

Vietnam - Australia's Longest War A Calendar of Military and Political Events

14 January 1950

Nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh, who had trained in the Soviet Union but received aid from the US to fight the Japanese during World War II, declares that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is the only legal government. This is recognised by the Soviet Union and China, but Australia supports the French-sponsored government of Emperor Bao Dai. US provides military and economic aid to the French in Indochina.

7 May 1954

French defeated by Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu, after a 55 day siege. The defeat signals the end to French presence in Indochina.

1955

US begins to funnel aid directly to the Saigon Government and agrees to train the South Vietnamese army.

September 1957

South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem visits Australia. Prime Minister Menzies reaffirms support.

20 December 1960

Hanoi leaders form National Liberation Front for South Vietnam, which the Saigon regime dubs "Viet Cong", meaning communist Vietnamese.

24 May 1962

The Minister for Defence (Reginald Townley) announces intention to send 30 army advisers to South Vietnam (SVN).

03 August 1962

The first members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) arrive in South Vietnam.

01 June 1963

Advisor, Sergeant William Hacking becomes the first Australian to die in Vietnam when his weapon accidentally discharges after being caught in vegetation.

01 November 1963

Vietnam's President Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu are murdered in a military coup, with the foreknowledge of the US Government.

22 November 1963

Lyndon B. Johnson becomes US president after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and announces that the US will continue support of South Vietnam. By year's end 15,000 US advisors are serving in Vietnam, which received \$500m in US aid that year.

08 June 1964

The Minister for Defence (Hon. Shane Partridge) announces the AATTV will be increased to 83 advisers with expanded role.

06 July 1964

Warrant Officer Class 2, Kevin Conway becomes the first Australian to die as a result of enemy action in South Vietnam.

7 August 1964

Following a reported attack on US ships in Tonkin Gulf, US Congress passes Tonkin Gulf Resolution giving President Johnson extraordinary powers to act in South Vietnam

10 November 1964

The Prime Minister (Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies) announces introduction of national service to increase the army's strength from 22,750 to 37,500. Opposition to the war in Vietnam is not accepted as a reason for exemption.

18 December 1964

Australian Government, responding to requests from the US President and South Vietnam Prime Minister for 200 additional advisers, offers to send ground troops to South Vietnam.

29 April 1965

The Prime Minister announces the dispatch of an infantry battalion to South Vietnam, with an armoured personnel carrier (APC) troop, a signals troop and a logistic support company.

24 May 1965

Advance party from 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), departs for South Vietnam, for service with the US 173rd Airborne Division.

08 June 1965

HMAS Sydney arrives at Vung Tau, South Vietnam, carrying the bulk of the Australian force.

30 June 1965

First national service intake begins recruit training.

17 August 1965

Australian Government approves increase of Australian forces to a battalion group, supported by an artillery, additional APCs, engineers, army helicopters, light aircraft and more logistic support.

September 1965

A Morgan Gallup Poll finds 56% of those polled were in favour of continuing the war in Vietnam.

22 October 1965

A demonstration against the war in Sydney results in 65 arrests.

13 November 1965

WO2 Kevin "Dasher" Wheatley refuses to leave his mate, WO2 Bob Swanston, and is killed. His actions earned him Australia's highest honour, the Victoria Cross.

26 January 1966

Harold Holt succeeds Menzies as Prime Minister.

06 March 1966

Holt announces the Australian commitment in South Vietnam will be increased to a 4350-man task force, and will include conscripts.

The 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) will include two infantry battalions, a Special Air Service squadron, combat and support logistic units and eight RAAF Iroquois helicopters (9 SQN).

The Task Force will be supported by 1 Australian Logistic Support Group (1 ALSG) to be established at Vung Tau. For the first time, national servicemen will be sent to South Vietnam.

24 May 1966

5 RAR deploys by helicopter from 1ATF concentration area at Vung Tau to secure the Task Force area at Nui Dat. Private Errol Noack becomes the first national serviceman and member of 1ATF to die from enemy action.

