN] or territorials knew how to adjust the sights of their rifles and carbines well enough to hit a target let alone a guerrilla’.²⁸ As a senior advisor to the ARVN, Vann had the opportunity to learn first-hand of the obstacles that had led to this situation.²⁹

Colonel F.P. (Ted) Serong, an Australian Army counter-insurgency expert and special advisor to Harkins, echoed Vann’s conclusions on ARVN problem areas. Serong wrote:

Morale is patchy. With the possible exception of the Airborne Brigade, there is no infantry element of the ARVN, CG, or SDC with high morale—even the Rangers. A small portion could be rated as fair. Most, low to very low. Witness—no GVN force will attack known VC force unless it has an assured superiority of 10 to 1.³⁰

Had these findings been properly investigated and followed up, a number of the ARVN problem areas might have been resolved. Instead these reports, like countless other unflattering assessments of the ARVN, were ignored in favour of continuing the same basic program that the US advisory mission had been engaged in since 1954. By the end of 1962, therefore, increased efforts of the US military advisory team and augmented material aid to the ARVN had not resolved its underlying problems.

Following a 1962 fact-finding trip to Vietnam, Kennedy’s Special Military Representative, General Maxwell D. Taylor wrote, ‘much progress [had] been accomplished’ since my last visit in October 1961, but a ‘coordinated national plan establishing priorities for operations against the VC’, does not exist.³¹ Estimates suggested that the ARVN was not achieving ‘more than 60 to 70 percent combat effectiveness from the forces presently available to them’.³² The reasons Taylor gave for this were not new—‘lack of intelligence, a defensive outlook, a bad civil-military

28. Ibid., 55.

29. Larry Cable writes that many US military personnel viewed continued ARVN ineffectiveness as a result of their own failings, rather than anything the US advisory was doing wrong. See Cable, *Conflict of Myths*, 180.

30. Report by Colonel F. P. Serong, Special Adviser to General Paul D. Harkins, COMUSMACV: Current Operations in Vietnam, October 1962, in Paul L. Miles Papers, unnumbered box, MACV Studies October 1962, MHI.

31. Paper prepared by the President’s Military Representative (Taylor), 20 September 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 660-3.

32. General Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares: A Memoir* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 240-2.

relationship in the provinces, and Diem's style of over centralised government'.³³ On the US military side, Taylor alluded to a problem that MACV's set-up had created stating 'we seem to be establishing a deeply layered command structure in Southeast Asia'. Summing up his report he noted that one of the 'outstanding questions [was] how to best organize the US military command in Southeast Asia'.³⁴ In May 1964, to address these problems in part, the JCS allowed MACV to assume MAAG's duties and responsibilities. This move was intended to allow the US military to better coordinate its efforts in South Vietnam. Yet by eliminating MAAG, MACV now had even more responsibility and as the scope of the fighting widened, the training and advisory effort suffered accordingly. The neglect of ARVN training would have telling effects in the latter part of the war.

Had Taylor, while he was in Vietnam, been briefed by Vann as he was supposed to have been, the General's report to Kennedy might have been offered a more detailed analysis on the military situation there. This did not happen as Harkins was more inclined to offer Taylor a 'dog and pony show' than allow Vann to educate him on the realities of South Vietnam's military situation.³⁵ Even if Vann had been permitted to explain the seriousness of ARVN failings, it seems unlikely that Taylor would have relayed them to Kennedy in full. While not as overtly optimistic as Harkins, the substance of his reporting back to Washington suggests that Taylor was willing to place the most optimistic spin on events in Vietnam.³⁶ Moreover, as Taylor had personally lobbied for Harkins' appointment as MACV, any findings that contradicted those of Harkins would reflect badly on Taylor.³⁷ It has also been suggested that Harkins' enthusiastic assessment was due to pressure from Taylor. General Donn Starry claimed that Harkins told him 'that what he was reporting from Vietnam was what Taylor was telling him to report'.³⁸ Regardless of who was telling Harkins to do what, it was his reports upon which the Kennedy administration based many of its decisions.

In early 1963 the inability of US initiatives to cure the political and military ills of South Vietnam was visibly demonstrated in the South Vietnamese village of Ap Bac. There an engagement between the ARVN and the VC highlighted all the problems—the

33. Ibid., 242.

34. Paper prepared by the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 20 September 1962, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2, 662-3.

35. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 117. In his memoirs, although Taylor mentions his September 1962 trip to South Vietnam and meeting with Harkins, he makes no mention of Vann illustrating the non-role he played in the meeting. See Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 257.

36. The tone of Taylor's memoir also indicates that he never saw the problems in Vietnam as Vann did. Also important was that Taylor was a close personal friend of Harkins. These facts further suggest that anything that Vann managed to relay to Taylor would be received with a measure of disbelief.

37. On Taylor's protection of Harkins see Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior: General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of Command* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 153.

38. Ibid.

ARVN's lack of leadership, its defensive attitude, Diem's interference, and an ineffective chain of command—that continued to undermine the US military advisory mission's efforts to mould the ARVN into an effective fighting force.

The January 1963 battle at Ap Bac between 2000 ARVN and 400 Viet Cong, unarguably illustrated ARVN shortcomings. In advising the ARVN commanders on how to conduct the operation, Vann endeavoured to ensure that the South Vietnamese would have everything possible in their favour—numbers, air and ground mobility, and firepower. The execution of Vann's plan first ran into problems when the ARVN commanders delayed the attack for twenty-four hours, which allowed the VC to prepare better defences. Once the attack did get underway, Vann discovered that his ARVN commanders' aggressiveness often evaporated upon the first sign of enemy resistance. Refusing to pursue the retreating VC meant that many escaped, undercutting the operation's effectiveness.³⁹ Poor ARVN fire discipline resulted in a number of friendly-fire deaths. Even though the South Vietnamese force was vastly superior in numbers, weapons and mobility, the ARVN offensive succeeded in only killing twelve enemy troops while suffering 61 dead and 100 wounded. The success the VC experienced against the ARVN provided them with a psychological victory. The fact that the American press was there to report on the ARVN's under-performance added to the defeat's psychological impact.

To Vann, who acted as the senior military adviser during the operation, the battle's outcome was proof that the ARVN remained incapable of defeating the Viet Cong and thus of securing South Vietnam. On the engagement Vann stated, 'it was a miserable damn performance. These people won't listen. They make the same goddamn mistakes over and over again in the same way.'⁴⁰ *New York Times* reporter David Halberstam wrote that 'to us [the journalists] and the military advisors involved, Ap Bac epitomized all the deficiencies of the system: lack of aggressiveness, hesitancy about taking casualties, lack of battlefield leadership, a nonexistent chain of command.'⁴¹ Colonel Wilbur Wilson, senior adviser III Corps, wrote, 'the combat effectiveness of ARVN units is directly proportional to the training that we invest in them.'⁴² The ARVN's failure to destroy a VC unit in a conventional engagement should have raised questions on the wisdom and effectiveness of MACV's training priorities to date. It did not.

39. Two insightful accounts of the battle at Ap Bac are found in Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 154-71 and Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 203-65. Also see Peter Arnett, *Live From the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 88-98.

40. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 277.

41. Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 165.

42. Memorandum for Senior Advisor, 5th Infantry Division, Senior Advisor 23rd Infantry Division, from Wilbur Wilson, 21 March 1963, in Wilbur Wilson Papers, unnumbered box, MHI.

In an article on the battle for the *New York Times*, Halberstam quoted an unnamed US military advisor as stating that ‘time after time I have seen the same Vietnamese officers and troops make the same mistakes in virtually the same rice paddy’.⁴³ Remarking on the shock expressed by many Americans over the South Vietnamese defeat, Halberstam noted, ‘apparently the only people not surprised are the American advisors in the field ... who felt that conditions in the field made a defeat like this virtually inevitable’.⁴⁴ Commenting on the battle from the enemy perspective, a North Vietnamese author wrote, ‘the victory at Ap Bac opened the way for the bankruptcy of the helicopter mobility and armored vehicle mobility tactics’.⁴⁵ This is not an insignificant fact, as by early 1963 the advantage that the ARVN had been enjoying from air mobility had begun to be lost due to improved Viet Cong anti-air tactics, aptly demonstrated at Ap Bac.

In his after-action report Vann drew attention to the ARVN’s inflated enemy body counts and to their commander’s skill in avoiding enemy contact.⁴⁶ Although Army Colonel Daniel B. Porter, IV Corps, reported to Harkins that the ‘conduct of this operation revealed many glaring weaknesses’, any concerns that Ap Bac might have raised among senior MACV personnel went unvoiced.⁴⁷ To the shock of many reporters and some military personnel in South Vietnam, Harkins argued that the operation at Ap Bac constituted an ARVN victory. His position on the battle led Neil Sheehan to write that up to that point ‘all of us ... had been profoundly underestimating Harkins’ capacity for self delusion’.⁴⁸ The VC success at Ap Bac and the US military’s disinterest in exploring new approaches to the South Vietnamese prosecution of the war served as a harbinger of what was to come.

A January 1963 CIA report on Vietnam concluded ‘on balance, the war remains a slowly escalating stalemate’. This finding offered little comfort for those in the administration seeking a quick victory.⁴⁹ A number of MACV advisors—such as Wilson, Vann, Porter, and Ladd—all continued to report ongoing ARVN failings to Harkins,

43. For Halberstam’s contemporary piece on the battle see ‘Vietnam Defeat Shocks U.S. Aides’, *The New York Times*, 7 January 1963.

44. Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 166.

45. Anon, *Vietnam: The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954-1975: Military Events* (Trans. Joint Publication Research Service. JPRS 80968. Washington, DC, 3 June 1982), 54.

46. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 83-4. Two other officers who, along with Porter and Vann, raised concerns to their superiors of ARVN shortcomings were Colonel Wilbur Wilson, III Corps, and Lieutenant Colonel Fred Ladd, 21st Division. Rather than investigating their reports, Harkins chose to ignore and censure their findings. See David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 202-03.

47. See General Bruce Palmer, Jr, *The 25-Year War: America’s Military Role in Vietnam* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1984), 22-3; and Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 83-84. For the Porter quote see Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 281.

48. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 283.

49. Current Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 11 January 1963. *FRUS, Vietnam, 1963*, vol. 3, 19-22.

reports that he chose to ignore. Harkins insisted that all indications suggested that ARVN effectiveness was improving and the war against the communist insurgency was being won. Not all US advisors completely disagreed with Harkins' position on the war. The senior US advisor in II Corps, Army Colonel Hal D. McCown' reported to Harkins, 'during 1963 the posture of the VC has clearly deteriorated in the II CTZ'.⁵⁰ McCown also wrote that 'the combat effectiveness of ARVN, the CG and the SDC has risen remarkably during this period. Although much progress is needed to reach accepted US standards, ARVN has come a long way and in my estimation has the capability to win the struggle militarily.'⁵¹ Interestingly, McCown's deputy, Army Colonel Rowland H. Renwanz, provided a somewhat different analysis from that of his superior. Renwanz wrote of ARVN reluctance to participate in combat operations and of the failure of the strategic hamlet program noting, 'that it would take six years to pacify the area'.⁵² As with all other negative reports, Harkins chose to ignore Renwanz's. He would do this until his replacement in 1964. Harkins' refusal to allow attention to be called to any of the problems in training and employing the ARVN meant that a search for solutions was never fully implemented. This fact contributed greatly to the US's eventual failure to achieve its goal of an independent South Vietnam.

Harkins' most vocal critic, Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, returned to the US in June 1963 to discover that his reports had been buried by MACV. After lobbying a number of senior officers, including the Vice Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Barksdale Hamlett, Vann managed to get a briefing to the JCS scheduled for 8 July 1963. Taylor, concerned that Vann's findings would contradict those of Harkins, had the briefing cancelled.⁵³ Mark Perry writes that Taylor's action led to 'an open war within the JCS. The chiefs concluded that Taylor was protecting his good friend Paul Harkins ... whose reputation for competence was widely and openly questioned by Taylor's Army colleagues, one of whom told the JCS chairman that Harkins was "just plain stupid"'.⁵⁴ Taylor was correct to be concerned about Harkins' reputation as Vann's brief contradicted MACV's position on almost every aspect of the war in Vietnam.⁵⁵

Kennedy's military initiatives for Vietnam, therefore, had little success in either modifying the US military approach to the war or in improving the ARVN's effectiveness in prosecuting it. Senior US military leadership in both Saigon and Washington continued

50. McCown cited in Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 82.

51. Colonel Hal D. McCown to Deputy COS for Military Operations, Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, 16 October 1963, in Paul D. Miles Papers, unnumbered box, Pacification January-March 1964, MHI.

52. Renwanz cited in Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 82.

53. For a recounting of Vann's aborted attempt to brief the JCS see, Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 339-42. Also see Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 154.

54. Mark Perry, *Four Stars* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), 128-9.

55. For excerpts of this brief, see Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 83-4.

to see the war as winnable through conventional means. The injection of a greater array of conventional weapons into the ARVN's arsenal gives evidence that MACV and his superiors in Washington believed that more firepower would tip the war in favour of the South Vietnamese forces. Even though Ap Bac called into question the theory that superior firepower would equal victory, the US advisory effort was slow to change its approach towards combating the Communist insurgency.

