



A DUTY DONE

ADDENDUM 2016

by

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Fred Fairhead



DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO SERVED

**Published by The Royal Australian Regiment Association SA Inc.
13 Beatty Street, Linden Park, SA 5068
To Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan**

Front Cover

Troops from 5 Platoon, B Company, 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in a Helicopter extraction from near the fishing village of Lang Phuoc Hai on 26 August 1967. The troops are wearing 'Patrol Order' as the operation was a one-day Cordon and Search of Lang Phuoc Hai.
(Australian War Memorial Negative No: EKN/67/0130/VN)

Back Cover

Long Tan Cross on loan to the Australian War Memorial in 2012 flanked by the Roll of Honour

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Entry:

Fairhead Fred 1941-

A Duty Done Addendum – A History of The Royal Australian Regiment in the Vietnam War

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ISBN 978-0-9924704-2-5

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2. 1st Australian Task Force Operations
3. Infantry Battalion Operations

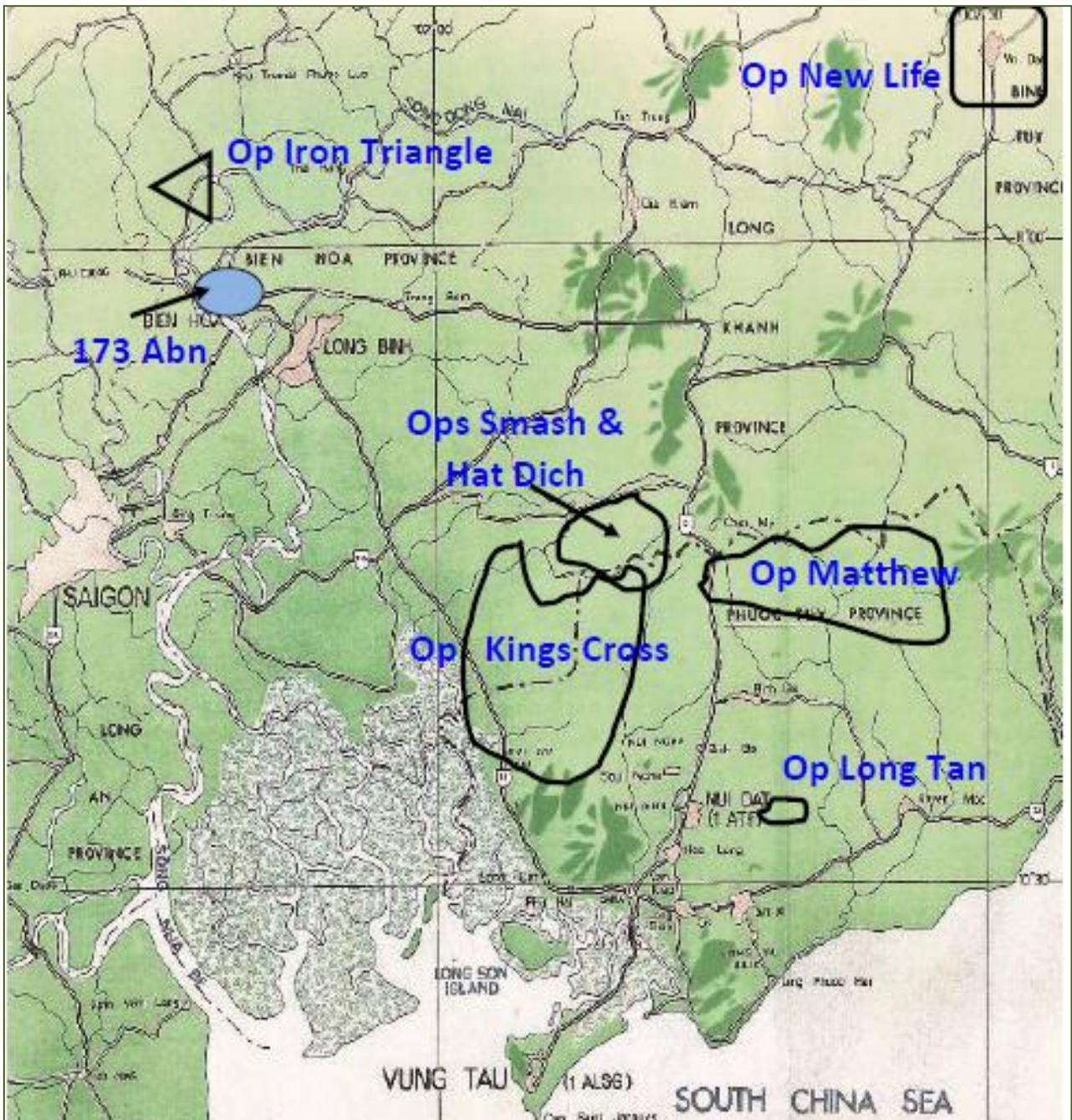
Also by the Author:

- Old Guildfordians who served in the Korean War 1950-1956 (July 2010).
- A Potted History of The Royal Australian Regiment in the Korean War 1950-1953 (2011).
- Old Guildfordians who served in the Vietnam War 1962-1972 (June 2011).
- A Duty Done – A History of The Royal Australian Regiment in the Vietnam War (August 2014) ISBN 978-0-9924704-0-1(Hard Cover); 978-0-9924704-1-8 (Soft Cover)

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Approximate Areas of the Operations described in this Addendum



PREFACE

When *A Duty Done* was published in 2014 there were some significant operations that should have been included but for a number of time and space reasons missed the cut. This Addendum aims to redress that discrepancy. In addition, the original book did not adequately describe the unique and trail blazing role that 1RAR had on its first tour when it served with the US Army's 173 Airborne Brigade ([see End Note 1](#)).

A Duty Done, page 21, describes *Operation Hump* conducted by 1RAR in War Zone D in early November 1965. The additional 1RAR operations described in this Addendum were conducted either side of *Operation Hump* and were selected because they are good illustrations of the type of operation conducted by 1RAR in the first year of The Regiment's involvement in the Vietnam War, ie:

- Were conducted as part of 173rd Airborne Brigade (173Abn);
- Were mainly full Brigade strength operations which was a tactical level the Australian Army had not much recent experience in;
- Were conducted in areas where allied forces had not been before and were of relatively short duration; and,
- When the Battalion's battle procedure for deployment and fire and manoeuvre were very much on conventional lines, eg moving as a single unit, including Battalion Headquarters and an A Echelon. This was very different to the approach of a Fire Support Patrol Base with companies moving independently in various directions that would become synonymous with operations in later years.

Also, in late 1965, 1RAR as part of 173 Abn deployed over considerable distances from the base at Bien Hoa as demonstrated on *Operation New Life* conducted in the north east of Long Khanh Province returning via the Hat Dich region of northern Phuoc Tuy Province (*Operation Smash*).

As with *A Duty Done*, it was mandatory that the selected operations had War Diaries on the Australian War Memorial's website (www.awm.gov.au/diaries/seasia/index.asp) which could provide operation orders, operation logs and after action reports in sufficient detail to describe the operation. It was also important that I had maps in my library that covered the area of operations:

In addition to the operations by 1RAR, the two conducted by 9RAR in July 1969 and the 5RAR operation in late 1969, I thought in view of the 50th Anniversary of the defining Battle of Long Tan, it would be useful to describe in some detail the operation conducted by 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion on 17/18 August 1969 when the Long Tan Memorial Cross was erected on the site of the battle.

This Addendum needs to be read in conjunction with the original book, especially: The Preface (pages 10,11); The Glossary (pages 12,13); The Operational Environment (pages 14,15); Chapter 1 (Background to the War and RAR operational tasks, pages 16-18)); the Summary (pages 164-166) ; and, the End Notes (Pages 167-186).

I am grateful for the assistance from the following: Lex McAulay (1RAR), especially for the copy of 'Blue Lanyard Green Valley', David Wilkins (5RAR), Adrian Craig and Tony Daniels (9RAR) and Bob Hogarth for their proof reading and advice.

Fred Fairhead
Erindale, South Australia
May 2016

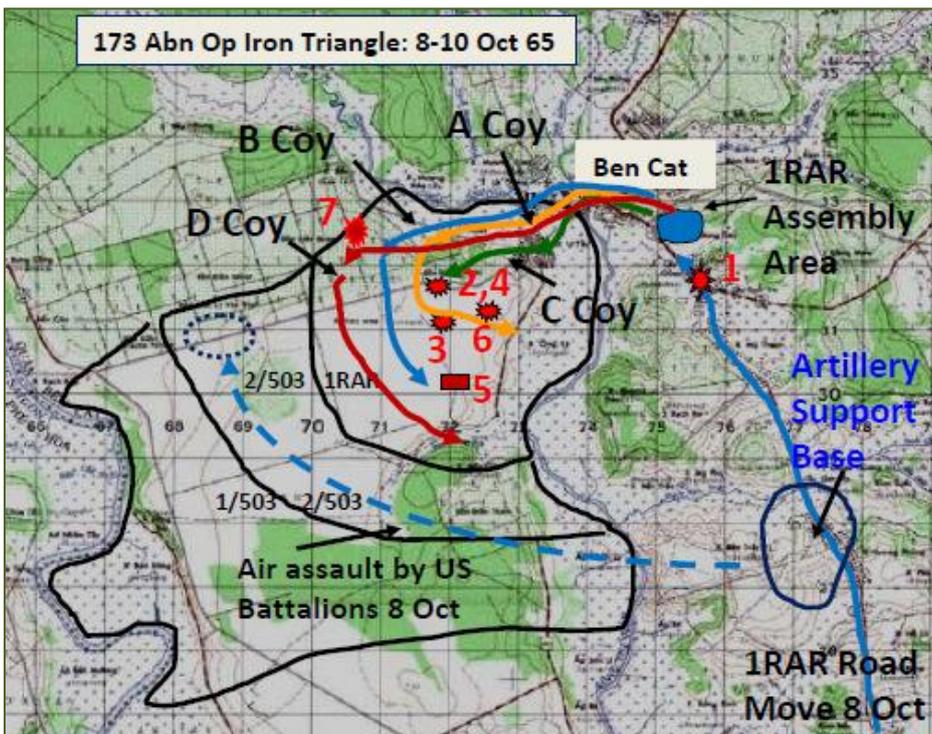
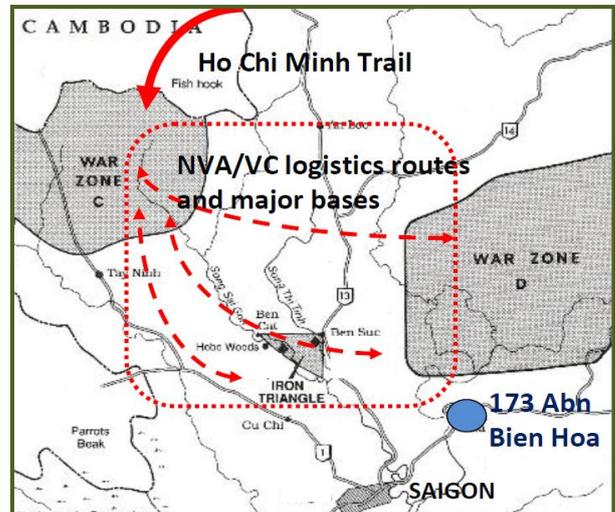
Operation Iron Triangle: 8-14 October 1965

In the early days of 1RAR's first tour of duty most of the operations were directed to the area north of Saigon, ie into what might be called the enemy 'heartland'. The area provided the enemy bases to threaten the strategic target of Saigon and was first developed by the Viet Minh during the first Indo China War against the French and stretched to just some 50 Kms from the Southern capital. The local population were generally sympathetic to the cause of the enemy.