04 June 1966

Concentration of 1ATF at Nui Dat is completed.

18 August 1966

The Battle of Long Tan

D Company, 6 RAR, strength of 108 men, battles North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) forces estimated at between 1500 and 2500 until relieved by A Company, carried in by armoured personnel carriers of 3 Troop, 1 APC Squadron. The enemy leaves 245 bodies on the battlefield while 17 Australian infantrymen and one APC crewman are killed. The Company earns the US Presidential Citation.

19 November 1966

Morgan Gallup Poll finds that 63% are in favour of conscription, but only 37% approve of sending National Servicemen to Vietnam.

07 April 1967

Major Peter Badcoe, AATTV, is killed in action leading two companies of Vietnamese regional forces. For his outstanding heroism in this and two previous actions, he will be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

26 May 1967

A New Zealand rifle company - V Company of the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Regiment (RNZIR) - arrives at Nui Dat to serve with 2 RAR. The Australian Battalion is re-designated 2RAR/NZ/ANZAC.

May 1967

Morgan Gallup Poll finds 62% in favour of continuing the war in Vietnam.

18 October 1967

The Prime Minister announces an increase of 1700 to Australia's commitment in South Vietnam, including a third infantry battalion and a tank squadron.

17 December 1967

Prime Minister Harold Holt missing, presumed drowned off Portsea in Victoria. His body is never recovered.

28 December 1967

3 RAR establishes itself at Nui Dat as 1 ATF's third battalion.

10 January 1968

John Grey Gorton sworn in as Prime Minister.

29 January 1968

Communist forces in South Vietnam launch what becomes known as the Tet Offensive, with concentrated attacks against every major city and regional centre. Although Tet costs the Communists 45-50,000 troops, it sows serious doubt in the minds of the Australian and American people and leads to major changes in government policy towards the conflict in South Vietnam.

01 February 1968

Tet comes to Baria, the capital of Phuoc Tuy province. A Company of 3 RAR and a troop of APCs fight a savage 24-hour battle to clear the town.

12 February 1968

Prime Minister Gorton indicates that Australia will not increase its commitment to Vietnam.

13 May 1968

The Battle of Coral & Balmoral

The Battle for Fire Support Base (FSB) Coral begins with an enemy attack that overruns 1 RAR Mortar Platoon and captures one of 102 Field Battery's gun pits. The base is cleared with the help of helicopter gunships. After a second attack on May 15, Australian casualties around Coral stand at 15 killed and 56 wounded while enemy losses are estimated to exceed 100 dead.

16 March 1968

Massacre of civilians by US soldiers at My Lai village. At least 450 unarmed people are killed.

26 May 1968

At FSB Balmoral, near Coral, infantry supported by Centurions tanks turn back an assault by two battalions of NVA regulars.

27 May 1968

A sweep outside Coral by D Company 1 RAR, supported by four Centurion tanks, smashes an enemy bunker systems and kills large numbers of VC and NVA.

28 May 1968

A second attack on Balmoral is crushed by combined infantry, tank, artillery and mortar fire, leaving 47 enemy dead and six prisoners for 1 Australian killed.

6/11 May 1968

Serving as a company commander with a Vietnamese mobile strike force, WO2 Ray Simpson displays outstanding heroism and disregard for personal safety in two firefights with enemy forces. His actions will make him the third member of the AATTV to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

24 May 1969

WO2 Keith Payne, also a company commander with a mobile strike force, earns the AATTV's fourth Victoria Cross.

06 June 1969

The Battle of Binh Bah

Two companies from 5 RAR, supported by APC and Tank troops and Australian helicopter gunships, engage in house-to-house fighting to clear the town of a strong force of NVA regulars. The fighting destroys much of the town and costs the NVA more than 100 dead for the loss of one Australian.

August 1969

Morgan Gallup Poll finds 55% want Australians brought home from Vietnam.

3 September 1969

Ho Chi Minh dies in Hanoi, aged 79.