Returning to Washington in October, Taylor and McNamara delivered a situation report on Vietnam to the President. It stated that 'the military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress'. They remarked on the continuing slide of Diem's popularity and noted that while there was 'no solid evidence of the possibility of a successful coup' the 'assassination of Diem or Nhu is always a possibility'. McNamara and Taylor acknowledged, 'the political situation in Vietnam remains deeply serious. It has not yet significantly affected the military effort but could do so at some time in the future'. In an effort to influence events in Vietnam the two authors suggested encouraging Diem to institute reforms through US 'expressions of disapproval and withholding of support from GVN activities'.⁵⁶ Throughout the remainder of October South Vietnamese anti-Diem forces planned for his overthrow with increasing determination. On 1 November 1963, a group of South Vietnamese generals launched a successful coup, which overthrew the Diem government and resulted in the assassinations of Diem and his brother Nhu.⁵⁷

In Saigon, the news of Diem's death was greeted with celebrations. In Washington, the news of the South Vietnamese leader's death led to a reassessment of US policy. Having spent almost one billion dollars, increased the number of US advisors to over 16,000 and suffered 108 dead, Kennedy realised that little there had changed for the better. A Kennedy insider wrote that following Diem's death, the President was 'somber and shaken. I had not seen him so depressed since the Bay of Pigs. No doubt he realized that Vietnam was his greatest failure in foreign policy'.⁵⁸ Kennedy would not have long to dwell on Vietnam, as he would be felled by an assassin's bullet on 22 November 1963. As for the North Vietnamese, the death of Diem led to an order for a stepped-up military campaign against the South Vietnamese and American forces. Hanoi also cautioned its people to prepare themselves for a lengthy 'struggle'.⁵⁹ Apparently nothing that the US had done during the Kennedy administration had convinced Hanoi that the

56. Report of the McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, 2 October 1963, in Gareth Porter (ed.), *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (New York: Meridian Books, 1979), 247-9.

57. For a full analysis of the events leading up to Diem's death see Kahin, *Intervention*, 146-80. For an insiders view see, for example, Taylor, *Swords & Plowshares*, 288-301.

58. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 848.

59. Resolution of the Ninth Conference of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee, December 1963, in Porter, *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, 255-7.

war was unwinnable. With the assassinations of Diem and Kennedy, a new approach was brought to the war by both sides with varying degrees of success. The remaining constant was the ARVN's lacklustre performance.

As 1963 drew to a close the political and military situation in South Vietnam was, despite statements by Harkins and McNamara to the contrary, neither stable nor improved. Without question the efforts of the US military advisory mission in South Vietnam had not all been in vain. Since the US take over of the South Vietnamese military training program great improvements had been made in equipment, organisation, infrastructure, education and small unit training. Under American tutelage the South Vietnamese military possessed numbers of excellent and brave soldiers and officers. The ARVN as a whole, however, did not fight at the same level as their adversary. The main point here is that despite the best efforts of the US advisory team and huge amounts of American aid, in late 1963 the South Vietnamese military had not reached a degree of proficiency that enabled them to match their communist enemy. This deficiency would later prove disastrous.

The Kennedy team's actions to counter the reverses in South Vietnam—the establishment of MACV, increasing military aid, economic aid and the number of US military advisors—all failed to halt the erosion of the South Vietnamese military position. The spectacular January 1963 military failure at Ap Bac, despite the ARVN's superior firepower and numbers, best underscored its continued inability to match the Viet Cong in combat. Kennedy's desire to see the US military shift the war fighting in South Vietnam to a more counter insurgency type approach met with little enthusiasm from most of his military advisors. In short, by late 1963 the US military had failed to modify its approach to war fighting, and by extension that of the South Vietnamese military.

At the time Kennedy was assassinated, Vietnam had become the centerpiece of America's war against Communism. In 1962 and 1963, more so than in 1961, Kennedy had come to fear that an abandonment of South Vietnam would be equated to US weakness and irresolution in combating the spread of Communism. As in 1961, the outcome of the 1962-63 fact finding missions to Vietnam was more US military advisors and more aid for South Vietnam.

Lyndon B. Johnson was bequeathed a situation in South Vietnam that was considerably expanded from that which Kennedy had inherited from Eisenhower.⁶⁰

60. Lawrence Bassett and Stephen Pelz write that 'Kennedy bequeathed to Lyndon B. Johnson a failing counter insurgency program and a deepened commitment to a war in Vietnam'. Lawrence J. Bassett and Stephen E. Pelz, 'The Failed Search for Victory: Vietnam and the Politics of War', in Thomas G. Paterson (ed.), *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 252.

Moreover, Johnson inherited a military situation in South Vietnam where the US had not yet succeeded in training the ARVN to a level where they could effectively reverse Viet Cong gains. Regardless of whether they were being trained for the wrong war, the ARVN after thirteen years of American aid and nine years of direct US training still could not match the enemy on the battlefield. Honouring the US commitment to maintain the independence of South Vietnam would bring renewed and expanded efforts to bring resolution to the situation there.

Without question, the combat effectiveness of Hanoi's military coupled with its leadership's determination to achieve its goal of Vietnamese unification made training the ARVN a considerable challenge. The incremental application of direct American military force, beginning in 1964, also made the formulation of a strategy that would best utilise the ARVN and US military resources problematic. Moreover, the direct application of US military force tied American credibility ever tighter to South Vietnam's continued non-communist status. Direct US military involvement lessened the importance of the ARVN's shortcomings as its role in the war was significantly reduced. The American unwillingness or inability to confront seriously or resolve these problems in training and in strategy, therefore, must be seen as principal reasons why the US was dragged further and further into a war that its own military saw as, at best, problematic from the outset.

From Truman through to Johnson, four presidents stressed, to varying degrees, the importance of training a non-communist indigenous military for the defence of Vietnam. As America's goal was to establish and see maintained a non-communist government in Vietnam, this was a logical course of action. While the inability of successive South Vietnamese governments to rule effectively and the ARVN's inability to defend the country may have been the United States' rationale for its direct military involvement, it erred in not focussing on resolution of these problems after taking over the war. The Vietnamese Communists, not the US's failure in training the ARVN, caused South Vietnam's military collapse on 30 April 1975. Yet the US inability to successfully address problems within the South Vietnamese armed forces, which had been identified time and again by American military and civilian officials, cannot be overlooked in explaining the United States' failure to succeed in its Vietnam policy.

Becoming the 3rd XV: The Citizen Military Forces and the Vietnam War

Dayton McCarthy

The August 2002 edition of the *Army* newspaper announced that an infantry company, consisting entirely of Reservists from various units around Australia, had been raised for service in East Timor. Becoming Alpha Company, 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and leaving in November this year, this is the first time since the Second World War that a complete infantry sub-unit of citizen soldiers has been deployed overseas.¹

The new legislative and non legislative measures created in the last several years has allowed this unprecedented move whereby Reservists can not only go onto full time service, but can also serve overseas and have their civil employment protected in their absence. Although these Reservists volunteered for this deployment, the recent legislative changes have also widened the scope for the calling out, or mobilisation, of the Reserves. The ability to use the Reserves to complement Regular units now gives the Army the ability to meet a number of overseas commitments. From the perspective of the Army Reservist, such opportunities for overseas service provide a relevance and motivation that has been lacking previously. This shows how far the Army, and for that matter Government thinking, has come in relation to the role, relevance and importance of part-time soldiers in the greater scheme of the nation's defence since the 1960s.

What is the relevance of these developments to the Vietnam War? As we all know, the Army Reserve's predecessor, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), did *not* go to Vietnam. To be sure, the odd CMF soldier went on full-time duty, and some left the CMF and joined the Regular Army, while others saw Vietnam over a two-week period as CMF observers. But the CMF was not called out nor were any of its units or sub-units sent to Vietnam. As a result, it struggled to define a role for itself both during, and after, the war. To make matters worse, not only was it relegated further down the military food chain, but the CMF was also plagued by accusations that it harboured so-called 'draft dodgers' who avoided operational service by joining the CMF. In other words, the

1. Captain Ian Toohill, 'Ready for East Timor', *Army*, No. 1056, 1 August 2002.

CMF became a distant '3rd XV'; it was National Servicemen, not CMF soldiers, who bolstered the ranks of the Regular Army for service in Vietnam.

How and why did the CMF become this '3rd XV'? Why did it not see service in Vietnam? This essay examines the factors behind the CMF's exclusion from operational service and the concomitant introduction of the Selective Service Scheme, and suggests that it was a combination of legislative, political and social factors that precluded the CMF from serving in Vietnam. It also analyses the impact of the Selective Service scheme on the CMF 'at home', and assesses the state of the CMF at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Such a study of the CMF's experiences during the Vietnam War, while important in its own right, provides timely lessons for today's Australian Army, forced to be increasingly reliant on part-time soldiers.

In order to explain the CMF's non-involvement, some background on the immediate pre-Vietnam history of the CMF and the Army's development as a whole is required. The CMF was recovering from the trauma of the disastrous Pentropic experiment, which was only part of the seachange impacting upon it. The Pentropic Division was implemented after a landmark strategic reassessment that indicated Southeast Asia, and not the Middle East, would be the most likely theatre for future Australian involvement. Moreover, modern conflict would escalate quickly, requiring troops to be more readily available than in the past. This placed greater emphasis on the Regular Army, rather than the CMF. Prior to this, the CMF had been the numerically larger force, bolstered by the first National Service scheme for most of the 1950s. The strategic thinking at the time was centred around fighting a conventional war which would allow time for an expeditionary force based on the CMF to be raised and sent overseas. But by 1959 the strategic situation had evolved and the concomitant force structure requirements led to the famous statement from the DCGS at the time that 'in future, the CMF is to be in support of the Regular Army, and not vice versa'.²

With the Regular Army now assuming the pre-eminent role within military planning, the function of the CMF in the new defence environment was unclear. One thing was for certain; the growing instability in Southeast Asia indicated that this region would be the most likely one for Australian involvement. Moreover in 1964, important amendments to the Defence Act had been introduced, allowing, it seemed, CMF involvement in the low-level conflicts developing. Previously, the Act, which detailed the preconditions necessary for the Governor-General to call-out the CMF, had specified that the CMF could not be sent outside the Commonwealth, unless its members volunteered specifically to do so. Moreover, the Act specified that the CMF could *only* be called out in a major

2. CRS A6922/1,1/4, Minute C1055, DCGS to all Commands, 'The Reorganisation of the AMF 1959/60-1961/62. General Staff Instruction Number 1', 22 December 1959, National Archives of Australia, Canberra. All CRS records subsequently cited are held at the NAA Office, Canberra.

conventional war or when Australia was directly threatened. This meant that the whole defence planning of the 1950s, based around the CMF and National Service, was, in retrospect, severely undermined by the Defence Act.

But what had changed in 1964? The Minister for Defence, Senator S.D. Paltridge, proposed to Cabinet that it should amend the Defence Act to 'ensure that the CMF is available for overseas service and can be called up if a threat of war exists or a limited war breaks out'. Cabinet agreed that the Defence Act needed to be brought up to date: the nature of the low-level, Cold War conflicts would not allow governments the time for the traditional concept of 'calling out the reserves'.³ Soon thereafter, the Act was amended, empowering the Government 'to make a call-up, for military purposes, *when it was of the opinion* that the military situation required it'.⁴ In other words, the new changes gave the Government an unprecedented level of flexibility in relation to using the CMF in any future conflict. If this was the case, why was the CMF not called out for service in Vietnam and a compulsory service scheme implemented instead?

The genesis of the Selective Service scheme can be traced back to March 1963. With the worsening situation in Southeast Asia, Cabinet ordered the Chiefs of Staff Committee to conduct a defence review, to include an assessment of the possibility of compulsory service. Cabinet received the paper and immediately ordered that the target strengths of the Regular Army and the CMF be increased to 28,000 and 35,000 men respectively in the near future. The then Minister for Defence, A.G. Townley, believed that both these targets could be achieved by a combination of vigorous recruiting and improved conditions of service. However, the official historian of this period, Peter Edwards, wrote later that 'there was widespread scepticism that the Army could reach its targets by voluntary means' in a period of full employment.⁵

With preparations accelerated as a result of this Defence Review, the next development was the sudden death of Townley. His successor, P.M.C. Hasluck, requested that the new Minister for the Army, Dr A.J. Forbes, prepare a paper on selective compulsory service. This Army paper dealt with the international circumstances that would warrant such a scheme and importantly, the effect such a scheme would have on the CMF. In particular, it noted that

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3. CRS A5827/1, vol. 7, Submission 215, 'Citizen and Reserve Forces-Availability in War', May 1964.
 4. CRS A5827/1, vol. 7, Decision 251, 'Citizen and Reserve Forces-Availability in Limited War', 28 May 1964.
 5. Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in South East Asian Conflicts, 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992), 271.

if South East Asia were lost and a threat to Australian territory developed, a much larger army would be required and there would be different priorities for the use of the Regular Army. The emphasis would be on expanding the CMF and the introduction of a full-scale national service scheme to provide the trained manpower necessary to expand the army to the required size.

The paper argued that such a threat was not imminent, and therefore the need for a 'selective' service scheme was not apparent. The paper concluded that the Army did not have the manpower to administer and train such a scheme. If a threat developed, *then* a scheme involving two years' full-time service, bolstering the mobilised CMF, could be enacted. Until such a threat occurred, the report warned that a selective service scheme would have an adverse effect on the CMF. The report's assessment of such an effect is worth quoting in full:

The new field force based on selective service would be replacing CMF combat units, and the CMF would be relegated to the secondary role of providing Communications Zone troops and a 'basis for expansion' in Australia. There would be a feeling that the provision of volunteer manpower for Australia's defence has no longer any practical significance and the incentive of serving in the CMF as a national duty would be lost. *The introduction of a selective service scheme would destroy the 'One Army' concept that has been fostered, and result in a serious drop in CMF morale and strength* (emphasis added).⁶

As Defence Minister, Hasluck was unhappy with the recommendations of the Army paper and referred it to the Chiefs of Staff Committee for reconsideration.⁷ The Committee examined the paper in April and agreed with its recommendations, advising Cabinet that 'the introduction of selective service is not required now. Selective Service will be required in time of war when the CMF has been mobilized'. Senator Paltridge, who had replaced Hasluck as Minister for Defence in late April, agreed with the Chiefs of Staff appraisal of the situation and advocated further recruiting drives to bring the Army up to strength.