Enemy strongholds such as **War Zone D**, the enemy's designation for a major base area of about 100km by 50 Km was basically on the front door of the new US Air Base at Bien Hoa, now defended by 173 Abn (*Brig Gen EW Williamson*). It had gone unchallenged by the French and was now considered impregnable by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

The US high command needed to establish a buffer zone around Saigon and thus commenced operations to wrest control from the enemy. One such operation was 'Iron Triangle' - against an enemy base area of the same name of about 80 square kilometres and heavily fortified, bristling with mines and booby traps

The operation began on 8 October 1965 with a Fire Support Base being secured by 173 Abn Cavalry. The two US Battalions were then flown there and after 1RAR (*Lt Col IRW Brumfield*) had passed through and onto secure the bridge at Ben Cat by C Company (*Maj JJ Tattam*), the 2/503 Battalion (*Lt Col GE Dexter*) air assaulted into the Area of Operations (AO), followed by 1/503 Battalion (*Lt Col JE Tyler*). Prior to that happening and as part of the Fire Support Plan



provided by two batteries of the 3/319 (*Lt Col LE Surut*) and 161 Battery (*Maj DR Kenning*) there was a bombing mission by USAF B-52 Bombers ([see also End Note 2](#)).

En route, an APC carrying men from 8 Platoon (*Lt JD McNamara*) struck an improvised anti tank mine (1) (a 105mm shell), killing the driver (*PFC MG Brancato, D/16 Armour*) and wounding nine C Company soldiers, four of whom were repatriated to Australia (*Pte WH Allen, Cpl AJJ Lightfoot, Pte R Morton and Pte JR Williams*).

After C Company secured the bridge the rifle

companies led by A Company (*Maj JB Healy*) moved forward to their respective search areas. As can be seen by the map the movement was congested, muddled and thus dangerous. Sign of enemy presence was evident and at about 7pm, 7 Platoon (*Sgt DG Saville*) during a company stand-to, observed a group

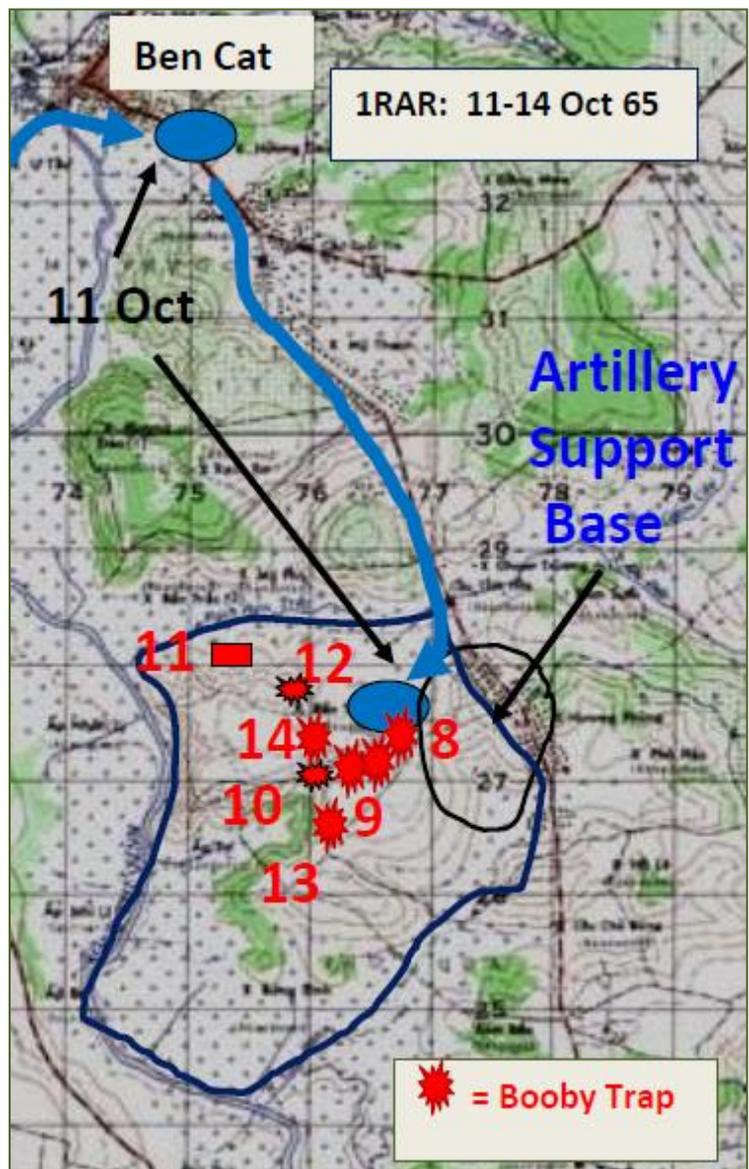
of enemy probing the perimeter, most likely in preparation for a grenade attack (2). The enemy was engaged by the forward section killing three, two of which were recovered when the Platoon Commander (*Sgt DG Saville*) went forward with a patrol. Further grenade attacks occurred during which time the Platoon Commander moved constantly throughout the platoon providing the necessary command and control. Close Defensive Fire from 161 Battery discouraged the enemy to continue.

At about 9am on 9th October, a patrol from 2 Platoon A Company (*Cpl JR Barber*) was conducting a reconnaissance when it was engaged by a VC sniper hitting and killing the Forward Scout (*Pte RE Field*) (3). The sniper had fired from behind an anthill used as a security position for a nearby VC village.

In accordance with conventional battle procedure Listening Posts, usually of three men, were deployed forward of company defensive positions; one such Listening Post from C Company which was apparently not fully alert was engaged by a VC patrol with an automatic weapon at about 1.30pm 9 October (4). One man was wounded who was subsequently repatriated to Australia (*Pte PJ Riddett, who was to serve as a Senior NCO with 7RAR in 1970/71*). Later that day 5 Platoon (*2Lt WF Hindson*) located a VC village that was subsequently destroyed by an airstrike (5).

At 1.30pm on 10 October, a 3 Platoon Listening Post (*LCpl CF Webster, Pte JPS Smith and Pte WJ Greenwood*) was at a track junction when a VC approached and was shot (6). With covering fire from the Machine Gunner (*Pte Greenwood*) the other two went forward removed the enemy soldier's SKS rifle and ammunition and buried him in situ. That night the VC retrieved the body which prompted chatter in various quarters as to whether the US Special Forces tactic of booby trapping the body should have been used. It is good to know that 1RAR remembered they were Australians and dismissed the idea! Later that day, 9 Platoon (*2Lt RD Loftus*) was returning from a reconnaissance patrol when a Forward Scout (*Pte PR Fagerlund*) detonated a booby trap (7), seriously wounding him and the Second Scout (*Pte RL Styles*) with minor shrapnel wounds.

On 11 October, the Battalion concentrated near Ben Cat and moved to a new Area of Operations adjacent to the Artillery Support Base. A Company led the Battalion to its new Harbour position first by APC and then by foot in an area thick with booby traps. Two were detonated, the first wounding one man (*Pte K Redford who was repatriated to Australia a couple of days later*) and the second wounding three men at Company Headquarters (*Pte HT D 'Alton, LBdr DTA Morrow RNZA and a Vietnamese Policeman*) (8). Despite his serious wounds LBdr Morrow was able to tell the Company Commander of the cause of the explosions and how the booby traps had been set up. The wounded were attended to by



the A Company medic (*Cpl LR Tait*) while the Battalion Reconnaissance Group Officer (*Capt MJ Carroll*), who was moving with A Company, organised the Dustoff Helicopter.

In the same area at about 9am on 12 October, two men (*Ptes JB Thatcher and JD Watts an attached Medic*) from 6 Platoon (*2Lt PA Sibree*) were wounded by a booby Trap **(9)**. A short while later the Platoon as the lead platoon for the B Company (*Maj ID McFarlane*) advance, discovered a bunker which it was investigating when a VC was spotted and engaged and dispatched by the Machine Gunner **(10)**.

At about 2pm a Section from 6 Platoon (*Cpl TB Loftus*) was clearing in the same area as the previous booby trap incident **(9)** when the Forward Scout (*Pte R Mangano*) detonated a booby trap seriously wounding both; though wounded, the Section Commander went forward and applied First Aid to the scout thus saving his life. Both men were repatriated to Australia, though Cpl Loftus would return with 1RAR as a Senior NCO in 1968/69.

A short time later 5 Platoon (*2Lt WF Hindson*) was following fresh sign when it located a VC defended village **(11)** and by good (silent) fire and movement allowed the forward section to enter the village undetected whereupon the Forward Scout (*Pte L Waring*) got within a few yards of a VC machine gunner and shot him. About half a dozen VC returned fire as the platoon, led by the Platoon Commander cleared through the village killing another VC while the others fled. It was apparent the village was some form of administrative headquarters.

A short time later 5 Platoon was returning to the company base when the Forward Scout of the lead section (*Pte RK McLean*) had halted at a track junction **(12)** when a group of VC fired automatic weapons wounding him several times. After clearing the VC position the platoon broke contact and carried the wounded man some 500 metres to Company Headquarters.

Meanwhile A Company had been patrolling extremely slowly in booby trap infested country but still detonated two **(13)**, killing one man (*LCpl R Ross*) and wounding four others including two who were repatriated to Australia (*Ptes CP Manktelow and RG Unwin*) and a Section Commander (*Cpl RD Seipel*) who was subsequently killed in action in War Zone D on 7 February 1966.

The menace from booby traps continued on 13 October when 8 Platoon Headquarters (*Lt JD McNamara*) detonated a grenade with a trip wire **(14)** after the forward section had already passed through it. Four men were wounded, three of whom were repatriated – the Platoon Commander, a Section 2iC (*LCpl CJ Clarke*) and the Platoon Signaller (*Pte DHJ Kirkby*). The seemingly mindless task of patrolling in such dangerous country without any real possibility of actually contacting the enemy was halted when the C Company Commander (*Maj JJ Tattam*) sought and received approval from Battalion Headquarters to withdraw from the area.

On 14 October the Battalion returned by air and road to the Brigade base at Bien Hoa.

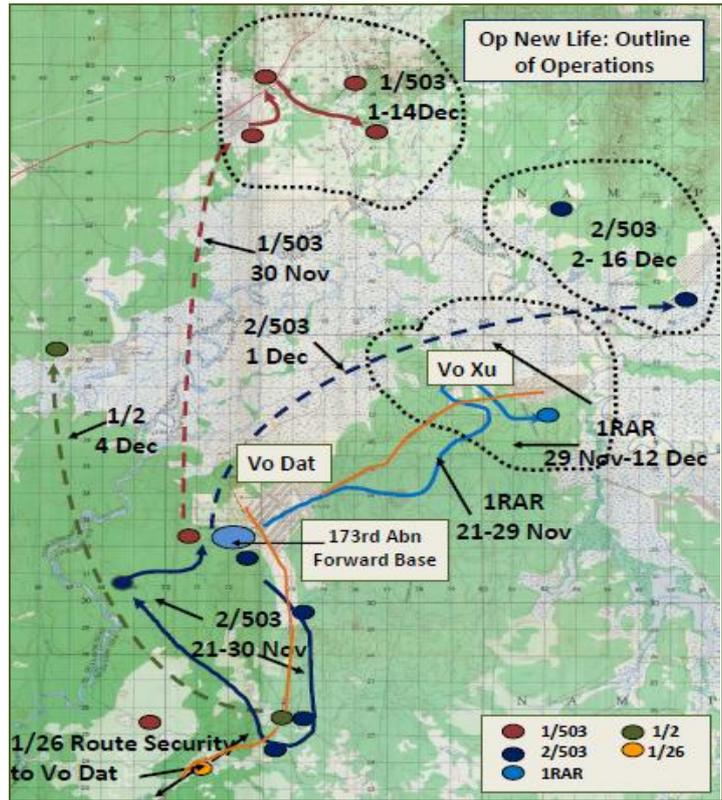
The following awards were made for Operation Iron Triangle:

- **Medal For Gallantry:** 2Lt WF Hindson (see 12 October);
- **Military Medal:** Sgt DG Saville (see 8 October), Pte L Waring (see 12 October);
- **Mentioned In Despatches:** Capt MJ Carroll (see 11 October), Cpl TB Loftus (see 12 October), LBdr DTA Morrow, RNZA (See 11 October).

