

**ADDRESS AT A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE  
FOR VIETNAM VETERANS' DAY 2023  
BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
HOBART CENOTAPH, FRIDAY 18 AUGUST 2023**

We gather to commemorate, as we have done every year since 1987, Vietnam Veterans' Day. We remember all the men and women who served in Vietnam. We also acknowledge all the families and friends who supported them.

I also pay my respects to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

Today, we commemorate the end of the Vietnam War, 50 years ago. On the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1973, Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck proclaimed the end to Australian involvement in the Vietnam War.

We know that the drawdown of Australian forces had begun in 1970, with 8 RAR rotated home without replacement. Further drawdowns saw the Australian Army Training Team – Vietnam the only troops operating outside Saigon, until their withdrawal in December 1972. After this date, a single platoon of soldiers remained in Saigon. They were tasked with the protection of the Australian embassy and were withdrawn in June 1973.<sup>1</sup>

The Vietnam War was one of the most difficult and divisive wars in Australian history. It lasted for more than a decade. It was a war that tested our nation's resolve and challenged our values. It was also a war that left an indelible mark on the soldiers who fought, as well as their families and loved ones.

Sixty thousand Australians served in Vietnam. Of those, 15,300 were conscripted. More than 1,800 Tasmanians enlisted for service. Tragically, 523 soldiers, including 17 Tasmanians, made the ultimate sacrifice. 3,000 were wounded. After experiencing the horrors of war, many suffered physical and emotional scars for the rest of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/vietnam> accessed 7 Aug 23

Our soldiers who came home faced difficulties. They did not receive the acknowledgement they were due, nor were they given adequate support on their return to Australia. There were anti-war protests raging towards the end of the war. The public was asking why our nation was involved in the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Byron Nichol, one of our Vietnam Veterans, reported that he and others were often shunned, and he “wasn’t allowed to join an RSL because he wasn’t considered a returned soldier.”<sup>3</sup>

Another Vietnam Veteran, Nick Howlett, wrote to me recently and said “...we veterans remember the hostile personal insults, and attacks from our communities when we returned home. We well remember the industrial action when in 1967 our resupply ships would not be loaded and perhaps most hurtful of all, when in 1969, letters from our loved ones were not forthcoming, rather withheld at the dockside in a political protest... In October 1987, Vietnam Veterans were finally acknowledged with a Home Coming Parade...”

So, attitudes did change, and the public separated the service of our men and women in uniform from politics and decision-makers.<sup>4</sup>

Our Vietnam Veterans have been instrumental in establishing support services available to all who have served and their families.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling this year celebrates 40 years of operation. Vietnam veterans fought to establish and maintain this counselling service by veterans for veterans. This service is an invaluable resource for veterans in need of support.

As we commemorate the end of the service and sacrifice of our Australian soldiers, sailors, and aviators during the Vietnam War, it is fitting that we also commemorate the support provided to our forces by members of the New Zealand Army and Airforce. This support is generally not well known.

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<sup>2</sup> Vietnam Remembered, “End of war, not the end,” Mercedes Maguire, *Examiner* Newspaper 12 August 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Tia Ewen, *Mercury* Newspaper 17 August 2023, page 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Unlike Australia, New Zealand committed only regular, fulltime personnel. No conscripts were deployed. Many Māori soldiers served.

New Zealand first contributed a civilian surgical team and an Army engineer unit to undertake reconstruction tasks. Their commitment increased with the deployment of 161 Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery, that fired their first shells on 16 July 1965. From 1966, New Zealand forces were increased by two infantry companies, and both were integrated with the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force at Nui Dat.

A New Zealand Special Air Service troop served with the Australian Special Air Service 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadrons. Along with Australian soldiers, New Zealanders were involved in regular patrols and cordon and search operations throughout Phuoc Tuy province.

More than 3,000 New Zealanders served in Vietnam, 39 were killed, including two civilians serving with surgical and Red Cross teams, and 187 wounded.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the challenges faced, our Vietnam veterans never wavered in their commitment to their country and their fellow soldiers. They fought bravely and honourably, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. They demonstrated courage and an unwavering sense of duty.

It is fitting that this annual commemoration provides us an opportunity to remember those who served and all who have been affected by their service. It is especially important that we show our support for our veterans of the Vietnam War. We are also here to demonstrate that our community remembers them and recognises their service on behalf of our Nation. They will not be forgotten.

We thank those who served and we thank those who support them.

Lest we forget.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/vietnam-war> accessed 7 Aug 23