

*Even though many of us were under 21 we were given the right to vote in a Federal Election during the early part of my tour. At that time I did vote for the current Government as I thought we were doing the right thing (cognitive dissonance?). However as time went on and politicians squirmed at the public reactions to the war, I did feel that we were being used as pawns in a very dangerous game.*

*A prime example was the apparent interference of Canberra in the decision to withdraw 8 RAR from its blockade and imminent assault of the VC headquarters during Operation Hammersly. The intended battle could have basically ended the war in Phuoc Tuy province but instead a B52 attack was ordered. It was thought that was to avoid potential negative headlines about high casualty numbers if a ground attack had been launched. A B52 strike meant the withdrawal of our troops for a couple of kilometres and approval from the nearby (VC controlled?) officials in Dat Do Village. Those actions gave the VC the signal, the time and the exit routes to leave their bunkers prior to the bombing. A veteran I have subsequently spoken to indicated that they only found one enemy killed in the bunkers as most had left (to later kill our troops?). I once asked a General, with whom I worked as a civilian, if it was true that Canberra had interfered to reduce the risks of bad headlines and got the tactful reply "I couldn't possibly say Rex, but you may well be right". If governments are going to send troops into a war then let them fight as they know best.*

*I grew to see war as a pretty hopeless way to solve the problems that politicians, religions, ideologies etc ,on all sides, convince us we have. Religion also appeared to have a very strong influence in South Vietnam's and its allies involvement in that war and I understand that The Animals's song *Sky Pilot* (a Padre) was a direct reference to the Church's involvement.*

*I volunteered for my service purely on the grounds of maintaining freedoms for us and the Vietnamese. However today we also hear about "protecting Australia's interests" which, I suspect, means business interests. If I had thought that was the case then I would have had no part of it (although business certainly profited from that war). I believe that wars, cold or hot, often come down to fairly simplistic, puerile views, held by both sides, that "we're good, we're right - you're bad, you're wrong" and I read that into Bowie's *I'm Afraid of Americans*. It is not Americans per se but self righteous, ideological power, somewhat devoid of wisdom, that is the source of my fears. Yes it comes from both sides but "ours" is far from squeaky clean (in my opinion). As I asked in the preface, what have we learned from the lives lost in Vietnam when we still engage in "wars of choice"?*

*I also see a great irony in Vietnam War politics. Protesters criticised troops who "thought" they were trying to maintain the very freedoms the protestors were exercising; and troops criticised the protestors who were only exercising the very freedoms they "thought" they were protecting. Sounds like a *Communication Breakdown* to me so Led Zeppelin's take on that theme might be a good way to lighten things up after my dummy spits.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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### **The Animals - *Sky Pilot***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0s3uIEyHaY>

### **David Bowie - *I'm Afraid of Americans***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7APmRkatEU>

### **Led Zeppelin - *Communication Breakdown***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoqQnR8NOVI>