Operation New Life: 21 November – 16 December 1965

In late 1965, the US High Command developed a strategy to deny the rice harvest to the VC while at the same time returning the farmland population to Government control. One such area was the La Nga River Valley north of Vo Dat in the north east of Long Khanh Province. The area had been originally settled in 1954 by displaced people from North Vietnam who with great industry turned the area from a wasteland into the fifth largest rice production area in Vietnam. In 1963 and 1964 however, the VC moved in and confiscated the crop, hence the backdrop for this 1965 operation.

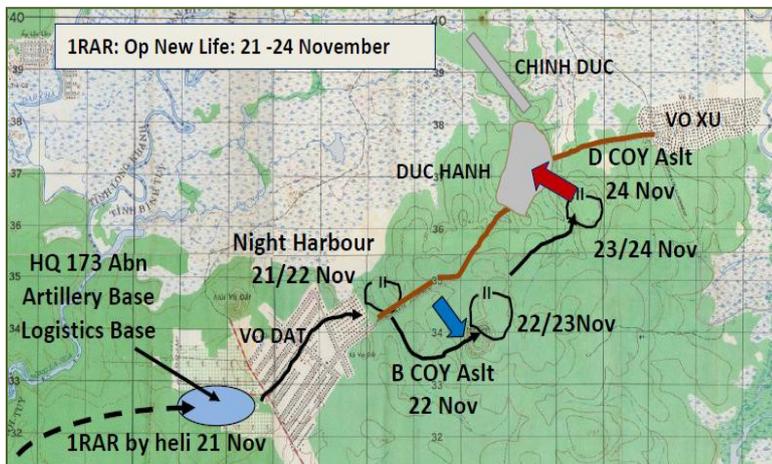
173 Abn (*Brig Gen EW Williamson*) was given the task of securing the area and the rice harvest while returning some 37,000 people to the security of government control. The Brigade was reinforced by two Battalions from the 1st US Division, the 1st Battalion 2nd Infantry Regiment (1/2) (see End Note 3) and the 2nd Battalion 26th Infantry Regiment (2/26). The outline of operations that occurred (see map) shows that after consolidating an Airhead at Vo Dat the Brigade's Battalions secured the major villages and roads;



this allowed the 10th ARVN Division to move through the area of operations and to the east on 26th November.

Battalions were then redeployed in quick order (as befits an Airborne Brigade) into individual Tactical Areas of Responsibility to secure the rice harvest and to eradicate enemy elements.

On 21 November, 2/503 (*Lt Col GE Dexter*) air assaulted Vo Dat airstrip and the Brigade then moved by air and road from Bien Hoa to Vo Dat and established a Command, Artillery and Logistics Base as well as an Airhead for various aircraft including C-130 (Hercules), C-7(Caribou), CH-37 (Mojave – recovery of downed aircraft), CH-47 (Chinook) and of course troop carrying Iroquois helicopters.

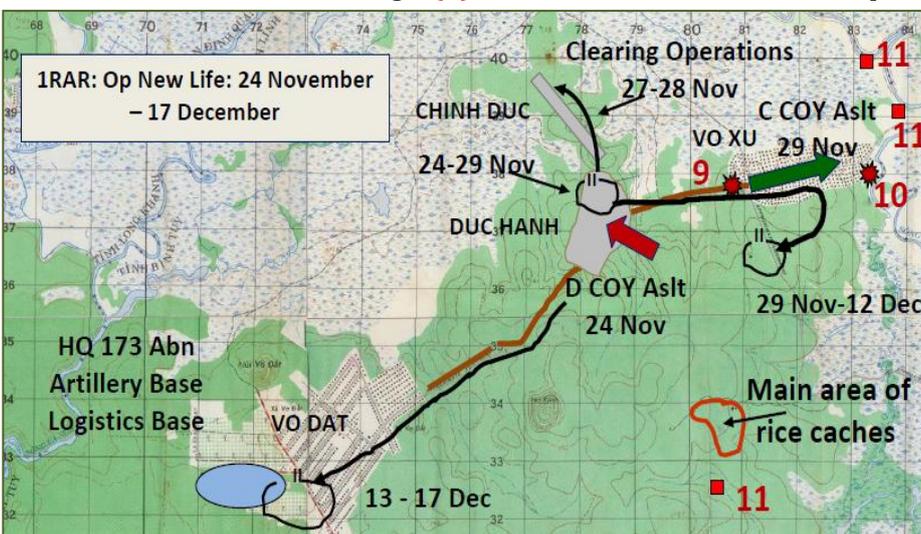
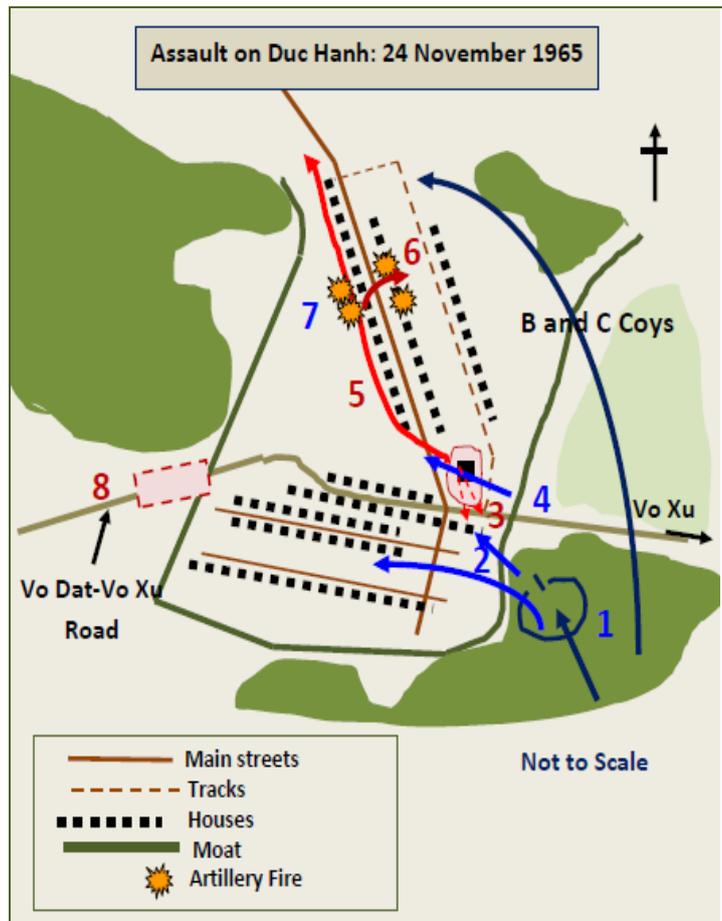


1RAR's mission was to secure and develop the road between Vo Dat and Vo Xu, secure and control Vo Xu and the surrounding area around Vo Xu. It was supported by 161 Battery RNZA, an APC Troop from PWLH and 3 Field Troop RAE. A Echelon (*Maj BJ Harper*) was established in the 173 Abn Forward Support Base adjacent to the Vo Dat Airfield, whilst B Echelon remained at Bien Hoa under the command of the Adjutant (*Capt RA Ducie*). On 21 November, the Battalion, commanded by the Battalion 2iC (*Maj HN Lander*)

moved in two lifts to a very (red) dusty Vo Dat (see picture page 11) and then moved to a night defensive position on a feature to the north east. The following morning A Company (*Maj JB Healy*)

secured the Start Line for B Company (*Maj ID McFarlane*) to assault a hill suspected to be held by the enemy, though it turned out to be unoccupied. On 23 November, the Battalion moved in single file to a defensive position adjacent to the village of Duc Hanh, straddling the Vo Dat to Vo Xu road. The village was a former product of the South Vietnamese Government's 'Strategic Hamlet Programme' so called and thus was surrounded by a moat (now overgrown), panji stakes, barbed wire and by now VC booby traps.

D Company (*Capt DP Rothwell*) was given the task to assault and the company commander in an aerial reconnaissance had recognised the layout from his experience in the Malayan Insurgency and had also identified a concealed approach to the perimeter (see sketch). Early on 24 November, D Company moved to the assault position (1) and 12 Platoon (2Lt JR Bourke) moved to breach the Moat (2) to be followed by Company HQ, 11 Platoon (2Lt WJ Giles) and 10 Platoon (2Lt OS Lind). As 12 Platoon was forming up it was fired on by a single weapon which was engaged by machine gun fire and as the Platoon moved across the road and into the village it received automatic fire from an enemy position (about 20 VC) around the church (3). The Platoon then formed up to assault the enemy position (4) however, the assault sections became separated from the platoon commander and were then led by the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt JW Carnes*) into and through the position forcing the enemy to withdraw (5). As the Platoon followed the withdrawing enemy a small group attempted to occupy a new position (6) but was stopped by artillery fire (7). Over half the enemy's numbers were killed or wounded in this action. After the village had been secured an enemy ambush position was discovered on the road at the western entrance of the village (8) which had been vacated the previous night. Clearly the enemy thought 1RAR would advance along the road from Vo Dat (as ARVN troops probably would) and had been caught by surprise when D Company emerged from the jungle.



had been caught by surprise when D Company emerged from the jungle. On 26 November, C Company (*Maj JJ Tattam*) in APCs was tasked to clear the road between Duc Hanh to and through Vo Xu. At about 8am as the lead carrier with the 9 Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt GA Smith*) and

a Section Commander (*LCpl GE Bland*) approached the village gates it was engaged by small arms and machine guns (9). Sgt Smith and LCpl Bland quickly moved to the gates and opened them to allow the carrier through. Because of the speed of their action the enemy was wrong footed and failed to detonate two large booby traps as they fled.

After clearing operations from 24 to 29 November though the hamlet of Chinh Duc, on 29 November, C Company with the Troop of APCs cleared through the village of Vo Xu, supported on the flanks by the other companies. Little or no opposition was encountered however, 4 Platoon (*2Lt GE Bolitho*) which was covering the Song La Nga River at the eastern end of the village was engaged by an estimated enemy platoon, including two machine guns, from the east bank of the river (10). Two soldiers were wounded, one fatally (*Cpl RH Hillier*). The enemy was engaged by two sections, artillery, mortar and armed helicopters destroying the machine guns and their crews and very likely others.

From 30 November to 12 December, the Battalion occupied a firm base and the companies patrolled in and around Vo Xu, while the Field Engineers repaired roads and destroyed fortifications. A number of unoccupied VC camps were located (11) and some 100 tons of rice recovered from caches located some 3 Kms south of Vo Xu.

On 13 December the Battalion, now under the command of *Lt Col AV Preece* (see [A Duty Done page 21](#)), moved to Vo Dat to defend the Airhead in preparation for a new 173 Abn operation commencing on 17 December, ie Operation Smash. This operation would take 1RAR to the north of Phuoc Tuy Province to the enemy base area that battalions with the 1st Australian Task Force would conduct many future operations, ie the *Hat Dich* (see also [End Note 4](#)).

Although Operation New Life was successful in securing the rice harvest it was, as in many cases in the Vietnam War, only temporary in nature, because a few weeks later the VC returned in strength and razed Vo Xu to the ground

The following awards were made for Operation New Life:

- **Military Medal: Sgt JW Carnes (see 24 November), Sgt GA Smith (see 26 November).**



A patrol crossing the Song La Nga River near Vo Xu led by Pte JH Harrap.
AWM SHA/0306/VN



D Company HQ in Vo Xu. L-R: Capt DP Rothwell, LCpl PT Fleming, Pte PJ Doody.
AWM SHA/0222/VN



UH 1H leaving Vo Dat in a cloud of dust after dropping off 1RAR soldiers (left bottom).

Photograph courtesy of Lex McAuley

B Coy troops disembarking from a PWLH APC during Operation New Life.

AWM KEL650016VN



Operation Smash: 17-21 December 1965

The concept of this operation was for the Brigade to move from Vo Dat to a concentration area at Xuan Loc and then for a battalion (1/503) to air assault Courtenay Airstrip to allow the artillery base for five batteries of 3/319 to be established (see End Note 5). Following that, two battalions (1RAR and 2/503) would air assault into LZs to the west to conduct search and destroy operations.

