

# The Vietnam War

## EVENT/TOPIC: The Battle of Long Tan

**Focus Question 1:** What was it like to be in the battle of Long Tan?

**Research Proposal: What is your chosen topic (brief summary) and why it is of significance to New Zealanders?** The Battle of Long Tan is part of the Vietnam war and one of the battles in Vietnam that New Zealanders were a part of. This was a surprise attack on Australians and New Zealanders as they were scouting to find the Viet Cong that attack their base the night before. This is significant to New Zealand as New Zealanders were part of the battle of Long Tan.

Evidence that I expect to use	HOW THIS MIGHT BE USEFUL TO MY INVESTIGATION
Battle of Long Tan Documentary - Vietnam War - Narrated by Sam Worthington  <a href="https://youtu.be/8gUSq7pxux4">https://youtu.be/8gUSq7pxux4</a>	This Documentary is a good source for showing what happened in Long Tan and is an award winning and critically acclaimed documentary which could help me answer my focus question about what was it like.
Long Tan   VietnamWar.govt.nz, New Zealand and the Vietnam War  <a href="https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/long-tan">https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/long-tan</a>	This is a good overview of what happen during Long Tan. This could be useful for my focus questions as it has some important details of what happened during the battle. It mostly talks about what happened.
Little Pattie Col Joye Vietnam 18 Aug 1966 - The Battle of Long Tan  <a href="https://battleoflongtan.com/little-pattie-col-joye-vietnam-18-aug-1966/?msckid=a455289cb45711ecaefba542">https://battleoflongtan.com/little-pattie-col-joye-vietnam-18-aug-1966/?msckid=a455289cb45711ecaefba542</a>	This is some real life footage before long tan it could be useful for showing where and what it was like and it could show stuff that words cannot.
[6 specific possible sources were identified. With a general comment about how they could be useful.]	

## What was it like to be in the battle of Long Tan?

### FQ1 Source 1

# Long Tan

<https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/long-tan>



Ceremony at Long Tan Memorial

On 18 August 1966, D Company of 6RAR set out on a sweep through an area from which VC forces had bombarded the 1ATF base at Nui Dat two days before. In the Long Tan rubber plantation five kilometres east of Nui Dat they encountered a combined NVA and VC force estimated at 1500-2000 strong.

During the ensuing battle D Company managed to hold off repeated attacks with artillery support from 161 Battery and the other three batteries at Nui Dat (two Australian, one United States). Amongst the troops pinned down in the rubber plantation, a New Zealand artillery FO party – Captain Maurice Stanley, Lance-Bombardier Murray Broomhall and Signaller Willie Walker – worked efficiently to bring down devastating artillery fire on the enemy forces. Their task was made more difficult by the extraordinary storm that began early in the engagement.

From their position at Nui Dat, the guns of 161 Battery fired more than 180 shells in two and half hours. All of the Battery's manpower – including clerks and drivers – were called into action to keep the guns supplied with ammunition. With the help of this continuous artillery support, D Company repelled repeated enemy assaults until an armoured relief force arrived. The accuracy of the artillery fire provided by the New Zealand, Australian and American batteries was revealed next day, with some 245 enemy bodies discovered on or near the battlefield.

For their part in the Battle of Long Tan, Captain Stanley was made an MBE and Signaller Corporal Willie Walker was Mentioned in Dispatches.

## FQ1 Source 1 Annotation

Source/Evidence reference:	Long Tan <a href="https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/long-tan">https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/long-tan</a> , accessed 11/4/2024
Type of Source:	Secondary  Website
<b>Relevance</b>  <i>Explain links between the evidence and the FQ(s) e.g. weigh the importance of the evidence to the FQ(s)</i>	The information from this source is good for an overview, but it doesn't give you much detailed information on the battle of Long Tan. But it helps by getting the main information on the battle of Long Tan. It tells us the number of people they fought to survive and it talks about the 161 battery and the other 3 batteries. This source is good at setting the scene in the most simple way possible, but the source would be more useful if it had slightly more information that could be used to answer the question in more detail.
<b>Reliability</b>  <i>Explain how trustworthy the evidence/source is/is not i.e. reliable or unreliable; include comments on cross-referencing</i>	This source is pretty reliable. First thing is that the source is a government website which means that it is more likely to be true than some of the other sources that do not come from a government website. Secondly, it has information that cross-referenced with some of the other sources that I have gathered. Because almost all the source I have, have this information which is good for making this source reliable.

