

**SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE FOR
VIETNAM VETERANS' DAY 2025
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART CENOTAPH, MONDAY 18 AUGUST 2025**

Good morning, everyone. Today, on Vietnam Veterans' Day, we honour the courage and sacrifice of Australians who served in the Vietnam War. We also reflect on the impact of their service, particularly in our State.

May I begin by acknowledging all veterans and serving members present and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have served in our Australian Defence Force.

Australia provided more than 60,000 members of the Navy, Army, and Air Force to the conflict; 532 died and more than 2,400 were wounded. Around 17 Tasmanians were killed among a total of 2,300 Tasmanians serving in Vietnam. 10 Tasmanian Aboriginal men served in Vietnam.¹ They joined around 285 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as veterans of the Vietnam War, identified by researchers from the Australian War Memorial.² The service of First Nation soldiers has long been hidden from official histories, despite them enlisting in the face of major barriers of widespread racism and exclusion at the time.³ They were exempt from conscription because of their Aboriginality, yet enlisted in their hundreds.⁴

Turning to Operation Babylift, this year marks its 50th anniversary. This was one of the final chapters in Australia's involvement in Vietnam, following the withdrawal of combat forces in 1972, and the Australian Embassy Platoon in 1973.⁵

In April 1975, North Vietnamese forces launched a major offensive that led to the fall of Saigon on 30 April when they stormed the presidential palace and took control of

¹ <https://tasmaniantimes.com/2015/01/indigenous-australians-at-war-exhibition/> accessed 15 Aug 25.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/18/australian-war-memorial-researchers-identify-285-indigenous-servicemen-who-fought-in-the-vietnam-war>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/vietnam> accessed 10 Jul 25

the city. These actions brought an end to the Vietnam War.⁶ As the South Vietnamese Government faced collapse, the population of South Vietnam was fleeing the approaching enemy. Thousands of orphans were displaced in the chaos. Suddenly, there was a need to get as many children as possible to safety.⁷

Aircrew from the Royal Australian Air Force's 36 and 37 Squadrons undertook a humanitarian mission to evacuate hundreds of orphaned and displaced Vietnamese children.⁸ The operation successfully rescued 194 orphaned Vietnamese children and brought them to Australia and other countries.⁹

These missions were fraught with danger, yet amid chaos and evidence of the advancing forces, our service members persevered, as they flew multiple missions ending with the evacuation of Australian Embassy staff on 25 April.¹⁰

Among the dedicated individuals on the ground was Matron Vivian Bullwinkel, a revered Australian Army nurse and survivor of the Bangka Island massacre. She led a team of nurses to Vietnam, providing care and comfort to the evacuated children. Their selfless actions during Operation Babylift reflect Australia's commitment to humanitarian aid amid the chaos of war.¹¹ ¹² As we mark this 50th anniversary, we honour the bravery of those involved and remember the lives saved and lost during this remarkable mission.

The Vietnam War caused "the greatest social and political dissent in Australia since the conscription referendums of the First World War."¹³ Many who resisted conscription

⁶ [https://www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/fact-sheets/fall-saigon-1975#:~:text=Saigon%2C%20the%20capital%20of%20South%20Vietnam%2C%20fell,was%20detained\)%2C%20Da%20Nang%20and%20Qui%20Nhon](https://www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/fact-sheets/fall-saigon-1975#:~:text=Saigon%2C%20the%20capital%20of%20South%20Vietnam%2C%20fell,was%20detained)%2C%20Da%20Nang%20and%20Qui%20Nhon). accessed 25 Jul 25

⁷ <https://www.rslaustralia.org/latest-news/operation-babylift-minhs-true-story?rq=operationbabylift>, accessed 17/8/2025.

⁸ <https://raafa.org.au/raafs-role-in-operation-babylift-50th-anniversary-spotlight/> accessed 1 Jul 25

⁹ <https://www.rslaustralia.org/latest-news/operation-babylift-minhs-true-story?rq=operationbabylift>, accessed 17/8/2025.

¹⁰ <https://wm.awm.gov.au/read/operation-babylift> accessed 1 Jul 25

¹¹ <https://anmj.org.au/nursing-war-hero-vivian-bullwinkels-legacy-burns-brightly/#:~:text=While%20Nurse%20Vivian%20Bullwinkel%20is%20remembered%20for,fallen%20nurses%20that%20is%20now%20her%20legacy.&text=After%20the%20withdrawal%20of%20forces%20signalling%20the,orphaned%20children%20out%20of%20Saigon%20to%20Melbourne> accessed 2 Jul 25

¹² <https://www.dva.gov.au/news/latest-stories/50th-anniversary-operation-babylift> accessed 2 Jul 25

¹³ <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/vietnam#:~:text=From%20the%20time%20of%20the,involvement%20in%20the%20Vietnam%20War>, accessed 18/8/2025.

or were conscientious objectors were fined or jailed. Our soldiers often met a hostile reception on their return home.¹⁴

During the 'Welcome Home' parade of October 1987, flags, with plaques attached with the name and unit of each soldier killed in Vietnam, were carried at the head of the parade by relatives and friends. Prime Minister Hawke noted in August of that year, "I firmly believe that the October parade will be the culmination of a long process of reconciliation and community acceptance of its obligations to the veterans of Vietnam".¹⁵

That parade and commemorations each year, on Vietnam Veterans' Day, are a part of that obligation. We gather to remember the dead and those who suffered wounds, physical and mental, as a result of their service. May we also remember those who supported our veterans on their return. We are grateful to all who served our nation when called upon.

May we reflect and reaffirm our dedication to remembering and honouring those who have served and their sacrifices. We must ensure that they receive the recognition they have earned and deserve.

Lest we forget.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2722233> accessed 10 Jul 25