On 17 December, 1RAR moved first from Vo Dat to Xuan Loc by Chinook Helicopters and then after air strikes, artillery fire (three batteries) and Light Fire Teams, the Battalion led by A Company (*Maj JB Healy*), air assaulted the Landing Zone (LZ).

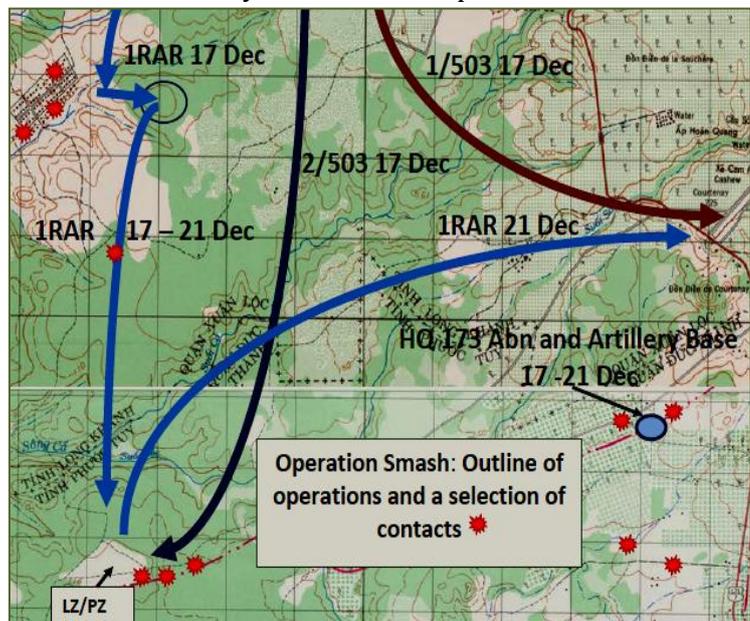
Before that at Vo Dat, the assault Pioneer Platoon (*Sgt CG Evans*) was destroying enemy ammunition when a grenade exploded prematurely killing a Section Commander (*Cpl AH Fotheringham*).

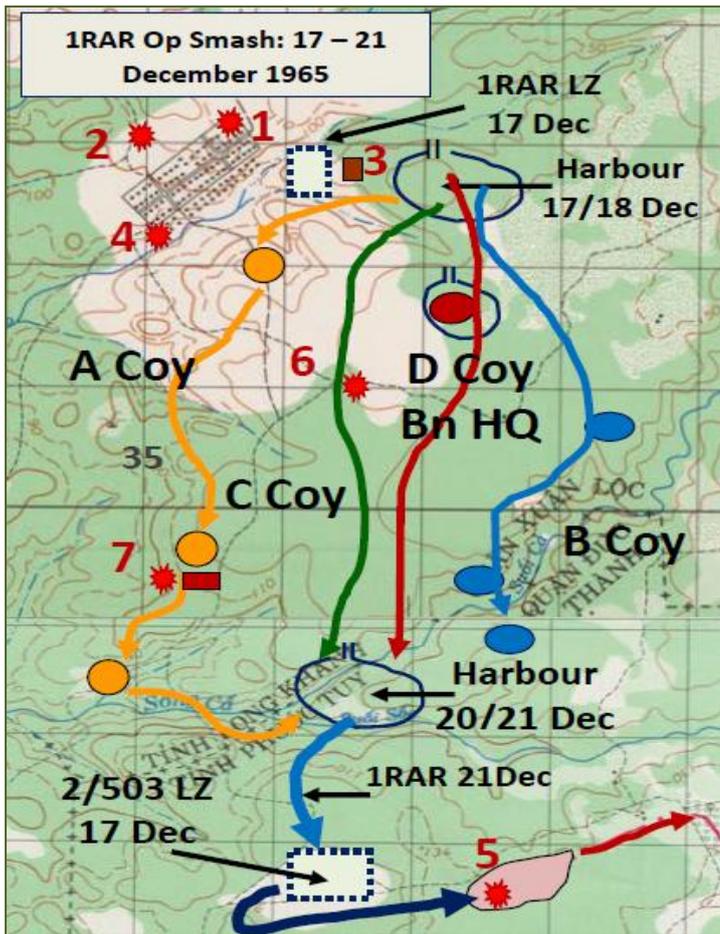
Some two hours later, the 2/503 air assaulted to a LZ 6 Kms to the south. This would become the Pickup Zone (PZ) for 1RAR on 21 December (see End Note 6).

The second company in the air assault, B Company (*Maj ID McFarlane*) immediately moved to clear the village to the west of the LZ. C Company (*Maj JJ Tattam*) gave protection to B Company's left flank and the Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Sgt CG Evans*) to the right flank.

About an hour later 4 Platoon (*2Lt GE Bolitho*) was fired on by a VC sniper (1) wounding one man (*Pte AP Ling*) who was evacuated. Two hours later 5 Platoon (*2Lt WF Hindson*) was establishing a firm base west of the village when it was engaged by a single VC (2) who quickly withdrew when he received return fire from an M60 machine gun and an M79 grenade launcher. That evening A Company located a rice cache near the LZ (3).

At about 1pm on 18 December, 2 Platoon (*Lt IM Guild*) was in a harbour next to the creek running to the south west of the village when a MG number 2 (*Pte KA Benier*) spotted two VC moving into the creek; shortly after, more enemy were seen and the Platoon engaged them catching them by complete surprise causing several casualties (4). Artillery was then used in depth and 1 Platoon (*2Lt EJ Culpitt*) then cleared the area locating two bodies and two German 7.92mm Mauser rifles.





Meanwhile further south, the Reconnaissance Platoon of 2/503 unwittingly entered an enemy defensive position and was engaged on three sides by automatic weapons and machine guns (5). The platoon, joined by C Company 2/503 held their nerve and used artillery and air support to break up the enemy's defences; later B Company 2/503 supported by C Company assaulted the enemy position from a flank. Over 50 enemy dead were located in the position which had been most likely occupied by a Main Force unit from 5VC Division. C Company lost five men killed (Sgt RA Gray, PFC S Griffin, PFC DJ Guilmet, PFC RW Peterson and Lt JP Yatsko).

At about 2pm, 8 Platoon (2Lt KW Lunny) was the lead platoon for the C Company advance when a forward scout sighted and engaged a single enemy without result (6).

At about 10am on 20 December, 1 Platoon (2Lt EJ Culpitt) was leading the A Company advance when it came across very fresh sign (footprints) and a bunker which was spotted by the Platoon Commander; he immediately began deploying the platoon when a Chicom Claymore Mine was detonated followed by enemy small arms fire (7). After calling in

artillery fire the Platoon assaulted through the enemy position which was a VC camp complete with a large kitchen.

The Battalion regrouped that night and the following day crossed the Suoi Ca River to the PZ. It was then flown first to the Courtenay Airstrip and then back to the base at Bien Hoa.



2/503rd Company Commander and Signaller at LZ on 17 December 1965.
Photograph by courtesy of 173rd Abn Association



Troops from Company C, 2/503rd at LZ on 17 December 1965.
Photograph by courtesy of 173rd Abn Association

Operation Matthew: 29 June – 17 July 1969

In mid 1969, two operations were conducted back to back by 9RAR (*Lt Col AL Morrison, CO; WO1 D Cassidy, RSM*) in the far north of Phuoc Tuy Province, *Operation Matthew* (29 June-17 July) and *Operation Hat Dich* (18-31 July). *Operation Matthew's* objective was to locate and destroy the main enemy logistic unit located in Phuoc Tuy Province, ie *84 Rear Services Group* which operated extensively between the Hat Dich and the May Tao Base areas. It was known the unit operated in small groups servicing enemy units by establishing caches and through the use of local villagers. It had been targeted by 1ATF several times, most notably by 3RAR and 4RAR/NZ during *Operation Capital* (see [A Duty Done pages 72 and 73](#)); and, by 6RAR/NZ during *Operation Lavarack* (see [A Duty Done pages 85-89](#)) which concluded on 30 June after D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) secured FSPB Flinders for the fly-in of A Company 9RAR (*Maj W McDonald*) on 29 June.

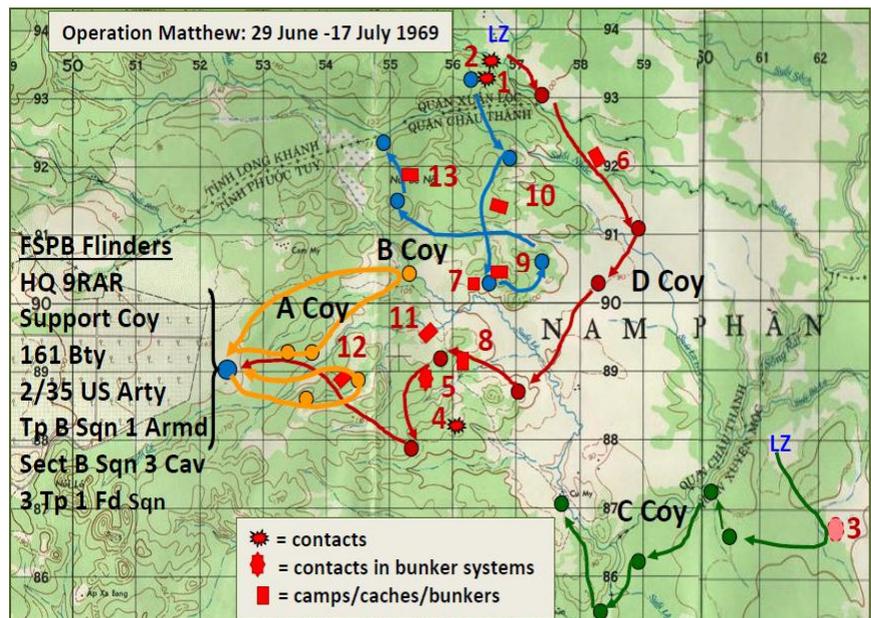
FSPB Flinders was established by road convoy on 29 June and B Company (*Maj EA Chitham*) and D Company (*Maj IJC Hearn*) flew via FSPB Flinders to a Landing Zone (LZ) some 10 kilometres to the north east; the companies then commenced to patrol to the south and south east. C Company (*Maj LJ Lewis*) remained on separate operations with 4/48 ARVN Battalion.

Contact with the enemy was immediate when at 8 am on 30 June two sentries from 6 Platoon (*Sgt GR Griffiths*), in a company base (1) detected movement and returned to the platoon as the company stood to. As 6 Platoon were organising a clearing patrol the enemy fired into the base fatally wounding one man (*Pte GD Sorrensen*).

The following morning 4 Platoon (*2Lt JB Langler*) was ambushing a track when a small group of enemy approached through the jungle (2). The platoon and the enemy opened fire simultaneously with one enemy soldier hit and one 4 Platoon soldier wounded (*Pte LD Smillie*).

On 3 July C Company joined the battalion and on 4 July was deployed some 10 Km to the east to link up with an SAS Patrol (*2Lt HN Howlett*) to search for a possible enemy camp (3). C Company searched the area for three days and found no trace of the enemy and on 8 July commenced to patrol to the west. (See also End Note 7).