What had occurred thus far? Besides an alarming turnover of ministers, two distinct views had emerged. The first was that put forward by Cabinet, which argued that a selective service scheme with full-time service and overseas obligations was necessary. The other was that put forward by the Army, which believed that voluntary measures could obtain the required numbers. The Army believed that the strategic situation at

6. CRS A6840/2, Item 3, Paper, 'Selective Service', 19 March 1964.

7. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 24.

the time did *not* warrant such a scheme, and reiterated that the CMF, enjoying the new amendments to the Defence Act, could be called out first and then bolstered by a compulsory service scheme. The Army also made it quite clear that the CMF would be adversely affected by any such compulsory service scheme, which would relegate it to the lowest priority in the order of battle.

By August 1964, events in Indonesia and Vietnam spurred Cabinet to consider such implications on Australian defence preparations. Cabinet's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee met in early September and ordered the Army to conduct a manpower review dealing with voluntary recruiting measures, the ability of the Army to manage a compulsory service scheme and the 'capacity of Australia to sustain an infantry effort over a period of time'.⁸ The Army responded, noting that its manpower targets for the Regular Army would not be reached without compulsory service; a later submission conceded that it was unlikely the CMF would meet its 1968 target of 35,000, despite the changed conditions of service.⁹

Why had the Army changed its stance on compulsory service vis-à-vis the CMF? As late as August, Minister Forbes was still receiving professional military advice against compulsory service. Indeed, that same month, the CGS, Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton, spoke of the new changes to the Defence Act and how it would allow mobilisation of the CMF when the military situation required it. Ian McNeill has written that the Army's 'reluctant conversion' to compulsory service, brought about by poor recruitment forecasts, was not made known to Forbes until late October 1964.¹⁰ The Army's submission to Cabinet calculated that if a selective service scheme was begun in June 1965, the Army could achieve a strength of 28,000 men by June 1967 and by December 1969, it could realise its long-term objective strength of 33,000 men.¹¹ The Defence Minister, Paltridge, was unaware of the Army's new stance on compulsory service, but came to the same conclusion. In November, he provided Cabinet with a manpower review that advocated recruiting and condition of service changes for a last-ditch drive to reach targets. Nonetheless, his report also stated that preparations for a compulsory service should be put in place in case such targets were not met.

Obviously, Cabinet now considered compulsory service a real possibility. On the morning of 4 November Wilton, the CGS, was told that he must provide a brief to Cabinet that day on how the Army could reach a strength of 33,000 men by the end of 1966. Cabinet considered his amended brief that night. He advised that:

8. CRS A5827/1, vol. 12, Eighth Menzies Ministry, FAD Committee Decision No. 451, 3 September 1964.

9. CRS A5827/1, vol. 16, Eighth Menzies Ministry, Submission No 521, 'Services Manpower Review', 3 November 1964.

10. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 25.

11. AWM 101, Item 3, 'Background'.

... the strength of 33,000 should be therefore reached as soon as possible ... [The] Army therefore proposed a graduated compulsory service scheme to build up the strength of the Army as soon as practicable without substantially reducing existing operational capacity.¹²

That night Cabinet decided to introduce a selective service scheme with intakes to commence in June 1965. These National Servicemen would serve two years full-time with the Regular Army, with obligations to serve overseas if required, then followed by three years in an inactive reserve. Soon thereafter, the Government announced that men called up could have the 'option' to serve a longer period of time with the CMF, instead of with the Regular Army.

In the larger picture, however, the die had been cast: the CMF had been removed from the possibility of operational service, and thereby its fortunes in the 1960s and 1970s were altered for the worse. The question posed then is why, when the strategic situation deteriorated, a separate selective service scheme was instituted instead of the CMF being called out. The answer is not simply that both the Regular Army and the CMF could not meet their recruiting targets. This was true, of course, but what the selective service scheme provided was a graduated infusion of manpower for the Regular Army. Thus although the CMF was under-strength in relation to its targets and would have had difficulty mobilising its own divisions to fight as a complete entity, it *could* have provided this infusion of manpower to complement the Regular Army.

The reasons behind the decision to implement a separate scheme can be divided into four areas: economic factors, military requirements, the ambiguity of the Defence Act, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, political considerations. It is well known that in the period we are considering, employment was high and both the Regular Army and the CMF had trouble attracting recruits via voluntary means. So military service, even that of a part-time nature, was unattractive and although the media informed daily of the troubles in Indonesia and Vietnam, the threat did not seem real or urgent enough to trigger a rush to the colours. A selective service scheme, on the other hand, would provide *certainty* in numbers, and would draw from all sections of society ensuring high quality men but without significantly affecting the productivity of the workforce. A scaled-down version of National Service could provide the short-term solutions to its manpower problems. However until its eleventh-hour conversion to the idea of compulsory service, the Army had held that the CMF could be called out first then compulsory service would be introduced to realise this expansion of the Army.

12. CRS A4940/1, C 162, Part 2, letter from Sir John Wilton to Sir John Bunting, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 'Notes on Professional Military Advice', 6 November 1964. This was a copy of the advice Wilton prepared for Cabinet on 4 November 1964.

The CMF's historical impediment, the Defence Act, and all the political baggage involved in mobilising citizen soldiers, helped to preclude the CMF from operational service in Vietnam. This was *despite* the new amendments which allowed the CMF to be called out in a defence emergency, and the new enlistment provisions that ensured that all members of the CMF were able to serve overseas. The Defence Act defined 'Time of Defence Emergency' as 'the period between the publication of a proclamation declaring that a state of defence emergency exists in relation to Australia and the publication of a proclamation that that state of defence emergency no longer exists'.

What is to be made of this particularly cumbersome definition? The defence analyst T.B. Millar wrote that new amendments enabled the CMF 'to deal with situations short of war and not a direct threat to Australia but which, *if unchecked, could gravely threaten Australia's security*' (emphasis added).¹³ His definition of 'defence emergency' was applicable to the situation facing Australia in 1964. Australia was not directly threatened by invasion; however the threat of Communist aggression in Vietnam, and even closer to Australia's shores, the sabre rattling of Indonesia, *were threats that if left unchecked, could deteriorate and place Australia in a poor strategic position*. In the era of the domino theory, the CMF could have been called out under the provisions of the Defence Act to deploy either to Vietnam or to the Indonesian border to help counter against the possible spread of communism, which would have endangered Australia indirectly and in the long term.

Support for this premise was provided by Forbes' speech to the House of Representatives. He stated that:

The CMF will be ready to move by the time it is required by the exigencies of the military situation. The CMF is thus an integral part of our response to a limited war situation. In considering our response to a limited war situation, it is quite wrong just to concentrate attention on the regular element of our 'One Army' concept.¹⁴

Although delivered before the Army converted to the idea of selective service, the speech was interesting for two reasons. First, Forbes clarified his belief that the CMF was an instrument that could be used in a limited war conflict. Second, and perhaps more important, he dismissed the notion that certainly would have been held in some Army circles- that the concept of fighting the 'limited war' was the sole preserve of the Regular Army. Indeed he emphasised that the new Defence Act provisions offered a greater potential scope for CMF deployment.

13. T.B. Millar, *Australia's Defence* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 125.

14. *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives (hereinafter *PD* (HR)), vol. 43, 19 August 1964, 438.

Ian McNeill disagrees with this. He notes certain prerequisites for the CMF to be called out that were *not* met. He argued that the CMF could not be called out

until limited war seemed imminent. Confrontation with Indonesia did not reach that stage. In Vietnam, actual overt aggression, a prerequisite in the definition of limited war, was replaced by infiltration: the conditions of limited war were created in all but name. Consequently a ‘time of defence emergency’ was never proclaimed.¹⁵

This was true, but it was the ‘devil in the detail’ of the definitions used that pose the problems in this analysis. First, nowhere in the Defence Act does it stipulate that all the ‘conditions of limited war’ had to be met before the CMF could be called out. Indeed the Defence Act itself did not clearly define a ‘defence emergency’ and was intentionally ambiguous to provide latitude in defence options. Nevertheless the Government’s objective was clear. When considering the mooted changes to the Act, it indicated that it ‘would wish the Bill to mean that *the Government would be in a position to make a call-up for military purposes, when it was of the opinion that the military situation required it*’ (emphasis added).¹⁶ It is fair to assume, then, that the meeting of strict criteria as to whether a situation could be defined a ‘limited war’ or not, was *not* the Government’s intention when it amended the Defence Act. In other words, both the situation in Vietnam, be it ‘infiltration’ or whatever, and the ‘Confrontation’ with Indonesia, could have been justification enough for the Government to call out the CMF under the new provisions in the Defence Act. If a ‘limited war was not imminent’ as McNeill has suggested, why then did the Government deem it necessary to introduce the selective service scheme to strengthen the Regular Army? The limitations and legalese of the Defence Act were *not* the sole reasons behind the decision not to call out the CMF, because clearly the contemporary events in Southeast Asia constituted a ‘time of defence emergency’. Indeed Major General N.A. Vickery, the CMF Member of the Military Board from 1966 to 1970, argued later that:

If we were right in committing troops to Vietnam War on the scale we have, the foreseeable effects upon the Army were such that *a defence emergency in fact existed* [emphasis added] ... one lesson arising from the Vietnam War is that a defence emergency must be recognized for what it is in relation to the capacity of the Regular Army to meet it, and action taken before the regular force is wrung

15. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 26.

16. CRS A5827/1, vol. 7, Eighth Menzies Ministry, Cabinet Decision 251, ‘Citizen and Reserve Forces—Availability in Limited War’, 28 May 1964.

out and the CMF adversely affected by having to sit in the wings watching it happening.¹⁷

Ironically, the new latitude provided by the 1964 amendments to the Act, which offered the CMF greater opportunities for operational service, also provided the pretext for the Government *not* to call out the CMF. Governments, even those facing external threats, must consider the domestic ramifications of any decisions made and herein lay the answer to this problem. In short, political considerations stopped the CMF from being used in Vietnam. Although the Government wanted to create a greater public awareness of the Southeast Asian situation, it did not want the economy adversely affected or the nation geared to a 'total war' philosophy. The economy, experiencing growth and full employment, was too inelastic to support a serious diversion of resources, both human and otherwise, for mobilisation purposes. The 'selective' nature of the new compulsory service scheme was small enough not to disrupt the economic and daily life of the nation. The battle against Communism was to be conducted off-shore so that Australia would not have to switch from civil economy to war economy to fight an invading foe; a 'business as usual' sentiment was engendered by the Government for this reason.

Selective Service Scheme (1965-1972): Reasons for the CMF's Role

Although the Government widened the CMF's potential role it had to consider the psychological impact on the wider community if it decided to call out the CMF. Unlike the small regular army that was confined to various garrison-like localities, the citizen soldier was, for most of his life, part of the community; there would have been a psychological ripple sent through the community when its members were withdrawn into full-time military service. What, then, was the difference between this and conscripting men into the selective service scheme? There was a tangible difference between what at the outset, at least, was a low-key, limited call-up of young men for the Regular Army and mobilising the CMF. To inform the public that the CMF was required was admitting, at least in the public's perception, that the situation had deteriorated to the extent that the last line of defence, the CMF, was required. Regardless of the fact that the CMF was no longer a solely home defence organisation, historically it was *perceived to be* by the wider community, and the Government did not want the calling-out of the CMF to be interpreted as a last-ditch measure. In addition to this, to call out 25,000 to 30,000 CMF men would have placed a strain on the tightly-stretched economy and the Government sought to avoid this although a partial mobilisation of the CMF was possible. Despite the Government enjoying widespread public support for its stance over Vietnam, it also

17. CRS A6829/1, M/C/3, Minute CMFM 1698, 'CMF and Reserves', Major General N.A. Vickery to Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCGS), 2 October 1970.

sought to minimise the war's impact on Australian daily life to ensure such support was maintained. To lend support to the country's allies in halting Communism in Southeast Asia and to be perceived to be involved in a major war would have had two, distinct and different effects on the political climate. Part of the Government's strategy in this regard was demonstrated in that it did not actually declare war and treated the intervention in Vietnam as a police action.

There was, in other words, no military or legal reason for the introduction of the Selective Service scheme and the failure to call out the CMF. The CMF had the numbers of men required to complement the Regular Army as the Selective Service scheme did, but it was the conscripted men in the Selective Service scheme who replaced the CMF soldiers as the back-up force to the Regular Army. How did the Selective Service scheme itself, specifically the 'option', impact on the CMF?

The scheme required young men to serve two years full time in the Regular Army, followed by three years in an inactive reserve. The National Service Act was amended in 1965 to allow these men to serve overseas. All twenty-year old men were required to register with the Department of Labour and National Service; there were two registration periods, determined by which half-year the man's birthday fell into. Dates, corresponding to a registrant's birthday, were used as the means of drawing the ballot. There would be a call-up of 2100 men in mid-1965 and then another call-up of 2100 men in September. In 1966, there would be four call-ups of 1725 men.

The question of deferments was raised soon thereafter, and among the possible classes were those registrants already in the CMF and those registrants who joined the CMF immediately before the ballot. In the first two registrations, that is January and July 1965, all CMF members *regardless of length of service* could have their full-time obligation deferred indefinitely if 'balloted in', that is if their 'number' came up. Alternatively, if their 'number' did not come up during the ballot, that is if they were 'balloted out', they had no further National Service liability and could leave the CMF if they desired. It was noted that there were 2500 CMF men in the 19-20 year bracket who, if called up and removed from the CMF, would harm the CMF's viability. Commencing with the January 1966 registration, those registrants already in the CMF with not less than one year's efficient service at the date of commencement of registration of their age group could undertake, before the ballot, to render a total of five years' efficient service with the CMF. If they gave this undertaking and were subsequently 'balloted in', they would be granted indefinite deferment provided they served effectively for the five years. If 'balloted out' (i.e. if they were not called up), these men would no longer be liable for National Service and could seek release from the CMF 'subject to the normal conditions for members of the Service concerned'. Under the existing arrangements then, those men who did *not* give this undertaking and were 'balloted in' would be called up and

thus discharged from the CMF; however if not called up, they could leave the CMF with no further liability for call-up.

