

**AN ADDRESS AT A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE FOR VIETNAM
VETERANS' DAY BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART, 18TH AUGUST 2020**

I begin by acknowledging all of the veterans of the Vietnam War who are here with us as we gather to commemorate, as we do every year since 1987, Vietnam Veterans' Day; a day to remember all of the men and women who served in Vietnam.¹ I would also like to pay my respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

As you are all aware, this day began as a commemoration of the Battle of Long Tan but is now recognised as the anniversary on which we remember and pay tribute to those who died or were injured in the Vietnam War, the second longest military conflict in which Australia has been involved.²

This year we concentrate our remembrance on the 50th anniversary of Operation Hammersley and the contribution to the war of the 8th Battalion, the Royal Australia Regiment.

¹ <http://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2008/08/15/vietnam-veterans-day/> accessed 4 August 2020

² <https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2008/08/15/vietnam-veterans-day/> accessed 4 August 2020

Between 10 February and 9 March 1970, the *Grey Eight* was involved in a reconnaissance operation in the Long Hai area.³ The Long Hai Hills had been a significant stronghold for enemy forces from which they had been able to operate with relative impunity. Heavy casualties had previously been inflicted on Australian forces attempting to dislodge them, predominantly by the use of mines and booby traps.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Keith O'Neill developed a concept of operations where Bravo Company would ambush likely enemy routes while Charlie Company and Delta Company, each with APC and tank support, conducted reconnaissance in force to the north west and south east to either destroy the enemy or force enemy groups to move into the ambush killing grounds.

He had decided that, due to the threat of anti-personnel mines, the infantry would move in closed-down APCs with tanks in front to clear the way. While casualties due to mines were relatively low, the danger posed by mines was ever present.

On 28 February, 4 Platoon of Bravo Company discovered a booby trap and called for engineers to assist. As they moved to the site, the engineer party triggered another mine, killing and wounding a large number of Australian soldiers. More were killed and wounded as the platoon guided in a medivac helicopter and triggered another mine in the open.

³https://web.archive.org/web/20080821081429/http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11346vietnam.asp accessed 4 August 2020

While casualties were sustained, Operation Hammersley was considered a great success. Despite heavy opposition, 8 RAR proved that the area was no longer a safe haven from which to launch attacks on civilian centres or the Task Force base. The battalion also gained valuable experience operating in close cooperation with APCs and Tanks. In addition to the significant enemy casualties, the battalion secured some 70 personal weapons, five crew served weapons, approximately 11,000 small arms rounds, 250 grenades, mortar bombs and mines, 2000 lbs of food and large quantities of medical supplies and equipment.

In recognition of their performance during the Operation, the battalion was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation, including Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation, by the South Vietnamese government.⁴

As Senator Jim Molan said during the commemorations earlier this year in Canberra: “Australians should pause and reflect on the bravery, teamwork and endurance that was displayed throughout the battle and wider war...

“We will always remember the Australians who served and the families who supported them. Today’s commemoration is an opportunity for our nation to ensure their legacy lives on.”⁵

⁴ *The Grey Eight in Vietnam: The History of the Eighth Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment - November 1969 - November 1970*, Ed Maj A. Clunies-Ross. (Major Clunies-Ross was later promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and served as Commanding Officer of 8 RAR)

⁵<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22media/pressrel/7191866%22> accessed 4 August 2020

It is clear to me that their legacy does live on. Today, about 2000 servicemen and women are serving around the globe in support of Australian interests.⁶ Another 3000 are serving in Australia as part of Defence's assistance to the whole-of-government COVID-19 pandemic response. That has included supporting the repatriation of Australians from overseas, reconnaissance, planning and contact tracing teams, medical assistance to the North West Regional Hospital in Burnie and in medical and aged care facilities in Victoria, supporting mandatory quarantine arrangements, and supporting state and territory police border controls.⁷

The Vietnam War has long been controversial. Was it a huge waste or was there good to come out of it? I would like to mention the view of the War put forward by war correspondent Denis Warner, my husband's uncle. He argued that the conflict bought time for the non-communist countries of South-East Asia to strengthen themselves, and concentrate on reform and economic development, so that by the time the Vietnamese communists emerged victorious, the South-East Asian "dominoes" stood firm instead of falling. Instead, it was the communist-led states of Indo-China that were economically shattered. They had to accept peaceful co-existence and later join non-communist ASEAN.⁸

So, to all who served in Vietnam and to those who supported you while deployed and at home I say, on behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for your service and sacrifice. Your example and actions are part of the history of the Australian Defence Force with a lasting impact, both now and into the future.

⁶ <https://www.defence.gov.au/operations/> accessed 4 August 2020

⁷ <https://www.defence.gov.au/covid-19/> accessed 4 August 2020

⁸ As summarised by Michael Richardson and cited by Anthony McAdam, 'Denis Warner, 1917-2012' , 1 November 2012, Quadrant Online, <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2012/11/denis-warner-1917-2012/> accessed 5 August 2020

Lest we forget.