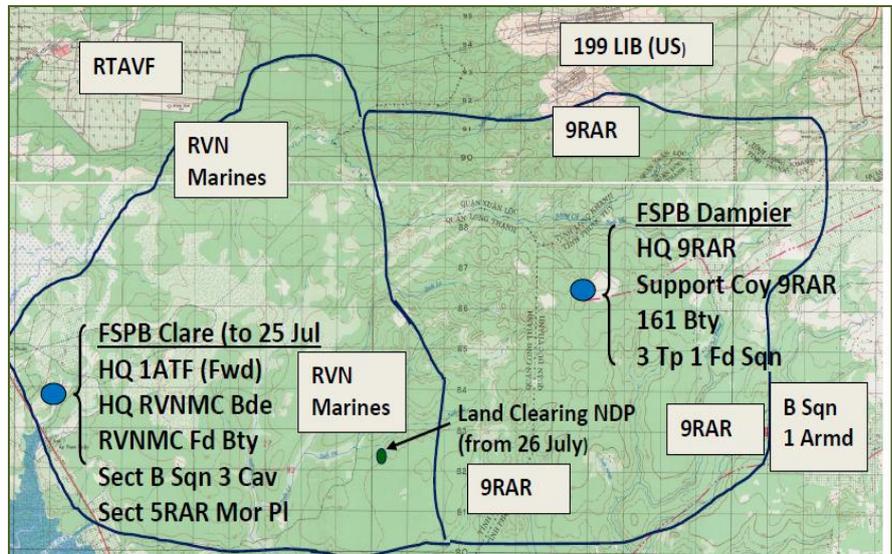
Meanwhile, at about 8am on 6 July, 10 Platoon (*Lt AGH Craig*) was moving from an overnight ambush position for morning administration when the Section left in the ambush (*Cpl GL Cousins*) (4) was fired upon by automatic weapons and RPGs killing one man (*LCpl RJ Abraham*) and seriously wounding another who was repatriated to Australia a week later (*Pte MW Spice*). On 12 July, 11 Platoon (*Lt SB Bramah*) was conducting a reconnaissance of a suspected enemy position (5) when one of the Sections was given permission to extend the sweep to follow up on sign of enemy being seen. The Section Commander (*Cpl BAJ Adamczyk*) and the Forward Scout (*Pte BP Edwards* who had also served in 1RAR from September 1968 to February 1969) moved forward independently of the rest of the Section, discovered the edge of a bunker system and threw a grenade. The enemy responded with small arms and RPGs killing both men. Mortar and artillery fire together with a Light Fire Team supported the move by Company Headquarters and 10 Platoon to join 11 Platoon to recover the casualties which



Operation Hat Dich: 18 to 31 July 1969

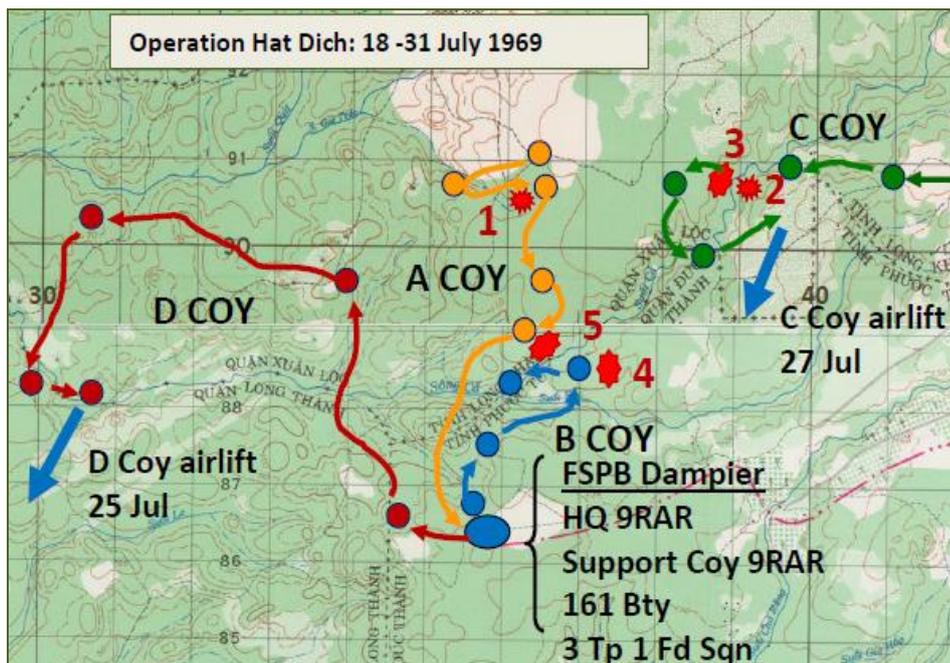
Operation Hat Dich was a combined operation by 1ATF and a Brigade of the Republic of Vietnam Marine Corps (RVNMC). HQ 1ATF deployed a Forward HQ to FSPB Clare where it was collocated with the Marine Brigade HQ and protected by a section of cavalry, the 1ATF D&E Platoon, a Marine Field Battery and a Section from the 5RAR Mortar Platoon.

The main objective of the operation however, was that 9RAR attempt to locate and destroy Headquarters 274 VC Regiment; however, as it was very mobile and well protected by security screens, finding it was always going to be a difficult task. Also, as the record shows, the involvement by the 1 ATF Forward HQ and the two Vietnamese Marine Battalions had no impact on the outcome of the operation and indeed seemed to have played no part in it.



On the first day of the operation 2 Platoon (2Lt AJ Daniels) had two contacts while ambushing a track (1). The first occurred about mid afternoon when 10 plus enemy with AK 47s and some wearing camouflage approached spaced about 15m apart; when 7 of them were in the killing ground the ambush was initiated by Claymore mines resulting in at least three being killed. The second contact occurred

two hours later when 3 enemy approached the platoon through the jungle and were engaged by a M60 Machine Gun killing or wounding all of them.



The 19 July was a day of high drama for C Company (Capt LA Tizard). At about 3pm, 7 Platoon (2Lt BV Osborn) had located what appeared to be a water point complete with a log bridge and shortly after two enemy soldiers approached from what was thought to be an enemy camp on the other

side of the creek. Both were engaged (2) with one killed and the other withdrawing; thus any enemy that were in the camp were now fully alert to the presence of C Company. So when 7 Platoon was joined by Company Headquarters and 9 Platoon (2Lt MJ Mummery) at about 5pm and the company was then ordered to follow up across the creek it was inevitable that the enemy was going to have a clear

advantage in any contact. At about 5.30pm this was to prove so with tragic results. The forward section in 7 Platoon (*LCpl AGS Ochiltree*) took the brunt of the enemy fire (3) with the Forward Scout (*Pte RC Kermode*) killed and ten others wounded, six seriously, who were subsequently repatriated back to Australia; they were the Platoon Commander and *Ptes LH Battley, MJ McDonnell, JD Nixon-Smith, DW Tate (who had served in 4RAR/NZ before joining 9RAR) and J Walker (who had joined 9RAR just two days prior)*. During the fire fight, the Section Commander moved forward some 30 metres under fire to assist the Forward Scout but was driven back; when he attempted to do so again he was wounded and after receiving First Aid tried a third time but was ordered not to do so. The Machine Gunner from the second section (*Pte GD Salmon*) moved forward to provide fire support and despite being a very tall man (195 cm), decided that the standing position would be best to give effective fire and he did so over about an hour that it took to extricate the forward section and casualties. 9 Platoon was also moved to the left flank thus helping to relieve the pressure on 7 Platoon. Artillery and a Light Fire Team then allowed the Company to consolidate its position, though it wasn't until the following day that *Pte Kermode's* body was recovered together with weapons and equipment left by the wounded.

On 22 July, B Company (*Maj EA Chitham*) had a similar experience but with an entirely different outcome. At about 1030am, 6 Platoon (*Lt RT Convery*) had contacted and wounded an enemy soldier on the edge of a bunker system (4) from which an RPG had been fired, probably from a depth position. The Platoon Commander was sure the bunker system extended over some distance to the north so the Company Commander decided to concentrate the company and then engage it with artillery, mortars and close air support. Following that, the Company moved into the system supported by a Light Fire Team but by then the enemy had predictably withdrawn from the system of some 30 newly constructed bunkers together with permanent facilities – it had mostly likely been occupied by elements of 274 VC Regiment.

On 24 July, A Company (*Maj W McDonald*) had two contacts (5), the first by 3 Platoon (*2Lt I Jones*) at 4pm when it engaged a single enemy moving on a track who quickly scarpered; the second was about half an hour later when 2 Platoon (*Sgt EJ Lute*) some 300m further south, was patrolling when an enemy sentry in a large bunker system fired at the Forward Scout (*Pte RJ Moore, who had joined 9RAR in June after serving in 1RAR*) hitting him in the chest; *Pte Moore* died from his wounds in the Dustoff Helicopter taking him to 1 Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau.

On 26 July, A Company had been cautiously searching a large bunker system (6) with 2 Platoon (*2Lt AJ Daniels*) in the north some 350m from Company Headquarters and 1 Platoon (*2Lt BJ Vickery*) in the south. Later that afternoon, 2 Platoon contacted an enemy stay-behind party who had remained concealed in a bunker and who responded with RPG fire. 2Platoon cleared the enemy and a short time later, near dusk, Company Headquarters and 1 Platoon came under RPG and MG fire wounding the Platoon Commander in the head and shoulders. 2Lt Vickery was evacuated around last light during a very heavy tropical storm.

During this operation and as had occurred on numerous other operations conducted by other Battalions in the Hat Dich area, 9RAR had encountered problems dealing with enemy Bunker Systems. These came mainly as a failure to conduct detailed reconnaissance to establish the strengths and flanks of the enemy position (see also [A Duty Done page 101](#)).

On 31 July the Battalion returned to Nui Dat to prepare for its next operation on 15 August, ie Operation Neppabunna to be conducted in Land Mine infested county east of Route 44 – but that is another story.

Awards for the 19 July 1969 Action were:

- **Military Medal: LCpl AGS Ochiltree; Pte GD Salmon.**



**9 Platoon taking a resupply loaded in sandbags. L-R: LCpl FG Chambers, Pte FN Brook, Cpl SA Evans, Pte GD Salmon, LCpl JF Kelly and LCpl RS McPhail.
Photograph by courtesy of the 9RAR Association.**

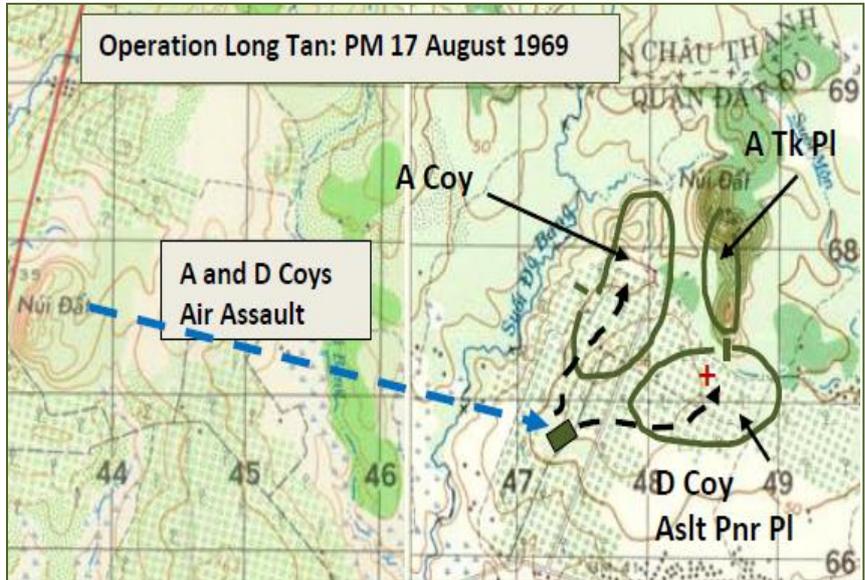


***“Once more unto the breach dear friends” 8 Platoon moves past C Company Headquarters at Nui Dat, led by a Forward Scout, Pte (later Cpl) GR Eaton.*
Photograph by courtesy of the 9RAR Association.**

Operation Long Tan: 18 August 1969

Following the conclusion of *Operation Mundingburra* on 15 August 1969, 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion returned to Nui Dat and immediately commenced preparations for a new operation commencing 17 August, ie *Operation Long Tan*. The concept for this operation had been under consideration for some time involving as it did a ceremony on 18 August at the site of the 1966 battle including the erection of a memorial cross. Because of the possibility of enemy being in the area, eg subunits of *D445 VC Battalion* which randomly roamed through the area of the Long Tan Rubber Plantation, the operation had to be conducted as a normal tactical operation.