The other category, that of registrants joining the CMF prior to a ballot, or with less than twelve months' effective service with the CMF at the time of their age group registration, could defer their call-up if they undertook the option to provide six years' efficient service with the CMF. If the men in the latter category gave the undertaking, but became inefficient or did not complete the six years, they would still be liable for call-up, regardless of the result of the original ballot applicable to them. If these men did not sign the undertaking, they would be called-up if 'balloted in', but would not be liable for further call-up if 'balloted out'. In the case of the registrant joining the CMF, he had to apply to the CMF before signing the undertaking and was dependent on the receiving CMF unit accepting him; and he would have to qualify for whatever selection criteria that unit had. Once again, if he gave the undertaking, he had the same liability and deferment criteria applied to him as those with less than one year's service with the CMF. All these proposals were 'designed to provide an incentive for Citizen Force enlistments'.¹⁸ Forbes later told Parliament that any man who chose this option met 'his legal obligation under the National Service Act. It should be noted that the undertaking was only binding on those men who chose the CMF 'option' with less than twelve months' service. If a man had more than twelve months' CMF service and made this undertaking, he was 'protected' if 'balloted in' but if he was 'balloted out' he could leave the CMF at his own accord.

This would be identified as a loophole in due course, but it was not until the early 1970s that moves were made to remove it. In the first year, however, it remained to be seen how many young registrants would realise that this loophole existed and be prepared to serve for at least twelve months in the CMF rather than take their very good chances with the normal ballot. At any rate, as early as September 1965, the House of Representatives heard allegations that the CMF had increased its strength substantially due to registrants 'draft-dodging'.¹⁹

Such allegations aside, the 'option' for National Servicemen to see out their obligations *did* bolster the CMF's strength. By July 1966 the CMF's strength had soared to 32,187 men, which was nearing its target of 33,750 men for that year. In 1965, 4629 registrants opted to serve in the CMF, while in 1966 a further 6664 chose to do so.²⁰ But this came at a cost. Malcolm Fraser, the Minister of the Army, argued that the role of the CMF was two-fold: they were to provide back-up forces in a situation of defence

18. CRS A1946/15, 67/824, SC 65/90, letter, H.A. Bland, Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service, to Hicks, Secretary, Department of Defence, 2 December 1965; and CRS A4940/1, C162 Part 2, 'National Service Policy', Department of Labour and National Service to Minister, 9 November 1964.

19. *PD (HR)*, vol. 47, 23 September 1965, 1188.

20. *Ibid.*, vol. 73, 18 August 1971, 279.

emergency to support the Regular Army and National Servicemen and then to provide for the expansion of the army in a major war. He explained that ‘the present situation in Vietnam does not require the CMF in fulfilment of its stated role’.²¹ This was a crushing demotion for the CMF: its role was now to support the Regular Army and a conscript force, which would probably be increased in time of further defence crisis in preference to the mobilisation of the CMF. The CMF had well and truly become the distant 3rd XV, with little chance of performing its nominal role of serving in a defence emergency.

The CMF had been reduced to an organisation where young men could opt to carry out their obligation as an alternative to full-time service or as a potential pool of individual replacements for the Regular Army. A number of CMF officers and NCOs joined the Regular Army or volunteered for full-time duty with it, thereby further depriving the CMF of some of its most valuable members. These CMF men either filled Regular Army positions or volunteered for service in Vietnam themselves. In 1966, 32 CMF men were accepted for service in Vietnam, but over 300 were on CMF full-time duty with the Regular Army. The difference between a CMF soldier who went on full-time duty and one who joined the ARA for a short-term period of service was that the former was still a member of the CMF and could revert to part-time service whenever he chose to do so. Whether or not a CMF man went on full-time duty or joined the ARA, his civil employment, unlike that of National Servicemen, was *not* protected by the Repatriation (Special Overseas Service) Act and the Defence (Re-Establishment) Act. In other words, it was assumed that civil re-employment prospects were taken into account before the man volunteered for a period of full-time service.²²

Smarting from the slight of having conscripts sent into operations in preference to CMF volunteers, the CMF Member of the Military Board, Major General P.A. Cullen, lobbied the Military Board to allow a composite CMF infantry battalion to serve in Vietnam. According to Cullen, he ‘pushed and pushed’ for this proposal, but the Military Board was not interested and informed him that at any rate it would not get ministerial approval. Instead, a deal was made which in return for him dropping the CMF battalion proposal, the Board would allow selected CMF officers to go to Vietnam on attachment for two to three weeks. Cullen agreed to do this. He later wondered whether he ‘was right or wrong to have given up at that stage’ and felt that his failure to get a CMF battalion to Vietnam his ‘big failure’. However, if he considered this a ‘failure’, his compromise, the CMF observation tours, must be considered a signal success.²³ Commencing in

21. *Ibid.*, vol. 53, 27 September 1966, 1328.

22. *Ibid.*, vol. 54, 4 April 1967, 892. Major General K.G. Cooke noted that his unit, 1st Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment, lost 32 officers and NCOs to a single Regular Army unit in Vietnam: letter, Cooke to author, 12 July 1997.

23. I am greatly indebted to Barrie M. Newman, a South Australian CMF Observer, for assisting me in this section, most of which is taken from his book: *Vietnam Remembered: Notes by South Australian CMF Observers* (Kent Town, SA: CMF Observer Group Vietnam, 2001).

January 1967 and continuing throughout the course of the Australia's involvement in Vietnam, the CMF Observer program allowed approximately 600 CMF officers to visit operational areas in that country.²⁴

The scheme, which soon became highly sought after, allowed six officers or senior NCOs to depart each fortnight and be attached to an Australian unit for a period of fourteen days. Generally the tour was structured around one week with a line unit (determined by the Corps of the CMF Observer) followed by a week visiting the headquarters in Nui Dat and Vung Tau. The nature of the activities undertaken depended on the relationship the CMF observer had with the posted unit and his own wishes.²⁵ There were some CMF observers who created a bad impression by their sloth, but invariably most endeavoured to participate as much as possible and in doing so both experience an operational environment and prove themselves equal to their Regular counterparts. In most cases the term 'CMF Observer' was a misnomer—they could participate to the extent they desired including going on combat operations. To be sure, they were closely supervised but most found that after initial familiarisation they could fit in quite easily. This was assisted by the fact that the Army at that stage was a 'small world' and as a result they often met former cadre staff or CMF men on full time duty whom they knew.

The impressions they took home were invariably the same: the professionalism of the Australian soldier and the inability to tell the difference between National Serviceman and Regular. But by witnessing the easy assimilation of the National Servicemen into the Regular units, they questioned why the CMF was not allowed to serve in Vietnam. The CMF observers felt that had they individually, or their CMF unit collectively, been given the opportunity for some concentrated training, the same high standards could have been achieved with the same level of integration within Regular units. After all, they asked, why call up National Servicemen, who required a period of training anyway, when the CMF was already there? That question plagued many in the CMF then and continues to rankle to this day.

Instead a widespread malaise spread through the CMF as the war progressed. With no role to play, the CMF started to spiral into decline as training resources and cadre staffs were diverted elsewhere and its own soldiers pondered their military future. Turnover rates increased and to make matters worse, its image was tarnished by allegations that it was a haven for draft dodgers. The strength of the CMF by November 1969 was down to

24. *PD (HR)*, vol. 77, 28 March 1972. The Minister for the Army, J.M. Fraser, foreshadowed the introduction of this scheme in Parliament in October 1966.

25. See CRS A3688/25, 174/R1/62, and interview, Major General W.E. Glenny, 2 December 1996.

just 33,983,²⁶ evidence that the National Service scheme, while providing a reasonable trickle of optees, had the adverse effect of turning away *bona fide* volunteers. The CMF entered the 1970s under a cloud of uncertainty. By July 1970, the strength of the CMF had dropped to 31,372 soldiers.²⁷ In December 1970, an Army Headquarters paper highlighted the deep state of malaise in the CMF. The CMF's operational capability was marred by its declining strength and high turnover, which hampered the completion of the three-year CMF training cycle. The report concluded that it was

clear that from the training and manpower aspects, there is no prospect of the CMF under present conditions approaching an acceptable unit standard of operational readiness ... No real solution is possible while the two factors of time available and turnover rates pertain.

At any rate the report condemned the CMF over 'the uncertainty of its availability' and concluded that the CMF was required 'primarily for the defence of Australia in the long term' since the possibility of it being required to augment regular troops in Southeast Asia was 'unlikely'. The report concluded that the

[I]mmitations inherent in a part-time force make it imperative that such a force concentrate its efforts on the most likely situation ... [which would be] a significant ground threat to Australia and her territories, and the CMF ... should be organized, trained and equipped primarily against that situation.²⁸

This was a further downgrading in the CMF's role as even the token possibility of it being sent overseas (except to the very near north) was repudiated and instead it was made clear that home defence was its sole purpose. Yet the report was accurate in its assessment of the CMF in 1970: it *was* in a poor state and was a far cry from the CMF in 1965-1966, which could have mustered (at least) a composite battalion for Vietnam. The situation was indicative of what could be called the 'allocated role/training priority spiral' which dogged the CMF and later the Army Reserve (ARES) from the 1960s through to recent times. The spiral functions when the CMF has its operational role downgraded, which means its priority in training and resource allocation is also downgraded.

This self-fulfilling prophecy was exemplified by the decay in the CMF in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was made clear to the CMF that it should prepare only for

26. CRS A6837/1, Item 9, DCGS; Minutes 1970, 'CMF and Reserves—Paper', 25 March 1970. Included in the figure of volunteers were 6670 soldiers under the age of twenty 'whose intentions on National Service registration were unknown'.

27. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, 'Review of CMF and Reserves', Office of DCGS, December 1970.

28. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, 'Review of the CMF and Reserves', Office of the DCGS, December 1970.

the distant possibility of mainland invasion and that the equipment and training priority would be commensurate with that objective. Indeed, an Army Headquarters report from mid-1971 concluded damningly that 'CMF training should be directed towards the defence of Australia. There is no apparent justification in training the present CMF for overseas operations. They can be rapidly converted to overseas type operations as a threat develops'.²⁹ The lack of a clearly defined role was one of many factors which harmed the development of the CMF. Other factors included the growth of the affluent, permissive society, the public perception that the Australian Regular Army could handle most situations short of general mobilisation (thereby negating the need for the CMF) and that the existence of National Service was believed to cancel out the need for volunteers.

In June 1972 there were 26,588 soldiers in the CMF of whom 6935 were National Service optees. When the Whitlam Government was elected, it suspended the National Service Act and announced that all CMF optees would have their service obligations waived. The CMF suffered the inevitable exodus of optees and disaffected volunteers and by June 1973 the strength of the CMF had dropped to 22,592 soldiers.³⁰ As one CMF soldier put it, when the Selective Service scheme was cancelled, 'most of the National Service people still in the system simply walked off'.³¹

Although the second National Service scheme provided a steady injection of manpower, the manifold effects of the Selective Service scheme left the CMF in a poorer state. Besides these effects, the introduction of conscription spelled the end of the CMF's pretensions that it was an immediate back-up force to the Regular Army. It was no longer a true reserve 2nd XV, but a distant 3rd XV which trained for the remote possibility of defending Australia against invasion. Even this lacklustre task was threatened when military planning pointed towards the Regular Army assuming this role. Yet realistically, by 1972 what role could the CMF have undertaken? The malaise was well entrenched, compounded by the tangible effects of being on the lower end of training priorities for years. Many senior CMF officers at the time identified the source of the CMF's woes as its lack of operational service since 1945 and more specifically the failure to call it out for service in Vietnam. Whatever the reason may have been for the CMF not being called out, the CMF's political, social and military position suffered incalculably because it did not see active service in Vietnam. Indeed, the CMF was one of the greatest casualties of the Vietnam War.

29. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, Minute AD 30/71, 'CMF and Reserves Study Progress Report', DAD to DCGS, 14 July 1971.

30. *Commonwealth Year Book* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1974), 97.

31. Letter, Jim Shannon to author, 22 September 2001.

Thirty years after the conclusion of Australian involvement in Vietnam, are there any lessons to be learned? Recent events have demonstrated quite clearly that the Army and the Government *have* learned from previous errors and have put in place legislative and non-legislative measures that enable Reservists to play a greater part in defence. The need for citizen soldiers to be used in future operations has been clearly noted in recent Defence White Papers. So, while a CMF battalion was not raised for service in Vietnam, an infantry company of Reservists *will* deploy to East Timor. In terms of lessons learned, surely this is ‘proof of the pudding’. Some may suggest that this is not much, but it is a start. In 1971 Major General Cullen wrote of the ability of Reservists to contribute actively to the nation’s military operations:

It is well to remember that the efficiency of a Citizen Force *reacts proportionally to the task given to it by the Government* (emphasis added) ... The capacity of the CMF to do the job is undoubted—provided it has the manpower and the equipment. It is now up to the Government to define more exactly the role and possible tasks of the CMF and give it the tools to do the job.³²

That comment is more topical than ever.

32. Major General P.A. Cullen, ‘The role of our citizen soldiers’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 1970.

The Australian Army and the Vietnam War in Retrospect

Alan Ryan

Introduction

Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was predominantly shaped by the experience of operations conducted by its Army. At the organisational level, the Department of Defence had only a general oversight of operations and the joint arrangements resulting in the creation of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) had yet to be made.¹ The Australian troops that were committed to Vietnam were predominantly employed in a counter-insurgency role or were engaged with North Vietnamese main force troops fighting a very unconventional campaign. It was a war that emphasised the importance of land power, close combat and a human presence on the battlefield. It was also a war that was waged at the operational level. Operations were conducted as a minor part of a greater multinational effort, not to achieve an immediate strategic outcome. Australian forces waged a very competent series of campaigns as a part of the 30-year long war to prevent the communist take-over of Indochina. However, there was no question that the Australian contribution would be decisive, or even that it would alter the course of the war one jot.