FQ1 Source 2

*A very close thing indeed*

<https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/55/long-tan>

Author

**Ashley Ekins**

The battle of Long Tan was Australia's most costly battle in Vietnam.

Australian soldiers fought in scores of fierce actions during the war in Vietnam. Few were as intense or dramatic as the action in the Long Tan rubber plantation on 18 August 1966. An isolated infantry company of 108 men, cut off and outnumbered by at least ten to one, withstood massed Viet Cong attacks for three hours. They suffered the heaviest Australian casualties in a single engagement in Vietnam, but prevailed against the odds. Their valiant stand became a defining action of the war.

In the early hours of 17 August, the 1st Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat was shaken without warning by enemy mortar and recoilless rifle fire. The bombardment lasted just 22 minutes but it left 24 soldiers wounded and raised fears that it could be a prelude to a full-scale enemy attack on the base, established in the heart of Phuoc Tuy province just two months earlier.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART40758

**Accession Number: ART40758**

[...] Official war artist Bruce Fletcher compressed some aspects in time and embellished others: the ammunition re-supply was free-dropped from helicopters, not delivered by slung load; and the armoured personnel carriers did not use their headlights in the initial assault. Long Tan action, Vietnam, 18 August 1966, oil on canvas, 152 x 175 cm, 1970 No attack followed. At dawn, rifle companies of 6th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR) were sent out to search for the enemy. Soldiers of B Company located the mortar base plate positions and followed several enemy tracks, but they encountered no Viet Cong. The search continued, although the threat now seemed to have passed. Companies harboured overnight in their search areas and the next day B Company sent 48 men, who were due for leave, back to the base where a visiting Australian concert party with Col Joye and Little Pattie was due to perform.

D Company was next ordered out to search and left the base at 11 am on 18 August. Company commander Major Harry Smith recalled that he and his men were "not real happy at missing the concert as they pushed through tall grass to the sound of the music from the base (as reported in Wartime Issue 35). The enemy, estimated to be a heavy weapons platoon of the local D445 Battalion, numbering some 30 to 40 men, was by now "thought long gone". D Company relieved B Company at about 1pm at the edge of the Long Tan rubber plantation, 2,500 metres east of Nui Dat. After inspecting the area and a quick meal of combat rations, D Company entered the rubber plantation at about 3 pm to search eastwards. "We did not expect action," Smith recalled, "but nevertheless, we set off in two-up formation, widely dispersed, alert, watching for the enemy."

What Smith and his soldiers did not know was that the task force headquarters signals intelligence unit, 547 Signal Troop, had been monitoring the transmissions of a radio set belonging to the Viet Cong 275 Regiment. This highly classified signals intelligence was restricted to operations and intelligence officers and the task force commander. For the past two weeks, tracking by radio direction-finding had indicated that the radio—and with it presumably the enemy main force formation—was approaching Nui Dat from the east, advancing a kilometre every day. The transmissions had apparently ceased on 14 August, when the radio was near the Nui Dat 2 hill feature, 5,000 metres east of the task force base. Earlier patrols sent out to investigate had found no signs of the enemy in the region. Now D Company was patrolling towards the same area.

At around 3.40 pm rifle platoons had their first fleeting contacts with scattered groups of enemy. The enemy uniforms, equipment and weapons, including AK47 assault rifles, should have warned the Australians they were enemy main force soldiers, not local guerrillas, but at first "the penny didn't drop", Smith said.

Contacts increased rapidly and it was soon obvious that the Australians were facing a large enemy main force regiment. The Australians were used to short, sharp enemy actions in which local guerrillas quickly struck, then slipped away. But the enemy were standing and fighting, not avoiding contact, and they were

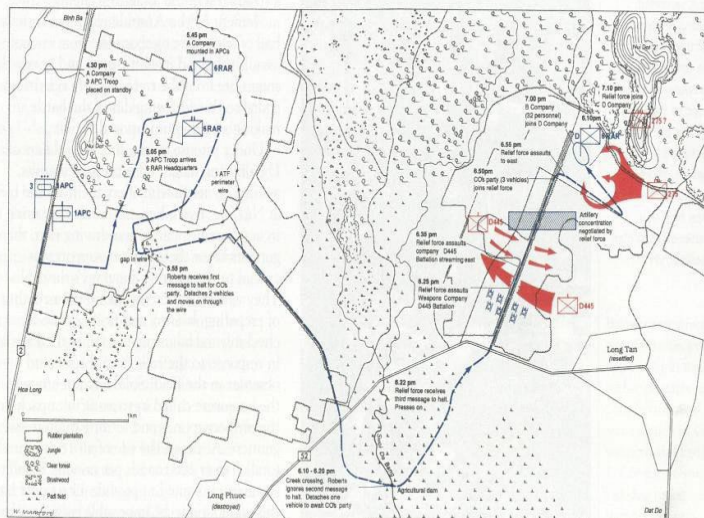
massing for attack with large volumes of fire.

