



**COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE TO MARK
VIETNAM VETERANS' DAY
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART CENOTAPH, TUESDAY 18 AUGUST 2026**

Good morning, everyone. It is a great honour to be with you today at the Cenotaph as we mark Vietnam Veterans' Day together.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge all veterans and their families and supporters here today, as well as those who are currently serving in our Australian Defence Force, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served in defence of Country.

Vietnam Veterans' Day began as a service remembering the battle of Long Tan in 1966. Long Tan was one of the most significant moments in the war for Australians, and this is of course the 60th anniversary of that battle.

As we heard from Ross Byrne, D Company 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment were ambushed on a patrol to pursue forces that had been harassing the Australian Task Force position at Nui Dat. Expecting to meet with around 30 – 40 enemy combatants, 108 members of Delta Company were confronted by around 2,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops in torrential rain. That means they were outnumbered nearly 20:1.

In extremely difficult conditions, low visibility, difficulty in communicating and under sustained and heavy fire, soldiers of the Company were supported by M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers, artillery fire support and Air Force

helicopter resupply and fought throughout the day and into the early evening despite heavy losses.

By the end of the fight, 17 Australians had been killed and 26 wounded, one of whom died a few days later. That was the largest number of casualties in a single operation for the Australian Task Force headquartered at Nui Dat.¹ The description of the lead up to, and the engagement, in Ian McNeill's book that I referenced for these figures, is a harrowing read.

In 1969 a cross was erected by members of 6 RAR and dedicated on the battlefield of Long Tan. Ten soldiers who had fought at Long Tan formed an honour guard. In 2012, and with the approval of the Ministry of Culture of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Long Tan cross was provided to the Australian War Memorial from the Dong Nai Museum and was displayed for six months, before being permanently displayed in the Australian War Memorial's "1945 to today" gallery from 18 August 2018.² I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to visit the War Memorial to take the time to include the cross as part of your itinerary and to think about what it meant to the soldiers then and today.

We know that, for many who served in Vietnam, their return to Australia was not what they had hoped for. Antiwar sentiment was high as people at home counted the cost of lives lost and were confronted by the nightly scenes broadcast in the news media. There were incidents of name calling and aggression against our veterans that were unacceptable, then as now. Almost 60,000 Australians had served in Vietnam during the war, and many felt that their service was not properly honoured on their return.

¹ McNeill, I. 1993. *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950 – 1966*. Allen and Unwin, p 351

² <https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/55/long-tan-cross> accessed 31 July 2026

Because of the sporadic schedule of returns and negative public sentiment there was no repeat of the victorious celebrations and parades that occurred following the cessation of the Second World War.³

These returning veterans were instead asked to carry, so very unfairly, not just the burden of their combat experiences, but also the weight of the unpopularity of the war, as though it was their decision to fight it.

Even the RSL in some instances were not as welcoming as they should have been. These experiences added to the feelings of returning veterans that their service was not as respected or honoured as those who served in previous conflicts.

That is why the national Welcome Home parade in October of 1987 was so important. Prime Minister Bob Hawke announced that the day would become Vietnam Veterans' Day to honour the service and sacrifice of all who had served during the war. They were soldiers, sailors, airmen, nurses and support staff. Amongst them were volunteers and conscripts; ordinary Australians asked to do an extraordinary job in a war that became one of our country's most contested. The day of commemoration previously concentrated on the battle of Long Tan, expanded to include all of the battles fought by Australians and all those Australians who served in Vietnam.

Around 22,000 Vietnam veterans marched through Sydney that day and were cheered on by around 100,000 supporters.⁴ They were joined by contingents of American, South Korean, Vietnamese and New Zealand veterans. It was particularly poignant that more than 500 crosses, each bearing a plaque with the name and unit of an Australian who had lost their life on active service, were carried at the head of the parade by their families and friends.⁵

³ <https://vwma.org.au/collections/home-page-stories/a-history-of-vietnam-veterans-day> accessed 31 July 2026

⁴ <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/commemoration/days/vietnam-veterans-day> accessed 31 July 2026

⁵ <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2722233> accessed 31 July 2026

Later, in 1992, the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, situated on Anzac Parade with other significant memorials, was dedicated. The memorial is made of black granite and carries the badges of the three services of the Australian Defence Force and is surmounted by a granite ring containing a scroll with the names of all Australians who died in the War and provides tangible recognition.⁶

Those events and monuments are visible expressions of our gratitude, but they do not necessarily have as much impact as personal words. I spoke when my appointment as Governor was announced about my desire to lead with compassion and kindness. It is wonderful to be here this morning to extend those values to everyone attending.

In my view, Vietnam Veterans' Day exists because there was a wrong that needed righting. It exists so that we can say, plainly, without hesitation or any qualification, we honour your service and we are grateful.

So today, I want to say thank you.

Thank you to those who paid the ultimate price.

Thank you to all who served and to those who continue to serve.

Thank you to those who have given their support.

As we reflect on the events during the battle of Long Tan and the wider Vietnam War, let us reaffirm our commitment to honour and value the sacrifices made.

⁶ <https://www.nca.gov.au/attractions/australian-vietnam-forces-national-memorial#> accessed 31 July 2026

We should keep in mind and acknowledge that some of those sacrifices continue years after the war ended, and that we have an obligation to support those impacted in whatever way we can, not just today but every day.

We remember those who did not come home, and we remember those veterans who we have farewelled since.

Lest we forget.