Furthermore, the absence of a clear strategic purpose to the attritional conflict that developed in the latter half of the 1960s subjected the Army's efforts to widespread public criticism. In the aftermath of the war, the confusion over the role played by the Army caused it to be marginalised as a tool of national security policy. As a result of the strategic reassessments that followed the war, it was the Army that suffered the most

This chapter is the product of wide-ranging discussions with a number of veterans of the Vietnam conflict as well as members who served in the Australian Army after the war concluded. It is impossible to acknowledge them all, but I would like to express my particular appreciation to General Sir Francis Hassett, AC, KBE, CB, DSO, LVO (Retd.); Lieutenant General John Coates, AC, MBE (Retd.); Lieutenant Colonel Neil James and Warrant Officer Ian Kuring. My apologies to those many others unnamed who helped with advice in the preparation of this work—you know who you are. The views expressed in this chapter remain my own responsibility and are in no way the official position of the Australian Army or the Department of Defence.

1. D.M. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1986), 59-60, 66.

from cuts to defence and it lost many of its functions. More importantly, it failed to develop new capabilities. Australia's ability to project land power has been diminished ever since. To understand Australia's strategic situation today, it is necessary to examine the consequences of the war for Australia's land forces.

Australia's role in the Vietnam War represented the longest involvement in a single conflict that Australian forces have been required to sustain. Approximately 50,000 Australians served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1973 and for more than a decade Australia's military resources were devoted to sustaining this effort. The task of fighting a counter-insurgency campaign in South Vietnam shaped Australian military planning for more than a generation; its influence is still felt 30 years later. The immediate post-Vietnam period saw a shift in strategic thinking from the concept of forward defence to a policy focused on the territorial defence of Australia. Working backwards from the end of the Australian Army's involvement in the war, this essay analyses the influence of the Vietnam experience on Army planning. It focuses on the strategic, operational and tactical consequences of Australia's ten-year war.

Reading (and Misreading) the 'Lessons' of Australia's Role in Vietnam

For those who study such things, the generally high esteem that the ADF enjoys in the eyes of the Australian public, following its successful role in helping establish peace and security in East Timor, is somewhat ironic. The popularity of the Services marks the end of a period of 30 years during which the prevailing attitude to the military was at best indifference and which, more often, questioned the need for the continuing existence of an Australian warfighting capacity. Since the end of the Cold War, the Australian Defence Force has been involved in an escalating tempo of military operations ranging from Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, and the Gulf to Bougainville, the Solomons, Afghanistan and, most notably, East Timor. Most of these operations have required a substantial land force component. Australian troops are, once again, serving in an expeditionary capacity overseas and have made a significant contribution to regional security. The conditions of insecurity arising from the War on Terrorism appear to guarantee that Australian troops will continue to serve—in coalition with other military forces—in regional and extra-regional theatres. The era of strategic paralysis that followed Vietnam appears to be ending, but the generation of policy-makers who emerged in the aftermath of the war need reminding that the latter stages of Cold War stasis were the exception in Australia's strategic circumstances. Both before President Nixon proclaimed the Guam Doctrine and since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international scene was dominated by conditions of protean insecurity. In the 1950s and 1960s Australia needed agile, deployable and effective land forces to serve its national interests in cooperation

with other states that shared those interests. That need has re-emerged and it is no longer possible to determine national security policy by reference to a populist misreading of the lessons of Vietnam.

After Vietnam, successive Australian governments concentrated the efforts of the defence force on the territorial defence of Australia, a trend that long-time Indochina correspondent Denis Warner described as 'a retreat rather than an advance in Australia's relations with Asia'.² That policy is now moribund, though its partisans continue to fight a rear-guard action. The Minister for Defence, Senator Robert Hill, recently spelled out the reality of Australia's current strategic situation in a speech at the Australian Defence College. In that speech, he concluded that the:

defence of Australia and its interests does not stop at the edge of the air-sea gap. It probably never made sense to conceptualise our security interests as a series of diminishing concentric circles around our coastline, but it certainly does not do so now. We are seeing a fundamental change to the notion that our security responsibilities are confined largely to our own region. The ADF is both more likely to be deployed and increasingly likely to be deployed well beyond Australia.³

In strategic terms, the Minister's statement reflects a dramatic shift in Australian policy and marks the end of the negative legacy of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. This essay considers some aspects of the nature of that legacy as well as the reasons that the debacle in Vietnam limited our national strategic vision.

Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War ended up becoming deeply unpopular with the broader Australian community. This fact, together with the slurs heaped on those who were sent to fight the war, has served to disguise the fact that the defence forces were also deeply wounded by the war. As the war progressed those who fought it were increasingly the subject of sustained attack from a variety of groups in society. The antipathy towards the Army that arose from the war was to last for more than a generation. This hostility was particularly evident in the new left movements in the

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2. Denis Warner, 'General Coates opens the door', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, April-May 1992, 16-18 at 18; see also Statement by L.H. Barnard, MP, Minister of Defence, *Australian Defence: Major Decisions Since December 1972* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975).
 3. Senator the Hon. Robert Hill, Minister for Defence, 'Beyond the White Paper: Strategic Directions for Defence', Address to the Defence and Strategic Studies Course, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 18 June, 2002, <www.minister.defence.gov.au/HillSpeechtpl.cfm?CurrentId=1605>, downloaded 25 June 2002.

universities and in the Trade Unions.⁴ In the current atmosphere of almost general support for the efforts of the ADF, it is troubling to remember that prior to the 1971 ANZAC Day parade, the Melbourne Shrine was defaced with anti-war slogans and other demonstrations targeted the veterans of earlier wars. Rejection of the military continued to be a feature of the post-war period. The Army drew particular obloquy during the latter 1970s and early 1980s and—in deep contrast with the situation today—veterans marching in ANZAC Day parades were abused and even assaulted by protestors. At the 1984 parade in Melbourne, the Women against Rape in War and the Anti-Anzac Day Collective attempted to disrupt the march and assaulted veterans and march organisers. As an institution, the Army responded by turning in on itself and losing its previously broad base within Australian society. Within a few years of the end of its involvement in Vietnam, which coincided with the end of the National Service scheme, the Army had become a stranger to the society it existed to serve.

At the national strategic level, in the political climate that emerged after Australia withdrew its combat forces from Vietnam, the defence forces were marginalised as an instrument of state power and almost became an irrelevance. The confusion surrounding Australian involvement in the war at the time that it occurred, combined with the misapprehensions and mythologies that rapidly developed in its wake, resulted in a short-term and ideologically driven national security policy. National memories of the war and the role that Australia's Army played in it are often quite bizarre or are imported from the (quite distinct) American experience. The popular confusion that arose from the war has shaped public and political attitudes to the use of military power. As the editors of the 1991 book *Vietnam Days: Australia and the impact of Vietnam* concluded, the various memories of the war 'are indicative of a superficial appeal to older and largely unquestioned myths, masking a profound and damaging inconclusion'.⁵ The assumptions that underlay that policy continue to influence some schools of Australian strategic thought today—though the harsh realities of the world since September 11 have forced a re-evaluation of Australia's defensive and insular security philosophy.

Quite apart from the vexed issues of whether Australian involvement in the war can be justified and whether it was fought in the right way, there can be no doubt that the Australian Government failed to achieve the objectives it sought to achieve by going

4. See Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997); Tony Duras, 'Trade Unions and the Vietnam war', <www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/workers.htm>, downloaded 25 September 2002; John Percy, 'The campaign against the Vietnam War', <www.angelfire.com/pr/red/vietnam_war/campaign_against_the_vietnam_war.htm>, downloaded 24 July 2002; Anonymous, 'Protest and Dissent', <<http://perandis.tripod.com/protest.htm>>, downloaded 18 July 2002; Michael Matteson and Geoff Mullen, 'Australian Draft Resistance and the Vietnam War', *Radical Tradition*, <<http://takver.com/history/matteson.htm>>, downloaded 18 July 2002.

5. Peter Pierce, Jeffrey Grey, and Jeff Doyle, *Vietnam Days: Australia and the impact of Vietnam* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1991), 285.

into the war. The main aim of the Menzies Government in committing troops was to build credit in the alliance with the United States in the expectation that it would remain committed to the region and return the compliment should Australia require assistance in the future.⁶ In the context of the Cold War and given Australia's limited military resources, this was not an unreasonable objective. What actually happened was that the failure of United States' policy in Vietnam led to its partial disengagement from the region and the promulgation of the Guam Doctrine. Stung by American losses in Vietnam, President Nixon made it clear that allies such as Australia had primary responsibility for their own security in regional conflicts.⁷ After the Liberal Government withdrew the Task Force from Vietnam, it responded to the Guam Doctrine with a defence policy that emphasised self-reliance; it had no other choice.⁸ However, within a year the Whitlam Government took that doctrine and used it to emasculate the Services and to limit national security policy to a narrow conception of territorial defence. The chief victim of the isolationist policy of those years was the Army. From being an active tool of national policy, heavily engaged in promoting regional peace and stability, it became Australia's third line of defence, to be called upon only if the Air Force and Navy had failed to block the Air-Sea-Land gap to Australia's north.⁹

With the end of National Service, the number of soldiers on full-time service shrank from 44,500 (including National Servicemen) to 29,000. By June 1973 the available field force only numbered 9700—hardly the basis to mount, sustain and rotate the deployment of anything larger than a battalion-sized force on operations.¹⁰ In fact, until the deployment to East Timor in September 1999, the only overseas deployment of any size was of a battalion group to Somalia in 1993—and then only for three months. Despite a small increase in numbers in the late 1970s and early 1990s, the strength of the Army has remained at lower than Vietnam War levels since 1993. The size of the Army currently stands at approximately 25,500 and the available combat component of the Army currently stands at 17,000. As a 'tooth to tail' ratio, this is an impressive figure. However, this would not provide a basis for successive rotations in the event of the Army being called upon to mount and sustain another operation on the scale of the

6. See *Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam*, paper tabled in accordance with the Prime Minister's statement to the House of Representatives, 13 May 1975.

7. President Richard M. Nixon, 'Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam', 3 November 1969, <http://www.nixonfoundation.org/Research_Center/1969_pdf_files/1969_0425.pdf>.

8. Department of Defence, *Australian Defence Review* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, March 1972), 9.

9. Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901-2001* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 370.

10. Ibid, p. 285; Joan Beaumont, *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*, 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', vol. VI (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 128; Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', vol. I (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 225.

East Timor commitment. Not all troops are available at once, as one third of the force may be recovering from their last rotation while another third is preparing for the next deployment. At the same time, members have to fit in professional development training and perhaps even spend some time on leave with their families. When the Army was called upon to mount and sustain land operations in East Timor, it was open to question whether it could meet the bidding of government. It did so, but whether it could have done so while conducting operations at anything more than a low level still remains open to question.¹¹ Since Vietnam, Australia has lost its capacity to field land forces for anything other than low-level operations or as a very minor part of a larger coalition. The loss of that capability is the product of the narrowing of Australia's strategic vision in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

The Strategic Consequences of Operations in Vietnam

The Australian Army's role in Vietnam was an unusual one—unprecedented in many ways—and it reflected the circumstances that would result in this becoming the most unpopular of all the conflicts in which it had been involved. As Robert Hall, a Vietnam veteran and author of *Combat Battalion*, concluded:

By 1969 the best commanders—at Task force and COMAFV level—were those who understood that the war was a lost cause. They saw Australia's involvement for what it was: a diplomatic gesture rather than a military necessity. They conducted operations accordingly, keeping casualties as low as possible while aiming to achieve limited military goals.¹²

The awareness that the objectives of the war did not match the manner in which it was being waged was not confined to the theatre of operations. In 1973, the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir Mervyn Brogan, concluded that:

[The] US and other Free World countries including Australia as democratic nations have been fighting for the freedom of a people but have done so with one hand tied behind their backs. There is no doubt that Clausewitz would turn in his grave at this approach to war and would probably agree ... that in these circumstances, militarily, it was an unwinnable war.¹³

11. Australian National Audit Office, *Management of Australian Defence Force Deployments to East Timor*, Audit Report No. 38 2001-02 (Canberra: ANAO, 2002), 75, 86-8.

12. Robert A. Hall, *Combat Battalion: The Eighth Battalion in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 19.

13. Lieutenant General Sir Mervyn Brogan, 'The Australian Army—Points and Problems', *The RUSI Journal*, March 1973, 54-60 at 54.

In the two decades of its existence, this was not the Regular Army's first limited war. Australian troops had served as a minor part of the United Nations coalition in Korea. They had also been involved in counter-insurgency warfare in the Malayan Emergency and in Confrontation with Indonesia between 1962 and 1966. These conflicts can be characterised as having a collective security component. In Korea, Australian troops fought as a part of a UN force within a Commonwealth Brigade. In Malaya and during Confrontation, as a part of the Commonwealth forces, they contributed to counter-insurgency operations to assist Malaysia in its passage to independence and to assure its security after independence occurred.

What made the involvement in Vietnam different was that there was no historical link to Indochina and Australian interests were not directly involved. At the level of strategic policy development there was considerable concern at the spread of revolutionary communist movements within the region. However, in this instance Australian troops were not fighting to prevent communism from reaching Australia. Malaysia, New Guinea and Indonesia were more proximate to Australian national security. Australia's contribution to America's war effort in Vietnam was driven by the desire to build up credit in its security relationship with it.¹⁴ Had the Australian commitment remained low-level and not involved conscripted soldiers, it is likely that it would have passed without much comment in Australia as previous operations had done. However, the operation came to involve National Servicemen; the commitment escalated to consume most of the Army's efforts (to say nothing of the other services); and the casualties in the nasty little microcosm of a war in Phuoc Tuy Province continued to mount. The Army's involvement in the war reflected the classic conundrum facing a junior coalition partner that was sacrificing its blood and its treasure but remained impotent in a strategic sense. That no immediate national interests were involved, as well as the fact that the Government had not identified an exit strategy, made it inevitable that the troops would have to be withdrawn at some stage.