16 December 1969

Following the withdrawal of 25,000 US troops from South Vietnam, and plans by the US Government to withdraw another 50,000, the Prime Minister (Sir John Gorton) advises any further substantial reductions will include Australian forces.

22 April 1970

The Prime Minister announces 8 RAR will not be replaced at the end of the year, some support elements will be withdrawn from South Vietnam and the AATTV will be increased by about 120 soldiers.

08 May 1970

Anti-Vietnam War protesters stage the first moratorium marches in Australian cities (70,000 in Melbourne, and about 120,000 throughout Australia).

18 September 1970

About 100,000 people take part in a second moratorium march.

12 November 1970

8 RAR returns to Australia at the end of its 12 month tour in South Vietnam. It is the first 1ATF unit not to be replaced.

10 March 1971

Sir William McMahon replaces Gorton as Liberal leader and Prime Minister.

30 March 1971

Prime Minister McMahon announces further cuts in Australian forces in South Vietnam, including withdrawal of the tank squadron, RAAF Canberra bomber squadron and some Caribou transport aircraft.

30 June 1971

Third and last of the big anti-war rallies. About 110,000 demonstrate in State capitals.

18 August 1971

The Prime Minister announces the bulk of Australian forces in South Vietnam are to be withdrawn, leaving only a modified training team. The period of national service is reduced from two years to 18 months.

06 October 1971

3 RAR is airlifted onto HMS Sydney, leaving only one battalion at Nui Dat.

07 November 1971

4 RAR moves out of Nui Dat to Vung Tau, ending Australian combat operations in Phuoc Tuy province.

27 January 1972

USA and North Vietnam sign a peace agreement.

05 March 1972

The last Australian logistic units leave Vung Tau and Australia's commitment in South Vietnam returns to a training role with the 150-man Australian Assistance Group, Vietnam (AAAGV) and the AATTV.

02 December 1972

Australian Labor Party elected to Government.

05 December 1972

Conscription ends, draft resisters are released from jail and pending prosecutions for draft resistance are dropped.

08 December 1972

Australia's military commitment in South Vietnam ends, although controversy about the precise end date of the war continues.

23 January 1973

Nixon announces agreement that has been reached for 'peace with honour'.

27 January 1973

Ceasefire begins.

26 February 1973

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announces establishment of diplomatic relations with Hanoi, but retains recognition of South Vietnam's Government.

29 March 1973

Last US troops leave Vietnam.

10 April 1973

International Conference on Vietnam receives first official complaints of violations to the ceasefire.

30 June 1973

The Saigon Embassy Guard Platoon are the last Australian troops to leave Vietnam.

After departure of the Embassy Guard, Transport Support Flight Butterworth continued their regular Saigon courier service.

04 January 1974

South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu declares that war has begun again.

29 March 1975

Australian Government responds to urgent requests for transport assistance from Governments of South Vietnam and United States by hastily dispatching a contingent of seven RAAF Hercules and two Dakota aircraft to Vietnam on a humanitarian relief mission

The RAAF is utilized in various roles during final weeks of the war, including movement of refugees, transport of Red Cross and UN supplies, and on 4th and 17th April, evacuation of Vietnamese war orphans from Saigon to Bangkok during 'Operation Baby Lift'.

17 April 1975

Phnom Penh, Cambodia falls to the Khmer Rouge

25 April 1975

Australia closes its embassy in Saigon, completing withdrawal from Vietnam on ANZAC Day.

The final task of Australia's military in the Vietnam War is conducted on ANZAC Day, when the RAAF participates in evacuation of the Australian Embassy and final withdrawal of personnel from Saigon

30 April 1975

Communist forces capture Saigon as the last Americans leave in scenes of panic and confusion.

Courtesy of the VVAA Museum Sub-Branch. Includes material from the Special Edition of the Australian on Thursday August 18 1988, with attribution to Stuart Rintoul's "Ashes of Vietnam" (William Heineman, Australia).