At 2pm on 17 August A Company (*Maj PL Belt*) air assaulted into a Landing Zone (LZ) that was about 500 metres south of the LZ used to evacuate casualties on the night of the battle in 1966. D Company (*Maj IT Stewart*) with under command the Assault Pioneer Platoon and the Anti Tank Platoon followed and both companies moved to secure the area, especially to the north of the proposed location of the Cross (+) – see map opposite.



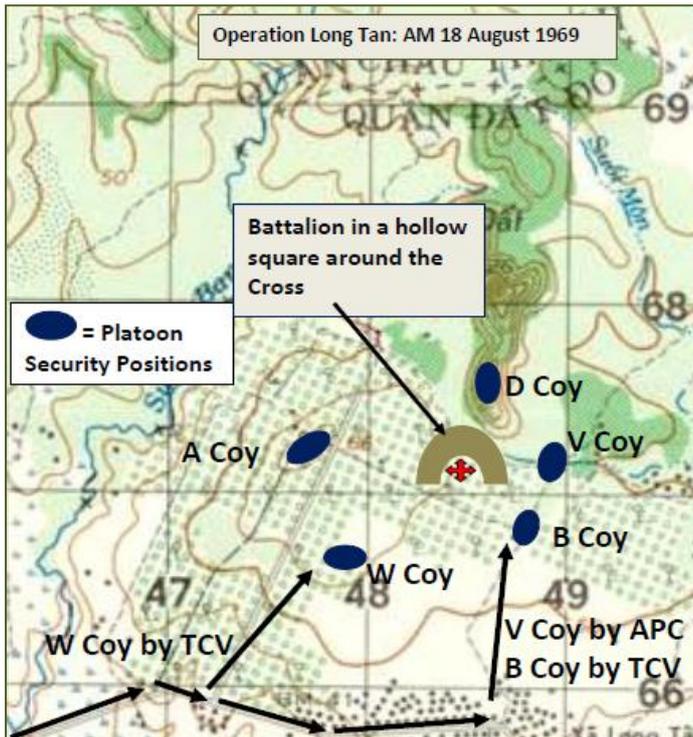
The Cross was to be erected on the site where 11 Platoon had fought so courageously and lost so many casualties during the Battle of Long Tan. The Cross was manufactured in concrete by the

6RAR/NZ Assault Pioneer Platoon (*Sgt AC McLean*), weighed about 200 Kg and was two metres high.

Early on 18 August 1969, the remaining Rifle Companies and Support Company moved to the area. V

Company (*Maj LJ Lynch*) led the move mounted in Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) followed by B Company (*Maj MJ Harris*) and W Company (*Maj LG Williams*) in Troop Carrying Vehicles (TCVs), ie trucks – see map left.

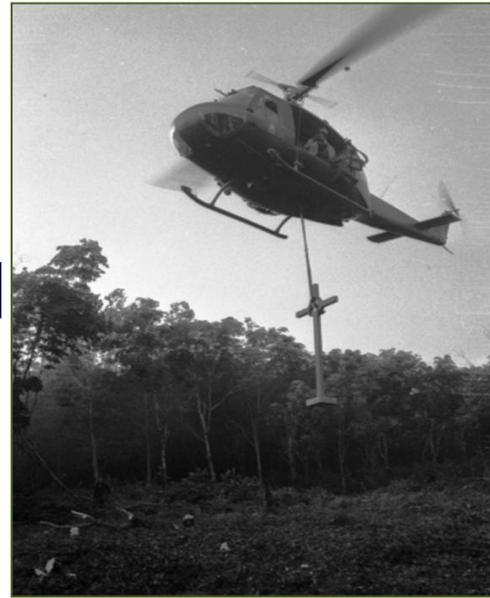
On reaching their designated areas the companies occupied a harbour position and then moved to the area of the Cross to form a 'hollow square'. Each company left a reinforced platoon behind to form a security screen around the area of the Cross ([see also End Note 9](#)).



Before the Battalion had concentrated D Company and the Assault Pioneer Platoon had located and secured the position of the Cross which was to face south. The Cross was then flown in by RAAF Helicopter

AWM PO4665.786

.....and erected by the Assault Pioneer Platoon.



The Brass Plaque on the Cross reads:

'In memory of those members of D Company and 3 Troop 1 APC Squadron who gave their lives near this spot during the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966. Erected by 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion 18 August 1969'

AWM PO4665.791

The dedication ceremony then commenced with the sun shining down on the Cross and the Honour Guard drawn from veterans of the Battle of Long Tan –and with the 'hollow square' visible in the tree line.

After the ceremony the rifle companies returned to Nui Dat and the Anti Tank Platoon (Tracker Platoon) (2Lt JB Neervoort) remained as the 'stay behind' before also returning to Nui Dat



AWM PO4665.809



2Lt JB Neervoort with Dog Trajan on 18 August 1969.
Photograph courtesy of Dave Sabben

Epilogue

It was evident in 1969 that people were confident the South would win the war against the revolutionary North because to preserve the integrity of the Cross it was suggested at the time that it included an inscription on the reverse side dedicating it to the men of 275 VC Regiment who lost their lives during the battle. The suggestion was robustly rejected and maybe it wouldn't have made any difference anyway because after victory by the North in 1975 the Cross was removed. Indeed it is quite possible the Cross and most certainly the Brass Plaque had been removed even before the Task Force left Nui Dat in November 1971 (see [A Duty Done page 162](#)).

The Cross was rediscovered in 1987 by Terry Burstall (see also [End Note 10](#)) on one of his many visits to Vietnam in the 1980s. It was in a shed in the redeveloped village of Long Tan, a couple of kilometres to the south east of the 1966 battlefield. The original village had been resettled in 1966 in advance of the Task Force occupation of Nui Dat (see [A Duty Done Page 24](#)). The Brass Plaque was missing but was presented to Terry by Vietnamese officials in Dat Do. He could have brought it back to Australia but correctly decided it and the Cross should stay together.

Terry had hoped that both could be removed to Australia in return for a donation of medical supplies by the Australian Government for a local hospital. For reasons which are obscure this did not happen and the Cross and Plaque were eventually relocated to the Dong Nai Museum in Bien Hoa where it remains, though it was temporarily loaned to the Australian War Memorial in 2012 (see below).



A replica Cross now stands at the original site where with prior approval, commemoration services may be conducted.



The original Cross in the Dong Nai Museum in Bien Hoa
Photograph courtesy of Ross Ellis

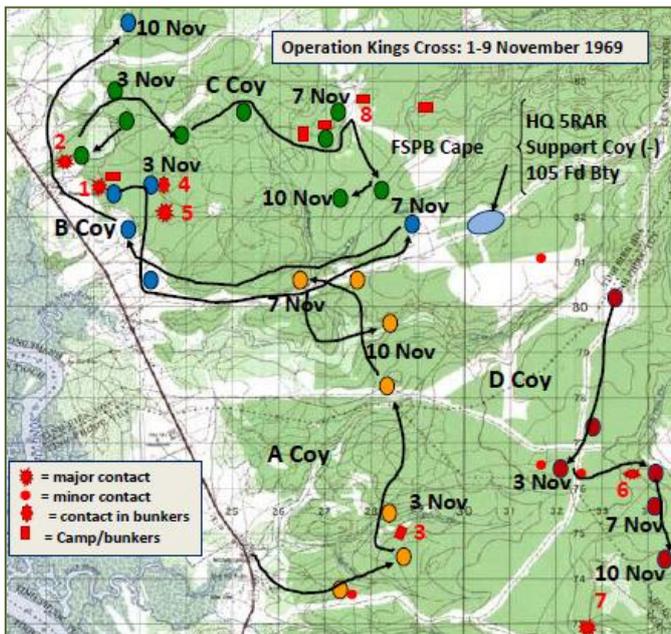


The replica Cross on 5 October 2015. Nui Dat 2 can just be seen on the far left.
Photograph courtesy of Bianca Signorelli, McLachlan Tours

Operation Kings Cross: 31 October – 12 December 1969

Operation Kings Cross was one of many conducted in the intense schedule of 1ATF operations in 1969. 5RAR (*Lt Col CN Khan, CO and WO1 CR Vagg, RSM*) was given a somewhat strange mission by HQ 1ATF, ie “to harass SR4 units and other VC elements”. To ‘locate and destroy’ might have made more sense tactically especially as Route 15 had been an area of interest for 274 VC Regiment (see also End Note 11). Regardless, the plot was for 5RAR to relieve 9RAR in place from Operation Jack in the North West Hat Dich area (see A Duty Done pages 104 and 105). The area was of course well known to 5RAR having conducted Operation Camden there some two months earlier (see A Duty Done pages 98 to 100).

5RAR’s outline plan is described on the map opposite and in summary was for the rifle companies to fly by Caribou Aircraft to an Airhead at Phu My on Route 15, with one company (B Company supported by 2 Troop B Squadron 1 Armoured Regiment and 2 Troop B Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment) securing Route 15; one company (D Company) moving from a separate Landing Zone to a blocking position in the east of the



2 November, the Company was moving in APCs when the Section on the lead APC saw a group of enemy which they immediately engaged (2). 8 Platoon (*2Lt JF Hood*) and 9 Platoon (*2Lt RA Lambert*) assaulted the enemy position and when the APCs became bogged in swampy ground the Company Commander had 9 Platoon sweep through the position with fire support from 8 Platoon and with 7 Platoon (*Lt IR Hosie*) in APCs sent to a blocking position in the rear. Of the 10 enemy involved all were killed or wounded including one captured; he had arrived from North Vietnam in August 1969 and was a member of a supply group.

9 Platoon C Company in APCs assaulting the enemy position on 2 November.
Photograph by courtesy of David Wilkins





**A wounded enemy soldier being carried to the Dustoff Helicopter by L-R: the C Company Medic (Cpl KW Mulligan), 8 Platoon Section Commander (LCpl EL Kime) under the supervision of the 8 Platoon Sergeant (Sgt RE Hill).
Photograph by courtesy of David Wilkins**

At about the same time as the C Company contact, 3 Platoon (*Lt JR James*) located one of many recently occupied bunker systems that would be found during the operation **(3)**.

About 12noon, 4 Platoon (*WO2 R Hindmarsh*) discovered fresh sign of enemy movement, then occupied a defensive position and for about two hours observed a suspected enemy bunker position **(4)**. The Platoon Commander's thinking was not to enter the bunker system, but rather ambush likely exits. This proved to be the correct approach because about 2pm, some 12 enemy emerged from the position and were engaged by M60 machine guns, small arms, M79 grenades and grenade launchers. All of the enemy were killed or wounded including a prisoner of war. Two Australian were slightly wounded (*Pte LW Darlington* and *Pte JW Fenton*). The enemy were from elements *274 VC Regiment* and the prisoner was an NVA soldier from that Regiment's Combat Engineer Company; the group had been escorting a wounded comrade to a *Sub Region 4 Hospital*. The bunker system had 30 bunkers which had been occupied by an enemy company, further confirming the wisdom of *WO2 Hindmarsh's* decision.

Early on 4 November, 6 Platoon was moving through thick bush when the Forward Scout (*Pte MP Linton*) emerged onto an ox cart track and was immediately hit by an RPG round killing him instantly **(5)** and wounding the Section Commander (*Cpl DA Campbell*). At about 1.30pm the same day, 11 Platoon (*2Lt J Russell*) was patrolling through thick jungle when it came across a track and saw an enemy soldier approaching some 25 metres away **(6)**; the Platoon went into a contact drill killing two enemy.

A short time later, 2 Platoon (*2Lt RA Brett*) was in an ambush at the junction of two Fire Trails ([see A Duty Done page 64](#)) when a group of enemy approached the cut-off group from behind – evidently, because of heavy air traffic the enemy were not using the Fire Trail but moving through the bush and found the track made by the cut-off group when it deployed **(7)**. A Number Two on one of the Machine Guns (*Pte AR Bellingham*) spotted the enemy movement behind him and alerted the Number One on the Gun (*LCpl MA Fowler*) but when he moved the weapon to engage, the enemy realised they were in trouble and withdrew. However, *LCpl Fowler* picked up the gun and chased them for some 30 metres hitting two; the rest of the Platoon then engaged and killed a further two. *LCpl Fowler's* action was an act of courage and determination typical of many shown by soldiers of 5RAR; in this case, as in many other cases, going unrewarded.