Quite apart from the operational experience of involvement in the war, both the Army and Australian society as a whole were strongly affected by the dilemmas arising from a limited commitment as a junior ally of the United States. Australia suffered some 500 deaths over a ten-year involvement in the war. While these figures were small in proportion to American casualties, they had a significant impact in Australia, particularly as 202 of the dead were conscripts.¹⁵ For the first few years of the war, the Australian commitment enjoyed bipartisan political support within Parliament. The Army's initial

14. J.D.B. Miller, 'Australia in Vietnam: Necessary Insurance or Burnt Fingers?', *The Round Table* (July 1970), 295-302.

15. Peter Dennis et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 620.

deployment to Vietnam of a regular army training team went almost unnoticed—counter-insurgency operations in Southeast Asia were hardly new, and beside, these troops were professionals. With the commitment of infantry battalions, the interest of the general community became more directly engaged. By the late 1960s opposition to the war mounted, mirroring the anti-war movement in America. The Australian involvement had an extra dimension in that while the Army had a clear vision of its role in Phuoc Tuy Province, it had no real influence on the overall course of the war. It has been estimated that, at the peak of the United States' commitment of forces, the Australian contribution represented less than 1.5 per cent of the overall military effort.¹⁶ With no end to the war in sight and no decisive outcome likely, it is not surprising that public opinion helped drive the decision of the Government to bring the Task Force home in 1971. The training team followed a year later.¹⁷ It should not be assumed that the Government gave in to anti-war sentiment. It is often forgotten that the Australian decision to withdraw its forces was not made in a vacuum. President Nixon's policy of 'Vietnamisation' was well advanced in 1971 and over 400,000 US troops had been brought home by the time the Australian Task Force left.¹⁸

Australia had entered the war to buttress its alliance relationship with the US. What is more, fighting communist subversion in Southeast Asia was consistent with its long-standing doctrine of Forward Defence. However, the government then failed to follow through on its commitment. It adopted a surprisingly passive approach to exploiting its investment of troops. In his work on higher command during the war, David Horner pointed out that

[t]here is no evidence that the Australian government took the opportunity ... to question the military conduct of the war, either at the grand strategic level or at the level of operational policy within Vietnam. Certainly the Australian contribution was so small in relation to the Americans' that we could hardly have expected much say in the running of the war, but consideration could have been given to gaining the maximum political influence from the nature of our contribution ... In the absence of direction from Canberra respective commanders of the Australian Force and 1 ATF [First Australian Task Force] made decisions as they saw fit within the framework of the initial directive.¹⁹

16. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Efficient and Effective Army* (Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, August 2000), 20.

17. See: Frank Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 178-182; Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War*; T.B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, 2nd edn (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1991), 174-6, 180, 222-5, 334.

18. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 636, 684-5.

19. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War*, 57.

The Vietnam experience demonstrated that in a complex security environment the commitment of Australian land forces requires a clear political vision of how they will be employed and for what purpose. That did not occur in this case. Any coalition relationship must be founded on clear understandings at the highest level. As Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of Defense, recently pointed out in the context of the War on Terrorism, coalitions are important but the mission must determine the coalition and not the other way around.²⁰ The lesson cuts both ways—it is not enough for a major power to throw resources and troops into a conflict in the expectation that its military might will prevail and that lesser partners simply provide another flag on the ground to bolster the perceived legitimacy of the operation. On the other hand, junior partners have a positive responsibility, both to their domestic constituencies and to the mission in which they are investing their young men, to ensure that their efforts are not wasted. Australia's war in Vietnam demonstrated that it could not make an open-ended commitment to a US-led coalition—particularly one involving land operations where the possibility of suffering casualties was high. The political dimension of combined operations not only involves the government and the military, but ultimately the electorate as well.

The most significant strategic consequence of the war was that it facilitated the Whitlam Government's abandonment of the long-standing policy of 'Forward Defence' that had prevailed during the period of the Liberal ascendancy during the 1950s and 1960s. The realities imposed by the adoption of the Guam Doctrine had already led to a significant re-assessment of this doctrine. In March 1972 David Fairbairn, the Minister for Defence in the McMahon Liberal Government, tabled the Department of Defence's *Australian Defence Review* in Parliament. While accepting the need for greater self-reliance, the review reiterated the importance of the defence force continuing to make an active contribution to regional stability. It rejected a formulaic approach to defence policy and held that

[t]he best defence of Australia's interests is seen to go beyond the defence of Australian territory alone. It calls for military capability, evident to other countries, to project Australian strength beyond the continental boundaries. In this view Australian security would be best promoted if, drawing on increasingly self-reliant military strength, we continue to recognise and support the security interests which we share with those who are a part of our special strategic environment. This implies a need to select carefully what we are capable of and what serves to strengthen our friends in that environment.²¹

20. Donald H. Rumsfeld, 'Transforming the Military', *Foreign Affairs* 81: 3 (May/June 2002), 20-32 at 31.

21. Department of Defence, *Australian Defence Review*, 2.

While stressing that Australia would need to be more self-reliant, the review reflected the fact that President Nixon's Guam Doctrine did not represent total disengagement from the region. In fact, it contained guarantees that the United States would provide military and economic assistance to its allies if they were attacked. Accordingly, 'greater self-reliance' was interpreted to mean that Australia would not rely on its allies for integral support but would build increased self-sufficiency in respect of strategic lift, reconnaissance, artillery, air strike and sea control.²²

As self-reliance was a concept that had been introduced by the Liberal Government, it does not figure at all in Labor Party policy either before or after the 1972 Federal election.²³ Instead the main focus of Labor policy was the territorial defence of Australia from foreign incursions. In May 1973, Lance Barnard, the Defence Minister in the Labor Government, announced to Parliament:

We are less apprehensive concerning the social and political changes that are taking place in the environment to our north, and Australia will no longer concern itself with military arrangements for the mobilisation of force to intervene simply because of the prospect for change. The Government favours programmes of political conciliation and cooperation rather than military intervention.²⁴

Consequently, not only was the Army reduced in size but it lost a substantial element of its reason for existence. Lance Barnard's announcement that a 'Labor Government would give effect to the overwhelming feeling in the ranks of its members and supporters that it is no longer appropriate for Australian troops to be stationed on the ground in South East Asia', was an assertion of an undeniably isolationist stance. That policy deprived Australia of the main plank of its security engagement in the region and minimised the ability of the defence forces to help shape regional security for many years to come.²⁵

22. Ibid. 27, para. 59.

23. See for example: 'Defence Policy' Statement issued at press conference held in Brisbane, 18 October 1971, by Mr E.G. Whitlam and Mr L.H. Barnard; L. Barnard MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Statement on Defence 11 April 1972; *Extracts in Defence and Foreign Affairs from the Australian Labor Party's Platform, Constitution and Rules*, as approved by the 30th Federal Conference, 1973, Surfers Paradise.

24. Statement by the Hon. L.H. Barnard MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, 'Australian Defence Policy', 30 May 1973, 10. (The reference is to the copy of the speech provided to the Secretary of the Department of Defence—the speech may be found in the House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* on 30 May 1973 at 2871; however the CPD transcript departs in some minor details from the speaker's script.)

25. L.H. Barnard MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Speech to the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, 29 March 1972.

It is instructive to follow the development of the notion of Australian defence self-reliance. From its origins as an operational concept, it evolved into a strategic imperative. The 1976 Defence White Paper, which was commissioned by the Whitlam Labor Government but released by its Liberal successor, asserted the need for increased self-reliance but accepted that

[o]ur alliance with the US gives substantial grounds for confidence that in the event of a fundamental threat to Australia's security, US military support would be forthcoming. However, even though our security may be ultimately dependent on US support, we owe it to ourselves to be able to mount a national defence effort that would maximise the risks and costs of any aggression.²⁶

The next White Paper, titled *The Defence of Australia* and released in 1987, claimed that its predecessor had 'failed to give substance or direction to the concept' of defence self-reliance.²⁷ *The Defence of Australia* held that 'Australia must have the military capability to prevent an enemy attacking us successfully in our sea and air approaches, gaining a foothold on our territory, or extracting political concessions through the use of military force'.²⁸ This policy required a 'force-in-being to defeat any challenge to our sovereignty and specific capabilities to respond effectively to attacks within our area of direct military interest'.²⁹ For the Army this meant that its role was effectively limited to deployment within 'Australia and its territories'.³⁰

Self-reliance began as a sensible way of maximising the potential of Australian forces deployed on operations. It became the cornerstone of national strategic policy. Without a very clear idea of what the lessons of Vietnam were, two generations of policy-makers were at least convinced that there would be 'no more Vietnams'—whatever that meant. A sound idea that was born of operational experience and strategic reality became, in turn, an ideological aspiration and an institutional truth. The original concept did not suggest, as it has come to mean, that Australia felt that it was possible 'to defend Australia without relying on the combat forces of other countries'—a laudable but perhaps impossibly ambitious aim.³¹ The idea of strategic self-reliance was marginally tenable in the period of Cold War bi-polar deadlock that followed the disengagement of the United States from Vietnam. In the era of protean insecurity that has followed the

26. Hon. D.J. Killen, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976), 10.

27. Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia 1987* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service), x.

28. *Ibid.*, 1.

29. *Ibid.*, 2.

30. *Ibid.*, 53.

31. *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), xi.

end of the Cold War, self-reliance has lost all meaning. In a globalised world, states need to provide for their individual security by taking collective action. Vietnam provided an object lesson in how not to manage an alliance relationship with a great and powerful ally, but the policies that emerged in the aftermath of the war had a negative impact on the Army's capacity to conduct operations in anything but the most limited geographical area. Throughout the post-Vietnam era, the unspoken guarantee of Australian security continued to be that in a global conflict 'US support would be forthcoming'. In the meantime, the Army lost its ability to mobilise, deploy and sustain combat operations in support of identified national interests—wherever those interests might be found.

The Operational Consequences of the War

A great deal has been written about the disillusionment of the junior and middle rank levels of the US Army's officer corps during the Vietnam War and the lessons that they have since carried into their doctrine for post-Cold War operations. Colin Powell's critical assessments of the US military role in Vietnam have been particularly influential in forging a more focused use of American military power.³² Although the officers that Australia sent to Vietnam had no influence on the military-strategic prosecution of the war, they garnered significant operational experience. Unlike the Americans, they could not blame their government for the course that the war took. Instead, they bore the heavy responsibility for conducting operations, knowing that the sacrifices that they and their men made were largely tokenistic.

Writing about the commanding officer and the majors within his own battalion, 8RAR, Bob Hall pointed out:

They provided a stable, experienced platform on which the cohesion and professionalism of the battalion would rest. Each man's career was strongly oriented towards Australia's region, particularly Southeast Asia. Of these nine officers, all had previous service somewhere in the region. Eight had served in Malaya (or Malaysia) and four had already served in South Vietnam. Three ... had served in other parts of the region including Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei, Borneo and Cambodia. Five had served in Papua New Guinea where, if they had not been at war, they were at least familiarised with the difficulties of jungle operations in areas with poor infrastructure. The professional orientation of these men was towards the conduct of counter-revolutionary war in South East Asia.³³

32. See Colin Powell, *A Soldier's Way: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), 132-3, 148-9, 302-3.

33. Hall, *Combat Battalion*, 9.

These were professional soldiers whose previous experience had been in small-scale operations and who had served with the reasonable expectation that their work might make a difference in the complex security situation of the era. In Vietnam, the rapid American build-up from 1965 dwarfed the scale of the Australian commitment. There was no question that the Australian Task Force would make a significant difference in the outcome of the war. As operations in Phuoc Tuy Province could not be conducted in isolation, the Australians could not even segregate their own security situation from the rest of the war. It was thus impossible to devise a campaign plan that would win a decisive victory, though the conduct of operations by the Task Force effectively constituted a campaign in Phuoc Tuy Province.³⁴ Instead of seeing their operational focus driven by mission objectives, the Australians witnessed what former officer and defence commentator, Peter Young, described as

a sorry unmilitary, unplanned, piece-meal build-up which bore little or no relevance to military needs—a helter-skelter political build-up . . . complete with the statutory assorted persons and a succession of commanders committed to a policy of optimism and the avoidance of casualties.³⁵

Commenting after the announcement of the troop withdrawal, Young argued that: ‘[i]n the combat commands they knew better than anyone else the realities behind the bullshit about winning the war, the myth of Vietnamisation and the hidden inadequacies of the force’.³⁶ Young knew what he was talking about. As a lieutenant, he had been a member of the Australian Army Training Team (AATTV) when it was first deployed to Vietnam in 1962, and later worked within the American intelligence community in Vietnam. As a major, he served as the assistant military attaché in Saigon. Denis Warner records that as an intelligence ‘insider’, Young forecast the Tet Offensive of early 1968 and had his assessment suppressed by the Australian Embassy.³⁷ The Vietnam War produced a number of officers—Young and Serong among them—who had an instinctive grasp at the operational level of what this war was all about. What is remarkable, is that outside the limited pool of professional military historians, most other Australian historians have shown little interest in what the Army thought about the war. Given that the soldiers were the ones who fought it, and who learned the lessons of coalition partnership the hard way, it might be a good idea. Without a balanced vision of Australia’s role in the

34. R.W. Cable, *An Independent Command: Command and Control of the 1st Australian Task Force in Vietnam* (Canberra: The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 2000), 10-11.

35. Peter Young, ‘What future for the Army’, *The Bulletin*, 13 November 1971, 20-2 at 21.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Denis Warner, *Not with guns alone* (Melbourne: Hutchison, 1977), 146-7, 152-3.

conflict, what is taught in our schools and universities is likely to remain frozen in a time-warp dating back to the passionate, but naive, ideological positions that many academics adopted during the late 1960s.