11 Platoon was almost surrounded and pinned down by heavy RPG and automatic weapons fire from an estimated company strength force of Viet Cong. At about this time, the monsoon broke and the battle continued through a torrential downpour. Within 20 minutes, the platoon commander and one-third of his platoon of 28 men were killed or wounded. The survivors were forced to pull back and rejoin the other platoons who were also fighting off heavy enemy attacks and manoeuvring to counter enemy flanking movements.

As the enemy continued to press their attacks, the dispersed platoons called in artillery fire support but communications were impeded as their radios were hit and damaged by enemy fire. One soldier ran forward to 10 Platoon under heavy enemy fire carrying a spare radio.

Major Smith managed to draw his platoons together and organise his force into a defensive perimeter around the company headquarters. Soldiers went to ground there and withstood repeated enemy attacks, including massed human-wave assaults. They held firm and controlled their fire, taking a steady toll of the assaulting enemy. Any movement by the Australians drew a furious hail of automatic weapons fire from enemy assault rifles and machine-guns and enemy sniper fire from the trees. The thunderstorm added to the deafening din of the battle, making all communication difficult.

Under intense enemy fire, the soldiers of D Company fought off successive assaults, assisted by accurate artillery fire from the base at Nui Dat five kilometres away. Labouring in acrid cordite smoke and driving rain, the gunners knew their artillery support was crucial to the infantry company's survival. They worked hard to maintain their rhythm of preparing, loading and firing while checking and adjusting the fall of their shells in response to the calls from the forward observer in the field. Soldiers from around the base were called in to assist in unpacking the artillery rounds and feeding them to the gunners. At times, the fire of all 18 guns totalled over 100 rounds per minute. Fighter-bombers attempted to provide air support but this was found to be impossible owing to the low cloud cover and the thunderstorm.



Progress of the relief force from Nui Dat to the besieged D Company in the Long Tan rubber plantation. (Reproduced from *To Long Tan*, by Ian McNeill, Map 15.1 - cartographer Winifred Mumford)

Meanwhile the soldiers of the besieged D Company fell back on their training and teamwork. Men know what they had to do and were sure from their training of what their mates alongside them were doing, and so worked together as a unit. As each wave of Viet Cong came forward they fired as a team, providing covering fire for each other. One soldier recalled:

*A solid line of them—it looked like hundreds—would suddenly rush us. The artillery would burst right in the middle of them and there would be bodies all over the place. The survivors would dive for cover beside these bodies, wait for the next attacking line, get up and leap over the dead to resume the rush. They were inching forward all the time over their piles of dead.*

Radio messages from D Company, recorded in the 6RAR log at Nui Dat, conveyed the company's increasingly desperate situation:

**4.26 pm** "Being mortared . . . Want all artillery possible."

**4.31 pm** "Enemy [on] left flank. Could be serious."

**5.01 pm** "Enemy . . . penetrating both flanks and to north and south."

**5.02 pm** "Running short of ammo. Require drop through trees."

With soldiers almost out of ammunition, the artillery briefly halted fire while RAAF helicopter crews flew a daring resupply mission. At 6 pm two RAAF helicopters succeeded in dropping boxes of ammunition to the company while hovering at tree-top level, despite the heavy downpour and the risks from enemy ground fire.

Company sergeant major Warrant Officer "Big Jack" Kirby handled the distribution of the rounds to soldiers lying in the mud under constant enemy fire. Kirby was the mainstay of the defence and an inspiration to soldiers, his burly figure moving among the men as he distributed ammunition, organised

the collection of the wounded, encouraged soldiers and even joked with them on occasion. At one stage, when the enemy attempted to set up a heavy machine-gun post only 50 metres from the company perimeter, Kirby moved out and personally silenced the weapon by killing the crew. The enemy continued to press their attack and soldiers began to wonder if the promised relief force would arrive in time. For over two hours they had been fighting a ferocious battle against overwhelming odds and they were now virtually surrounded by a determined and well-equipped combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army force estimated at over 2,000 men. At 6.20 pm, as daylight was fading, D Company radioed to the base: "Enemy could be reorganising to attack. Two platoons are about 75 per cent effective. One platoon has been almost completely destroyed. [We] are reorganising for all-round defence."