On 7 November, C Company located a series of bunkers that had either been recently occupied or were under construction **(8)**.

On 8 November CO 5RAR (*Lt Col CN Khan*) issued new orders which included D Company (*Maj MP Blake*) being moved on 10 November by helicopter from the south east of the Area of Operations to the vacated FSPB Diggers Rest and then to patrol further north.

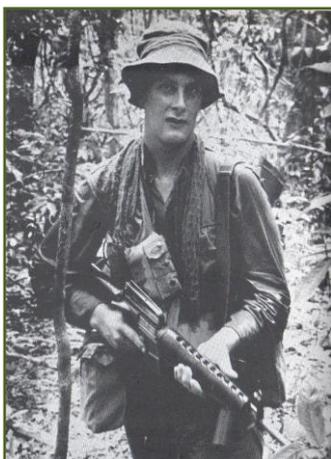
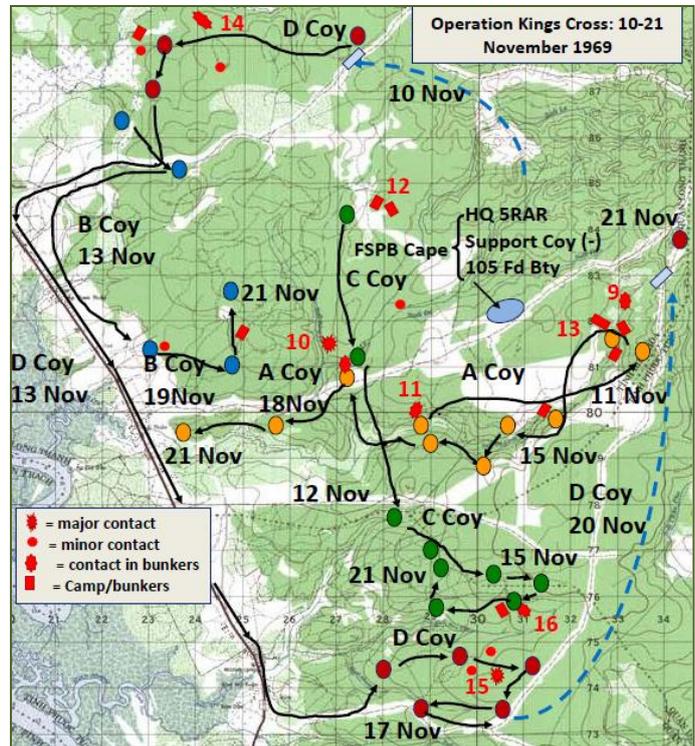
The next phase of the operation was characterised by constant movement of the rifle companies with several major redeployments, especially by D Company which basically circumnavigated the whole of the Area of Operations in 10 days. The general line of advance by the companies (shown on the map on page 24) required considerable skill to coordinate the necessary separation between companies both in time and space. Given there was a strong likelihood of contact with the enemy and thus tension in the ranks, this was especially important to avoid the possibility of friendly patrol clashes.

10 November was a busy day with the first contact occurring at about 10am by the Tracker Platoon (2Lt JWO Paterson). The Platoon was patrolling on the axis of a creek (9) when the Forward Section (Cpl PD Baker) and Platoon Headquarters came under heavy fire from AK 47s and RPG2s seriously wounding the Tail End Charlie (Pte JF Humphries) who was subsequently repatriated to Australia. The Platoon Commander manoeuvred the other two sections to provide covering fire to retrieve the wounded man and to allow the forward section to withdraw and then brought in artillery, mortars and airstrikes. When the Dustoff Helicopter was fired on, a Light Fire Team was used to suppress enemy fire. As the Platoon Commander said at the time "fire and movement is my god".

At about 1pm, a 7 Platoon Reconnaissance Patrol led by the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt J Halliday) contacted one enemy (10) who responded with a rifle grenade wounding one man (Pte MG Browne); artillery was brought down on the enemy's withdrawal route and two bodies were found subsequently. A few hours later, at about 5pm, 1 Platoon (Lt RW Randell) was clearing the west side of a major creek when the Forward Scout (Pte KB Answer) was engaged by three enemy (11). As the Forward Section went to ground the next Section moved in extended line on the left flank and commenced to move using fire and movement. Very soon they saw bunkers and given the time of day, the Platoon Commander sensibly withdrew the Platoon and engaged the area with Light Fire Teams and subsequently with artillery, mortars and airstrikes, forcing the enemy to withdraw.

Early on 11 November, C Company (Maj CH Ducker) located two major bunker systems that were new or under construction and in one case recently occupied (12), while A Company (Maj RF Sutton) was making similar finds in the east (13). Later that morning, 12 Platoon (2Lt RA Fenwick) was patrolling when a sentry bunker and fresh footprints were found; a Reconnaissance Patrol went forward and was fired on from bunkers (14). The Platoon then withdrew and used artillery and a Light Fire Team before moving back into the system with covering mortar fire. The enemy had withdrawn and the bunker system was one that had been rebuilt in a system destroyed previously by airstrikes

D Company redeployed by APC on 13 November to the southern sector of the Area of Operations and after a series of minor contacts, on 16 November 12 Platoon contacted an enemy platoon (15); the Platoon heard movement and then saw three enemy withdrawing and when one returned for a look he was engaged by a scout. The enemy then returned fire and attempted to outflank the Platoon but were dissuaded by artillery fire. Later that day, 9 Platoon (2Lt RA Lambert) was patrolling towards a suspected bunker system when it was fired on by an enemy sentry (16). As the Platoon deployed it was engaged by a number of AK47s including accurate fire from snipers. A Section Commander (Cpl HE Suttor) when attempting to grenade a bunker was shot and killed. Two other men were wounded including the Platoon Sergeant (Sgt PJ Knight) who was shot by a sniper when he attempted to retrieve the body of Cpl Suttor.



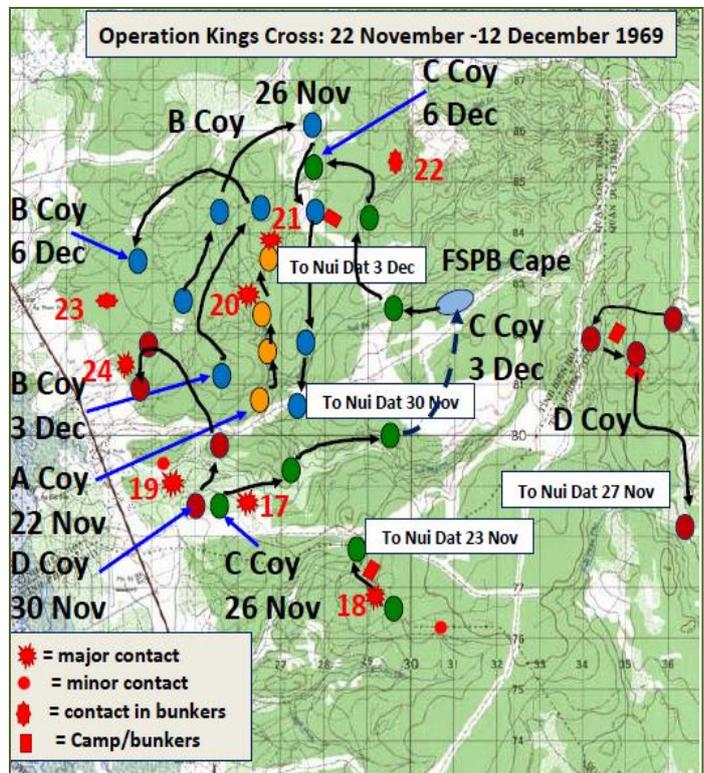
Pte KB Answer, Forward Scout 1 Platoon 5RAR
Courtesy 5RAR Association

A Light Fire Team was called in and after the remainder of C Company with a troop of tanks cleared the (now vacant) enemy position: the casualties were then evacuated. C Company subsequently located a large (20 plus) bunker system 300 metres to the west of the contact.

On 23 November, the rifle companies and Support Company Platoons began to rotate back to Núi Dat and then to Vung Tau for a couple of days R&C. C Company was followed in turn by D Company (27 November), B Company (30 November) and A Company (3 December).

As one company left another returned and was often reinserted into the Area of Operations where another company had been previously. Obviously the thinking at Battalion Headquarters was that as the enemy usually returned to its regular base of operations it would be confronted by a new threat from 5RAR. Hence the 'spaghetti trails' describing company routes shown on the next map.

At about 6.30pm on 18 November, 1 Platoon (*Lt RW Randell*) was in an ambush position when three enemy approached but having probably heard movement from within the Platoon began to withdraw. The sentry on the Machine Gun (*Pte MG Tuckett*) opened fire including with a Claymore killing one of the enemy. The others attempted to retrieve the body but were driven off by small arms fire (17). The following day the Platoon was in an ambush in the same area when at about 8pm two enemy approached and were engaged by the Machine Gun sentry (*Pte DI Douglas* who was to do most of his tour with 7RAR). The MG had several stoppages (loose gas plug) and the enemy escaped relatively unscathed.



Early on 21 November, 9 Platoon (*2Lt RA Lambert*) had been in an overnight ambush on a well used track when three enemy approached through the scrub from an unexpected direction but were nevertheless successfully engaged (18). A large bunker system probably occupied by the *Sapper Platoon of 274 VC Regiment* was discovered near by the following day.

At about 11am on 27 November, 8 Platoon (*2Lt JF Hood*) had established a firm base from which a Reconnaissance Patrol searched along the bank of Suoi Rang Ca. It observed and engaged a group of enemy killing two (19) one of whom was a senior officer from *HQ 274 VC Regiment* but who may have been seconded to the *Headquarters of Military Region 7*, the senior enemy headquarters in the region. The following day 1 Platoon was establishing a firm base when an enemy soldier came to investigate. The MG sentry (*Pte RA Gell*) and the enemy saw and engaged each other simultaneously (20) however, the gun jammed after 5 rounds and the sentry was shot in the leg which required him to be repatriated to Australia a week later.

At about midday on 3 December, 3 Platoon (*Lt JR James*) was in an ambush when a group of enemy approached through the scrub to the rear of the ambush (21). The rear protection MG engaged but had a stoppage after only one round and the Claymore sited to cover the rear approach couldn't fire because of a faulty firing device (a common occurrence). The enemy withdrew firing three RPG7 rounds as they did wounding 7 men including the Platoon Commander and the Platoon Sergeant (*Sgt KJ Thomson*).

Mid morning on 5 December, a Reconnaissance Patrol from 8 Platoon (*Sgt TE Wass*) was carefully checking what appeared to be an unoccupied bunker system when some six enemy were spotted and engaged (22). The enemy responded quickly with intense small arms fire but close artillery support (75 metres) called by the Patrol Commander forced the enemy to withdraw. At about midday on 7

December, 5 Platoon (2Lt BJ Ryan) was moving through very heavy secondary growth when the Forward Scout (Pte NJ Cassano) saw a bunker and two enemy who he engaged at close range (23). The enemy returned fire killing Pte Cassano and while the Platoon attempted to outflank the enemy it was not able to do so because of intense defensive fire from the enemy. Eventually the situation was stabilised when a troop of tanks arrived and crushed the occupied bunkers.

The final contact on the operation occurred on 8 December when a Standing Patrol from 11 Platoon (2Lt J Russell) observed two enemy attempting an 'obstacle crossing' over a track, unsuccessfully as it turned out (24).



Over the next few days the Battalion returned by air and road to Nui Dat.

Soldiers from B Company getting up close and friendly with a Centurion Main Battle Tank on Operation Kings Cross.