Despite the failure to make the most of the operational experience built up by those with the most immediate involvement in the war, the experience acquired by the Army provided a potent stimulus for professional and intellectual engagement with the problems of counter-insurgency warfare. Richard Bushby, a serving Army officer, has published a monograph demonstrating that during the period of the war, soldiers and officers wrote a large number of articles for professional publications such as the *Australian Army Journal* and *Australian Infantry*. Many of these articles were republished in military journals around the world. Bushby concluded that this activity revealed ‘an active practical and intellectual interest in tactics and doctrine, which was evident from the bottom of the army to its top’.³⁸ With a bright, experienced and educated officer corps, the Vietnam years witnessed a higher level of professional engagement with the problems of waging war than had ever been seen in the Army before—and probably since. In the years following the war, the opportunities for Army officers to provide successive governments with military-strategic and professional operational advice became increasingly marginalised. In 1974, the establishment of a bureaucratic ‘diarchy’ within the Department of Defence saw many of the professional roles of the military taken over by generalist public servants.³⁹ The task of preparing for war was overtaken by the responsibility of preparing for the self-reliant defence of Australia. Given the extreme improbability of such an eventuality—short of a global nuclear conflagration—the bureaucracy settled into the convenient routine of administering a peacetime army. For their part, burnt by the experience of Vietnam, the thinkers within the Army learnt that it did not matter what they knew if that knowledge did not fit with the prevailing bureaucratic, political or ideological orthodoxies. Consequently, since the end of the Vietnam War, the intellectual climate within the Army has been predominantly ‘mechanistic, materialist and narrowly functional’ and (with a few notable exceptions) most officers have not thought it worth establishing an intellectual approach to their trade.⁴⁰

38. R.N. Bushby, *‘Educating an Army’: Australian Army Doctrinal Development and the Operational Experience in South Vietnam 1965-72* (Canberra: The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1998), 92.

39. See T.B. Millar, ‘The Political—Military Relationship in Australia’, in Desmond Ball (ed.), *Strategy and Defence: Australian Essays* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 279; also Lieutenant Colonel Neil James, *Reform of the Defence Management Paradigm: A Fresh View* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, Australian Defence Force Academy, 2000), 12-14, 18-20.

40. See Michael Evans, *Western Armies and the Use of Military History since 1945* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1997), 1.

The years that followed the war saw considerable disenchantment and confusion within the Army. Reared on the digger tradition, many soldiers were surprised and dismayed on returning home to find that large sections of Australian society rejected them. Unsubstantiated claims that the Australians had committed atrocities and were ‘baby-killers’, combined with harassment of military families, served to alienate members of the defence force from the wider community.⁴¹ Some of those involved in the moratorium movement in Australia have since had the good grace to be uncomfortable about their treatment of their soldiers, particularly once the details of the North Vietnamese conducted massacres, re-education camps and ethnic cleansing emerged.⁴² Denis Warner has since described how disinformation campaigns sponsored by Dr Jim Cairns’s Congress for International Disarmament and the Soviet-sponsored World Peace Council helped shape public opinion in Australia.⁴³ However, at this time, the military was unprepared to protect itself and its members against what has since come to be known as ‘Information Operations’. The impact of the anti-war rhetoric alienated the Army from the community for a generation.

On serving out their commitment in the Army, many National Servicemen simply re-entered the community and put Vietnam behind them. From a psychological point of view, many of these veterans suffered the most because they lacked the support and companionship that their regular counterparts continued to experience. After National service concluded, the restoration of an all-volunteer force enabled the institution to temporarily pull back from the broader society that had so evidently rejected it. The Regular Army turned in on itself and became something of a time capsule frozen in the early 1970s—over a decade later, you could encounter non-commissioned officers in civilian attire with the bell bottom trousers, wide lapels and sideburns that had been popular in their youth. They did not get out much. The divisions prompted by the war also exacerbated pre-existing tensions within the Army. As late as the early 1980s, University Regiment members attending courses at Battle Wing, Canungra, Puckapunyal and the Infantry Centre at Singleton met with considerable hostility because ‘they’—students and academics—had been responsible for the ostracism of the Army.⁴⁴

In the years after the withdrawal of Australian forces, the pages of the *Army Journal* reflected the concern that the Army might be seen as irrelevant under the new strategic

41. R. Teusner, *The Australian Veteran and the Vietnam Experience*, manuscript compiled for the South Australian Branch of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, September 1992; Hall, *Combat Battalion*, ch. 9; Stuart Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices* (Port Melbourne: Mandarin Australia, 1989), 181-98. See also fn. 4.

42. See Charlotte Clutterbuck, ‘Protests and Peace Marches: From Vietnam to Palm Sunday’, in Keith Maddock and Barry Wright (eds), *War: Australia and Vietnam* (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1987), 135-47.

43. Warner, *Not with guns alone*, 181-4.

44. Anecdotal, but none the less bruising, personal experience of the author.

guidance which focussed on the defence of the air-sea gap to Australia's north. The joke ran that in the unlikely event of an attempted invasion, the role of the Army was to bayonet the survivors who struggled ashore after the Navy and Air Force had defeated them. One very experienced officer concluded:

The Australian Army now stands at the threshold of a decade or two of minimum military activity and practically the whole force is back on the continent, and likely to remain so. There is today in the public mind a questioning of what the Army is all about, and a doubting that the Army is doing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. After all, they (the troops) are all home, they have no defenceless Asians to knock about, what do they do all day? ... Try giving the ordinary man in the street the stock answer that we are training for war and he will give you the stock reply, 'You are joking' ...⁴⁵

It is hard to overstate the importance of political guidance in a democracy on the posture adopted by the armed forces. In the years following the withdrawal from Vietnam, it was made clear to the Services that 'political conciliation and cooperation' would supplant the military option in enhancing Australia's regional security.⁴⁶ On assuming power in 1972, the Labor Party brought with it a palpable air of discomfort with things military as well as a particularly idealist philosophy. While still in opposition, Lance Barnard wrote:

For Democratic Socialists, defence policy must invariably seem a frustrating and negative area. Spending on defence does not build up social capital. It is opposed to the fundamental principles and aspirations of all socialist theory. Defence planning is contingency planning and contingency planning is inherently wasteful because the premises on which it is based may never arise.⁴⁷

In the same publication, Barnard proposed that the role of the military needed to be changed to carry out what he called 'PUMF—the Peaceful Use of Military Forces'.⁴⁸ This concept involved the military providing manpower to carry out aid programs, engineering works, health and educational programs and relief work in the community. On assuming power, the Labor Government set about restructuring the Army for the

45. Major J. Jeans, 'Secondary Roles for the Army', *Army Journal* 304 (September 1974), 40-46 at 41. For a similar interpretation see also Major A.J.C. Wells, 'People's Army', *Army Journal* 303 (August 1974), 13-22 at 14.

46. Barnard, 'Australian Defence Policy', 30 May 1973.

47. L.H. Barnard, *Australian Defence—Policy and Programmes* (Victorian Fabian Society Pamphlet 18, January 1969), 4.

48. *Ibid.*, 40-1.

defence of Australia—a risk that the Government itself assessed as ‘remote’.⁴⁹ The involvement in Vietnam was written off as having ‘represented an exaggerated concern with ideological conflict far from our own shores and was wrong in itself’.⁵⁰ Apparently, Australia’s commitment to its ideological value system—most notably the right to freedom from totalitarian oppression—waned the further one travelled from its shores. The defence establishment took this guidance to heart, and the 1976 Defence White Paper confirmed the new orthodoxy that Australia’s forces would no longer be developed and trained to fight in coalitions overseas.⁵¹

Reflecting on the loss of a warfighting focus that resulted from the end of the commitment to Vietnam, one young officer, who graduated from the Royal Military College in 1971, would write five years later in the *Army Journal*:

Despite the generalities that persist in all military curricula, our out-of-class association with military personalities and events was ALL Vietnam... during our final year we came to realise that we would miss out. Vietnam was a dead duck; our military future seemed dull and unexciting; and those who aspired to the ‘heroic commander’ motif of military life had little chance of winning their spurs at the junior commander level in combat.⁵²

One of the joys of reading history is that you get to see how things actually turned out. In 1971, those young officers with an eye to the future concluded that ‘if we have no violence to manage then one could at least study and learn organisational management’.⁵³ At the Royal Military College, many graduating cadets changed their preferences for career opportunities within the Army. Fewer wanted to serve in the Arms Corps—infantry, armour, artillery and the engineers—and more wanted to serve in the services. Training for combat might not be a good career move in an army with no war to fight, but management experience could be carried into a civilian career. Writing five years later, the young officer, by now a captain, conceded that he and his cohort had perhaps over-reacted—he had already served overseas in Papua New Guinea and as a United Nations Military Observer in Kashmir. However, the rapid change in defence policy had come as something of a shock. The Army had undergone an abrupt change in direction and in its own eyes, at least, had lost the operational focus that was a primary justification for its existence.

49. *Australian Defence: Major Decisions Since December 1972* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975), 2.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Hon. D.J. Killen, *Australian Defence*, 6, 10.

52. Captain M.G. Smith, ‘The Australian Defence Forces: Their Peace-time Roles – A Young Officer’s Experience’, *Army Journal* 323 (April 1976), 45-54 at 46.

53. *Ibid.*

This officer's career was to come full-circle. Captain Mike Smith's career peaked with the rank of Major General and the deputy command of the multinational United Nations peacekeeping force in East Timor. Prior to taking up that appointment, as Director General East Timor in Defence Headquarters and as head of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) liaison staff in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at United Nations Headquarters in 1999, his efforts were instrumental in making INTERFET a success. He was also the first officer who had not served in Vietnam to command an Australian infantry battalion. After a career spent in an Army tasked with the territorial defence of Australia, Smith and his succeeding generation of officers were, once again, being asked to make an active contribution to regional security and stability.

The Tactical Consequences of the War in Vietnam

As in any combined operation, the key challenge encountered by Australian forces was the need to establish effective levels of interoperability with the American forces to which the Australian contingent was attached. This problem became particularly critical for the battalion sent to Vietnam in June 1965. This battalion was based with the US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) in Bien Hoa and operated through the III Corps area. Not only was Australian equipment found to be of a poorer quality than that used by the US Army forces that they worked with, but there was ongoing disagreement over doctrine and tactics. As a result, the Australian Government dispatched a largely self-sufficient brigade-sized Task Force which conducted independent operations in its own area of operations in Phuoc Tuy Province from 1966 to 1971. The fact that the Task Force had its own logistics link through the coastal town of Vung Tau, enabled it to exercise a greater degree of self-reliance.

Although Australian forces came under the operational control of a US headquarters, II Field Force Vietnam, the Australians were largely responsible for fighting the war in their own way.⁵⁴ Reflecting the different scale of the Australian forces involved, as well as the more limited resources available to them, Australian Army tactics for tropical counter-insurgency warfare remained quite distinct from those employed by the American forces. Building on their previous experience in Malaya and during Confrontation with Indonesia, the Army units employed patrolling and cordon and search operations to maintain constant pressure on the Viet Cong infrastructure. While a few major battles occurred, Australian operations, for the most part, were characterised by a 'softly-softly' approach. Small unit operations, rather than inflicting massive battlefield casualties, lay at the heart of Australian operational doctrine. One commentator has noted:

54. Grey, *The Australian Army*, 220.

Australia's army was essentially a light infantry force and this was reflected in the troops' aptitude for patrolling, fieldcraft and night operations. America's big mechanised army was more able to devastate opposing forces. The small Australian force was more thoroughly trained and able to include a greater proportion of experienced soldiers and leaders than the US.⁵⁵

The tactical situation in the Australian area of operations assisted this approach, as the operations that the Australians conducted were relatively small-scale by comparison with some of the fighting experienced by the Americans.

Although over the period of the Australian involvement in Vietnam the Australian Army maintained its own 'national way of warfighting', the United States' influence did reshape the Australian Army. The Army acquired (or copied) many items of American equipment, including field radios, load-carrying gear and weapons. More significant was the exposure to the enormous resources of the United States' military, as the Australian Army had long experience of making do with limited support.

Operations in Vietnam did much to break down the tribal jealousies that had characterised an Army that, for over a decade, had focused almost exclusively on infantry operations in isolation. In Vietnam the Army learnt and practiced a combined arms approach that saved lives. The development of tactics that enabled commanders to orchestrate infantry, artillery and armour to attack strong-points and bunker systems—even in heavy jungle—was extremely innovative. Even in close country, infantry entering a bunker complex required—and welcomed—armour to deal with those bunkers.

The principal lesson of combined arms operations in Vietnam was that the armour deployed in jungle or urban terrain needs protection against shoulder launched weapons. Lightly protected armoured personnel carriers were not sufficient—tanks were required.⁵⁶ The Australian Army has not yet developed a capability that can replace the protection, firepower, accuracy and shock action provided by the tank. What is more, Robert Hall and Andrew Ross of the Australian Defence Force Academy have undertaken a recent comparative statistical analysis of attacks on prepared positions in Vietnam. Their study has demonstrated that the use of tanks in direct support of infantry assaults on bunker systems both radically reduced the casualty rate and increased the success rate of these attacks.⁵⁷ The study proves that, if they are not to suffer unnecessary casualties, attacking forces also require fire on call and may not be able to wait for air support to

55. Russell Miles, 'Vietnam Re-examined', *Defender* XII: 2 (Winter 1995), 24-7 at 26.

56. Interview by author with Lieutenant General John Coates, AC MBE, at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, 23 September 2002.

57. This study will be published by the Land Warfare Studies Centre as *Lessons from Vietnam: Combined Arms Assault against Prepared Defences*.

arrive. They need access to integrated and available artillery fire. Operating with both direct and indirect fire on call has the distinct advantage over aerial fire support that it will not go away. There is no guarantee that aircraft will be able to loiter over the battlefield forever. Moreover, as the results of this research demonstrate, most close air support—and particularly helicopter support—is extremely vulnerable to ground fire.