Photograph by courtesy of 5RAR Association

In a war where somewhat bizarrely the Infantry weren't required to 'capture and hold ground' and the enemy occupied ground only temporarily but generally always returned to his base areas, Operation Kings Cross was a very successful operation. It had caused substantial enemy casualties and the destruction of base areas, albeit temporarily. 5RAR had demonstrated initiative, tenacity, sound leadership and that it was a very good Battalion.

Awards for Operation Kings Cross were:

- **Military Cross. 2Lt RA Brett, (in conjunction with other actions in March and June 1969).**
- **Mention in Despatches. Maj CH Ducker, MC (in conjunction with other actions in 1969).**

Tandem ad Finem

This is the final chapter of my attempt to describe, hopefully with some sense of accuracy, operations conducted by the Royal Australian Regiment in the Second Indo China War. This Addendum and A Duty Done are dedicated to those who served; and especially those men from The Regiment who did their duty so admirably but many of whom retain memories of unpleasant events from long ago.

I also need to acknowledge those men who served but since the war have sadly passed from our presence:-

*But they shall remain known to us
Just as the stars remain known to the night;
As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness.
To the end, to the end, they remain.*

(With apologies to Laurence Binyon)

If there is one of those who could be singled out then it would be the late Jim Bourke, MG, AM – a gallant Officer who was always the friend and benefactor of the Diggers.

END NOTES

1. **See Page 5.** The 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) (173 Abn) origins date back to 1917 when as the 173rd Infantry Brigade it was part of the US 87th Division. It saw no action in WWI and between the wars was in the Army Reserve. In WWII the US Army had eliminated Brigades from its Divisions and thus 173rd did not in name exist during the War.



In the early 1960s the US Army reintroduced Brigades to the Order of Battle and the 173rd was reconstituted as a separate airborne brigade for rapid and independent deployment. The Brigade arrived in Vietnam from Okinawa on 5th May, 1965 and was the first major ground combat unit of the United States Army to serve in the War. The brigade was based at the US Airbase at Bien Hoa and under the command of II Field Force, Vietnam located at Long Binh.



In 1965 the Brigade comprised three Infantry Battalions, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, of the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment (1/503 and 2/503) and 1RAR. The 503rd was raised in WWII as the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment which took part in the airborne assault at Nadzab (see [A Duty Done page 19](#)) and was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for its parachute landing on 16 February 1945 to recapture the Fortress Corregidor in the Philippines. This is symbolized in its shoulder patch by the inverted triangle with parachutes terminating in the fortress and hence also its motto "The Rock"

173 Abn Combat Support Arms included: two batteries of the 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment (3/319) plus 105 Field Battery RAA and 161 Battery RNZA; the 173rd Support Battalion; 173rd Engineers, Troop E/17th Cavalry (in 1965, equipped with Jeeps mounted with 106mm Recoilless Rifles or Heavy Machine Guns), Company D/16th Armour, (in 1965 equipped with 11 APCs, four 4.2inch mortar carriers and 5 M56 Self



Propelled Anti Tank carriers with 90mm guns, 13 APCs in a Troop of The Prince of Wales Light Horse (PWLH) and a Troop of 1 Field Squadron, RAE.



In addition to its own helicopter support, 173 Abn was supported by the 145th Aviation Battalion which had three Helicopter Companies with a total of 70 UH troop carrier helicopters plus armed gunships and fixed wing aircraft (C-123 Providers). A bit

upmarket compared to the 20 something helicopters operated by 9 Squadron RAAF in support of three battalions in 1ATF!

2. See Page 6. The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress is a long-range, subsonic, jet-powered (eight engines) strategic bomber which has been operated by the United States Air Force (USAF) since the 1950s. Until the 1990's it flew under the banner of Strategic Air Command. Its design was based primarily on the B47 Bomber which was the worlds first swept wing bomber. The B-52 has a range of some 14,000 Km without aerial refuelling and a massive payload of some 32 tonnes. Compare that to a WWII RAF Lancaster Bomber with a payload of about 10 tonnes and a range of 4,000 Km or a RAAF Canberra flown by 2 Squadron in Vietnam with a payload of about 5 tonnes.



A comparison in size! A B52-D, a RAF Lancaster and a RAF Spitfire. (Battle of Britain Flight sans the Hurricane).

Models from the Fred Fairhead collection, all at 1/72 Scale

Bombers based at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam were used extensively in Vietnam, especially against targets in North Vietnam, bridges, railways, ports etc, as part of the mostly unsuccessful bombing campaign that commenced in 1965 (Operation Rolling Thunder). It was designed to weaken the resolve and military capability of the North but if anything it served to strengthen both at enormous cost!

But it is the use of this strategic bomber in a ground tactical support role that is of the most interest, especially as an example of the 'no expenses spared' approach by the US Military. With each aircraft carrying approximately 100 x 500lb bombs, a three aircraft mission flying at altitudes of up to 50,000 feet in the Stratosphere would cause considerable damage to a 'box' of about 1km wide and 3km long. The trouble was that the targets were mostly relatively small, very mobile enemy groups who would often remote radio aerials some distance from their bases so as to avoid becoming a target for a B-52 strike or 'Arc Light' as they were called. Consequently often the only thing that was damaged was the vegetation and indeed the area of a B-52 strike became a tangle of shattered trees, ground and of course many deep craters that could fill with water, thus making it even more difficult for the Infantry to move through.

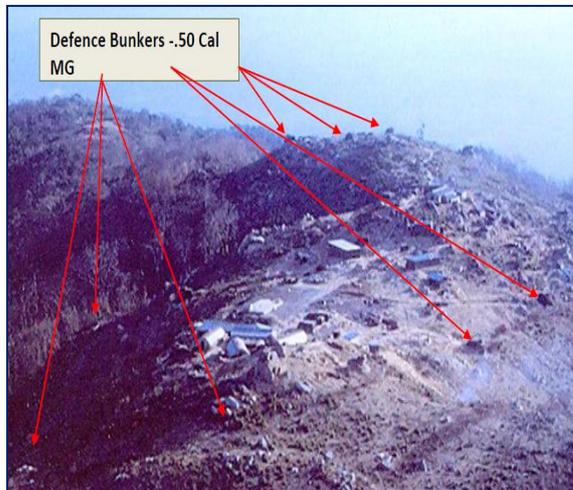
Unless they were carpet bombing enemy concentrations, such as occurred during the USMC siege at Khe Sanh in 1968, it is hard to think of a less cost effective way of delivering aerial bombs to small tactical targets such as mainly occurred in Vietnam.

3. See Page 9. The 2nd Infantry Regiment is one of the oldest in the US Army having been raised in 1812. In the 19th Century it fought in the Indian Wars, the American Civil War in the Army of the Potomac and the Spanish-American War. In WWI the Regiment was on security duties in the Hawaiian Islands and was readied to deploy to France when the war ended. In World War II, the Regiment was assigned to the 5th Infantry Division, landing in Normandy in 1944 where it became part of the Third Army (Patton). The Regiment secured the crossing for the Third Army over the Rhine and was spearheading the advance into Czechoslovakia when the ceasefire occurred on 7 May 1945. In Vietnam the 2nd Infantry, with two battalions was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division, arriving in country in October 1965 via Vung Tau. Its unit patch (1920) has symbols representing wars fought in up to that time. The motto can be translated as 'Do not touch me' which is rather sweet for an Infantryman to say!



4. See Page 11. Hat Dich was the spelling used by the Australian Army for the area used by the enemy to establish bases including for resupply. The correct spelling of the area, which from early in the 20th Century was in fact a 'commune' is Hắc Dịch. In the First Indo China War the area was a 'Secret Zone' and used by VC supply units such as 84 Rear Services Group. During the Second Indo China War the people were removed from the area mainly to villages along Route 15. Today Hắc Dịch is a thriving village some 6Kms to the north east of Núi Túc Tiên (Núi Thi Vai) on the road between Phu My on Route 15 (now Route 51) and Ngai Giao to the east on Route 2 (now Route 56).
5. See Page 12. The artillery base was located in the same area as 1ATF *Fire Support Patrol Bases Buffalo* for 9RAR *Operation Matthew* in July 1969, *Debbie* for 4RAR/NZ *Operation Hermit Park* in June 1971 and *Ivanhoe* in September 1971.
6. See Page 12. This LZ/PZ would in time, be the location of *Fire Support Patrol Base Dampier* for 1RAR *Operation Hawkesbury* in September 1968 and 9RAR *Operation Hat Dich* in July 1969.
7. See Page 14. It is interesting to note how sometimes the dissemination of information on the enemy could go awry and thus the response to it being basically a waste of effort. The entry in the 9RAR Operations Log for 3 July 1969 at Serial 32 reports a message from HQ 1ATF as "SAS Ptl sight (sic) by unknown member of en at 622865. And 60m N of that grid they sighted 60 en in base camp". However, the Patrol Report for the 10 man SAS Patrol Number 14 dated 8 July 69 makes no mention of "60 en in a base camp" but states that at 031430 as the patrol crossed a track the last man saw " 1 VC 40m N " and that the enemy soldier appeared to be looking towards the patrol. The patrol moved 40 metres east and went into all round defence. It then heard sounds of a wooden stake being hammered into the ground from 50 metres north. Not for the first time then a company, in this case C Company 9RAR was reacted into an isolated area based on a furphy.
8. See Page 15. The US Army Corps of Signals (C Company 53rd Signals Battalion) established a sophisticated Radio Relay Station on the top of the Nui Chua Chan; it was

accessible only by Helicopter and well defended with Heavy Machine Guns and mortars-see bunkers about 50 m from the crest. The Detachment of 131 Divisional Locating Battery attached to the Field Regiment used the French Trig Station established on the hill in Colonial times. It provided a reliable point of origin when FSPBs were deployed in the area sweeping from south to the west. Given the right conditions, a direct line of sight could be achieved, if not into the FSPBs proper, then to points close by. For the Survey task a small party would be flown to Chua Chan and, the remainder would deploy as near to the FSPB as possible.



9. See Page 19. As the Battalion Intelligence Officer on the day of the Long Tan Cross Ceremony, I and some of my men in the Intelligence Section were slightly curious as to why 'pomp and circumstance' held sway over security. It was well known that local VC units had both 60mm and 82mm mortars and they had demonstrated just how effectively they could use them. Given that the whole Battalion was concentrated in a small area and that every senior Army Officer in-country was present, it seemed somewhat risky that potential mortar base plate positions were not secured, especially to the north and east of Nui Dat 2. But as it turned out all went to plan and there were no incidents, so in the end the planners got it right!

10. See Page 21. Terry Burstall served briefly with 1RAR and then as a Rifleman in 12 Platoon, D Company 6RAR in 1966/67. At the Battle of Long Tan he was an acting Section Commander in 12 Platoon. Terry has written extensively about the Vietnam War: *'The Soldiers Story'*, 1986; *'A Soldier Returns'*, 1990; and *'Vietnam the Australian Dilemma'*, 1994, all published by University of Queensland Press. I drew on the second regarding the discovery of the Long Tan Cross.

Terry Burstall and friend at the original site of the Long Tan Cross.
From 'A Soldier Returns'



11. See Page 22. On Operation Kings Cross 5RAR concluded that VC Main Force Units and especially 274 VC Regiment, had relocated base areas in the Hat Dich (Hắc Dịch) to adjacent to Route 15, the main route between Saigon, US Bases at Bien Hoa , Long Binh and Bear Cat and the strategic entry Port of Vung Tau. This was partly because enemy bases close to Route 15 were less likely to become targets for B -52 Bombers but also because it put them closer to supply routes through the Rung Sat. It also meant the enemy would then need to neutralise Government Military Posts dotted along Route 15. 6RAR/NZ had come to the same conclusion during Operation Burnham which concluded a month earlier (see A Duty Done pages 102 and 103). However, 5RAR had taken the extra precaution of tasking a company supported by armour to secure Route 15 against these enemy incursions.

A DUTY DONE ADDENDUM 2016

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Pte DJ McCormack
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2Lt GC Sharp
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Pte CJ Whiston

18th August 1966



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