Having learnt these lessons at the cost of the lives of its soldiers, the Army needs to continue to propagate them. Too many unqualified armchair tacticians now argue that a medium to heavy armoured capability is irrelevant in Australia's likely operational circumstances. The Vietnam War demonstrated the strengths and the weaknesses of the Army and much of what was learned remains relevant. The likely range of operational environments that face the Army today has much in common with the Vietnam era. As in Vietnam, our troops will continue to serve in a mix of open, lightly wooded and complex terrain. They are likely to face asymmetric foes—either irregular 'warriors' like the Viet Cong, or conventional forces from less technologically advanced states such as the North Vietnamese Army. The availability of direct and indirect fire support gives the Australian Army the advantage in most of the combat scenarios that it will face. Until such time that new capabilities are found that can replace the weapon systems currently in service, the Army needs to maintain its combined arms systems and tactics. When soldiers' lives are at stake, bureaucrats without warfighting expertise cannot be allowed the final word when making decisions about core combat capabilities.

Michael Evans, of the Australian Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre, has concluded:

The most important doctrinal impact of Vietnam was the influence of combined arms warfare through the use of helicopters, close air support, artillery fire and armour. The Australian Army emerged from Vietnam in 1972 as a highly professional force. It was expert in Asian counter-revolutionary warfare and accustomed to fighting in tropical warfare conditions against a definite enemy and within the framework of an allied force. However, it was also a tactical-level Army, derivative of its allies in much of its operational thinking and with little experience of developing doctrine for independent operations.⁵⁸

With the realignment of defence policy to focus on the territorial defence of Australia, the Australian Defence Force had to prepare for conventional operations in continental Australia. For the Army, in particular, this change required a major adjustment—for twenty years, the Army had been training to conduct operations in close country within

58. Michael Evans, *Forward from the Past: The Development of Australian Army Doctrine 1972-Present* (Duntroon: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 1999), 7.

a tropical environment. Now the Army had to restructure itself for open-country warfare in the vast spaces of Australia's north. In 1975, the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Francis Hassett, stated:

The starting point for the development of tactical doctrine is more likely to be that doctrine which existed at the conclusion of World War II, resulting from operations in the European and Middle East theatres, than the Australian experience in South-East Asia. We need to re-learn much which has been irrelevant in the Army's more recent operations. In the broader field of armoured warfare, armoured tactics as opposed to armoured-infantry tactics, is a field in which we must catch up with modern armoured warfare doctrine. I feel we are behind in this field.⁵⁹

While the Army made substantial progress in preparing for mobile open country warfare during the 1970s and 1980s, it received little practical guidance from the Whitlam and Fraser Governments. In particular, the Army required guidance as to the nature of the most likely operational scenarios, the expected structure of the Army in war and peace, or the operational relationship that it was expected to form with the other Services.⁶⁰ Accordingly, given limited resources, the Army spread itself thinly, maintaining a 'core' of skill sets and personnel to form an expansion base should it be required to meet a future threat. This approach was endorsed by a Senate Standing Committee inquiry into the Army in 1974.⁶¹ While this was happening, the Army's abilities to operate offshore, particularly in tropical and close country environments, deteriorated rapidly.⁶² The Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Donald Dunstan, concluded:

Expertise in specialised areas was being lost, or was at best static. We expected too many people to be jack-of-all-trades ... The worst part, however, was the level of operational readiness we could achieve. There was so much regrouping of men and equipment which had to be done. The result was that I could not guarantee to provide a task force of two battalions in less than about three months, or a battalion group in less than a month.⁶³

59. Chief of the General Staff, 'Training Directive', 1975, cited in Evans, *Forward from the Past*, 12.

60. Grey, *The Australian Army*, 232-3. See also Stewart Woodman and David Horner, 'Land Forces in the Defence of Australia', in David Horner (ed.), *Reshaping the Australian Army: Challenges for the 1990s* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1991), 39-41.

61. Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *The Australian Army* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1974), 31-5.

62. Woodman and Horner, 'Land Forces in the Defence of Australia', 41.

63. *Ibid.*, Chief of the General Staff, Address to Army Staff College, Queensland, 1980.

The lack of direction from Government was finally resolved with the issue of the 1987 Defence White Paper, *The Defence of Australia*.⁶⁴ The White Paper reiterated the theme of self-reliance in the territorial defence of Australia that had emerged in the wake of the Vietnam War. The restriction of the Army's role was complete—the reaction to the Vietnam commitment had seen the Army's mission shrink. From fighting the nation's wars and conducting a range of operations to further the national interest, the role of the Army was limited to homeland defence and providing a plausible deterrent to potential invaders.

Conclusion

In the years that followed the Vietnam War, the dominant thinking within governments from both sides of politics was that they had to administer a 'peace-time Army'.⁶⁵ This attitude flew in the face of the operational experience of the Regular Army since 1948. Although Australia had been at peace from the end of the Second World War, the Army had been required to maintain a high operational tempo, including the conduct of combat operations. As a result, Australia had played a major role in developing conditions of peace and security within the region. After Vietnam, the outgoing Liberal Government introduced the policy of defence self-reliance before leaving office and the successor Labor Government announced that Australian troops would never again serve on operations in Southeast Asia.⁶⁶ As we have since seen, 'never' is an awfully long time.

Within three years of the 1987 White Paper, the ADF was providing naval assets to the war for the liberation of Kuwait. Three years after that, an infantry battalion group was deployed on a complex peace enforcement operation in Somalia and saw combat. Australia played a major part in peace operations in Cambodia and has sent its troops in harm's way in Rwanda, Bougainville and the Solomons. In 1999, the ADF mounted and commanded the international operation to restore peace and security in East Timor and has continued to provide the largest contingent in the multinational United Nations force that took over responsibility for that country. Australian ground troops were once again conducting operations in South East Asia. Peculiarly, no government had required the ADF to prepare for the command of a multinational military operation offshore,

64. Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia 1987*.

65. Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *The Australian Army*, ch. 9.

66. Department of Defence, *Australian Defence Review* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, March 1972), 27.; Mr E.G. Whitlam and Mr L.H. Barnard, 'Defence Policy: Statement issued at a press conference held in Brisbane', 18 October 1971.; L.H. Barnard, MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, 'Speech to the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre', The Australian National University, Canberra, 29 March 1972; Statement by L.H. Barnard, MP, Minister of Defence, *Australian Defence: Major Decisions Since December 1972* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975).

though once the contingency arose the military was expected to deal with the problem. The prevailing strategic orthodoxy was still dictated by the assumptions that had been derived from the political struggles over Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. The actual employment of the ADF—and the Army in particular—had nothing in common with that guidance.

Vietnam did a great deal of harm to Australia's strategic vision and the capacity of its armed forces to do the national bidding. No threat-based strategic scenario ever eventuated—nor was it ever likely to—at least if Australia was expecting to be self-reliant in its own defence. No small or middle-level state has ever had the potential to launch more than nuisance conventional attacks against the Australian mainland. In the case of a significant deterioration in the international security environment, Australia would always have to provide for its security by taking collective action together with its friends and allies. As defence authority Dr Robert O'Neill wrote in 1976:

As far as major attacks are concerned, obviously we would need assistance if attacked by a super-power. There is no way that Australia can create a wholly self-reliant Defence force to fend off a super-power ... if a major attack is ever directed at Australia, it would probably come as a part of a great, global catastrophe ...⁶⁷

The most damaging long-term consequence of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was not so much the failure of policy that saw an uncoordinated build-up of troops with an unclear operational objective, no exit strategy and no politico-strategic attempt to influence the conduct of the war. Rather, it was the isolationist policy that was adopted for ideological reasons that diminished Australia's ability to contribute to regional security. This retreat, combined with the slide from the laudable objective of greater self-sufficiency in military capability to self-reliant continental defence, left our forces ill-prepared for the military challenges of today's world.

67. Robert J. O'Neill, 'Adjusting to the Problems of a Continental Defence Posture', in J. Birman (ed.), *Australia's Defence* (Perth: Extension Service, University of Western Australia, 1976), 36.

How History Works: Afterthoughts

Peter Edwards

The best description of history that I know is that history is a debate between the present and the past about the future. That captures something very important. History is not something static, engraved in stone; it is an ongoing debate, with new questions constantly arising from the present and new answers arising from new evidence and approaches.

We can see something of this process in the enormous number of publications on the Vietnam War that have emerged from the United States over, say, the last three decades. In the 1970s they tended to ask: How did we get into this mess? How could our leaders, the best and brightest of their generation, get it so wrong? In the 1980s, many asked if a distinction could be made between ends and means. Was President Reagan right to say that Vietnam had been ‘a noble cause’? Did that mean that, if only this or that change had been made to military or political tactics, the result might have been different? By the 1990s, the Cold War was over and the Soviet Union dissolved. Some then asked if Vietnam should be seen, not as a lost war, but as a lost battle—a major strategic failure within a long war that was eventually won, a little like the fall of Singapore in the Second World War.

To say that these questions were asked, of course, does not mean that they were necessarily given positive answers. There were always those willing to give, so to speak, 1970s answers to 1980s or 1990s questions. For instance, in 2000 I attended a conference in Europe at which there was a session reviewing the history of the Cold War. The contributions were listed as ‘The Cold War and the United States’, ‘The Cold War and Europe’ and so on. The speaker on the Cold War and Europe, a distinguished professor from Florence, said, with the effortless arrogance that some Europeans have been perfecting for centuries, that the Cold War was solely a European phenomenon. It was the struggle to fill the vacuum in central Europe caused by the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Cold War, he stated, had no manifestations outside Europe. I then was asked to speak on ‘The Cold War and Asia’. I suggested, with due respect to the distinguished professor, that a few million Koreans and a few million Vietnamese might perhaps take a different view.

All these questions are of continuing interest. No doubt there will be new and old answers given to them now and for years to come. But in the world following September 11, 2001, there is a new emphasis, not least recently. Vietnam has been in the news again, not as a noble cause or a phase in the Cold War, but as an example of American interventionism. That is why, when General Cosgrove recently made, in response to a question from the press, some anodyne comments to the effect that, with 20-20 hindsight, the commitment to Vietnam might not have been such a great idea, some media and 'experts' blew it into what even a journalist has described to me as a huge beat-up. Cosgrove, we were told, was giving a coded message to the Government about the dangers of intervention in Iraq. I suspect that, as the Government's principal military adviser, General Cosgrove has all the avenues he needs to give advice without resorting to coded messages at the National Press Club.

But in one sense it is right for Vietnam analogies to be raised. The current position, with the entire world debating whether the United States will and should take action in Iraq, is reminiscent of the position in 1965, when for months the whole world debated whether the United States should send massive numbers of combat forces to Vietnam or should accept that South Vietnam would have to fall. It is noteworthy that, only in the last few years but starting before 11 September 2000, Americans have been showing much more interest than ever before about the international aspects of the Vietnam War, including the diplomatic debates around 1965.

The current discussions of building coalitions, of unilateralism and multilateralism, lead me to think of alliances and allies. We have to remember that the questions and answers about the Vietnam War are not necessarily the same for America's allies as they are for the United States itself. This, in fact, has been one of the principal motivations for having an Australian official history of the war. One of the themes of our official history is precisely the similarities and differences between the Australian and American experiences of the war, in all its aspects—military, political, diplomatic, medical, the home front. What was to be the last volume of the official history, covering the Australian Army's operations after the battle of Long Tan, has been divided into two volumes. They will reaffirm some old views and say some new things about Australia's military involvement.

The question of alliances has many ramifications. Several years ago I happened to be in the United States on Memorial Day. I took the opportunity to visit the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This is a fairly new institution that is the nearest thing I have seen to the Australian War Memorial outside Australia. Its centrepiece is a large round room, with its walls holding an immense amount of information on the Vietnam War. It is all there—the background of Vietnamese history, the diplomatic context, the military operations and their complexity, the social context of the sixties and so forth.

I was greatly impressed. Only after some time did it occur to me that one thing seemed to be missing. Unless I missed it, there seemed to be nothing there that indicated that the United States had willing allies in Vietnam—the ‘troop contributing countries’ that included Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and others. Does this matter? Since our involvement was based partly on building mutual trust and support between the US and Australia, does it matter if an American memorial does not even acknowledge our presence? Or is it better if we are not associated with what is generally seen as an American disaster? I offer no answers, I just ask the questions.

These, and many others, are questions worth asking, to which new and old answers will be given. For a variety of reasons, they will often be discussed in Australia in publications or conferences sponsored by government agencies, like Army, Defence, the Australian War Memorial, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and so on. The fact that this is so places a premium on the understanding by all the relevant agencies that they must support free, unfettered discussion. For the most part, Australian governments and their official agencies have a very good record in this respect. Since the days of Charles Bean, official war historians have been given assurances that their work would be published without official or political censorship. At political and official levels, this assurance has been honoured, with few significant exceptions. I trust that this will remain the case for all historical work. At present, there are signs that one agency—which will remain unnamed—would like to impose an official line on any discussion of a particular historical episode. If this practice were to be continued—and I am not saying that it has reached this stage—it could become dangerous. I certainly think that any such effort would be inappropriate and unethical. Above all, it would be counter-productive: that is not how history works. Unlike those cynics who say that the only lesson from history is that there are no lessons from history, I respect the military inclination to draw the ‘lessons learned’ from any significant episode. But the lessons can only be learned if discussion of historical matters is left free, with old and new questions being asked and old and new answers being freely debated.

Much that the Army does in the historical area shows that Army usually gets this right. Indeed, Army seems to understand how history works, perhaps better than some historians. In discussions about the Australian Army and the Vietnam War, therefore, we can expect a continuation of the debate between the past and the present about the future, with new and old questions being raised, new and old answers being given. So it should be.