Annihilation seemed imminent. Then, just before 7 pm, as the enemy were apparently forming up for a final assault, the relief company of infantry, mounted in armoured personnel carriers, broke through the enemy lines and drove them off.

The battle ended and the monsoonal storm abated, as suddenly as both began. "All firing ceased as though the tap was turned off," Major Smith recalled. Under cover of darkness, the Australian units withdrew and regrouped while the dead and wounded were evacuated by helicopters. Soldiers spent a restless night as artillery and air strikes continued to pound the battle site and likely enemy withdrawal routes.

The next morning, a combined force of infantry and armoured personnel carriers went back into the battlefield to conduct a thorough clearance. For the men of D Company this was a harrowing experience. The rubber plantation was a scene of utter devastation and carnage. The bodies of the soldiers of 11 Platoon were found lying in their firing positions, still facing towards the enemy and eerily washed clean by overnight rain. Amid the sombre scene, soldiers were elated to find two of their mates earlier reported missing in action. The two men had been wounded but survived on the battlefield overnight. Soldiers also found three enemy wounded who were treated and evacuated.

[...]

### FQ1 Source 2 Annotation

<p>Source/Evidence reference:</p>	<p><b>A very close thing indeed</b>  <a href="https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/55/long-tan">https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/55/long-tan</a>, accessed on 30/3/2024</p>
<p>Type of Source:</p>	<p>Secondary  Website</p>
<p><b>Relevance</b>  <i>Explain links between the evidence and the FQ(s) e.g. weigh the importance of the evidence to the FQ(s)</i></p>	<p>This source is another source that gives a detailed look into the events that happened during the battle of Long Tan. This helps answer the focus question as it gives information that helps us understand what happened during the battle. This source also gives us even more of a look at the people who were caught in the battle and what it looked like at the time. These reasons make this source relevant to the question and make this source very valuable to my research into the battle of Long Tan. The detail of the source makes it more useful than my first source which was rather general. In saying this, the information in both sources does support each other.</p>
<p><b>Reliability</b>  <i>Explain how trustworthy the evidence/source is/is not i.e. reliable or unreliable; include comments on cross-referencing</i></p>	<p>This source is reliable as it is another one of the government sources. This means that the source is backed by the government which is a sign that the information that is shown in this source is likely to be true. Also, the information that is shown can be backed up by other sources to strengthen the reliability of the source. All the photos come from an Australian war memorial which strengthens the reliability of the photos shown in the source.</p>

## FQ1 Source 3



## FQ1 Source 3 Annotation

Source/Evidence reference:	Little Pattie and Col Joye Concert at Nui Dat Vietnam War - 18 Aug 1966 <a href="https://youtu.be/qAEQCEQb804">https://youtu.be/qAEQCEQb804</a> , accessed on 30/3/2024
Type of Source:	Primary  Video
<b>Relevance and reliability</b>	<p>Because this is real footage of the base, this gives us more details than text could ever give. This gives us a look into the lives of the soldiers before the Battle and gives us a look at what they were missing out on while out searching for the Viet Cong. This gives us more about what the soldiers were doing while they were out fighting for their lives/searching for the Viet Cong and therefore is helpful to my focus question.</p> <p>Photos from the time are great, but nothing can beat a video from the time as it gives you more context than a photo or even text could. I do need to be cautious though as I do not know why someone took this footage, what their motive was and whether they therefore only chose to show certain aspects of the event.</p>

Exemplar for Internal Achievement Standard 91229 History Level 2

Evaluation

<p><b>STRENGTHS/ SUCCESSES of my inquiry process</b></p> <p><i>Describe and give reasons</i></p>	<p>During my time doing this research project, my strengths/successes were the following. I found government sources that were good for the research project as they made the reliability of the sources easy as government sources are more reliable than others and the information is mostly not going to be faked. Now that the government has addressed some of the lingering issues associated with the war, such as compensation for Agent Orange, the Apology and the Memorandum of understanding, it is unlikely they have reason to lie about what happened in Vietnam and therefore are likely to accurately tell the events. I also had a range of sources such as photographs, YouTube, websites and newspaper articles. Most of the sources contained, or were, primary evidence. This made my answer to the question more trustworthy as I had firsthand information on the battle.</p>
<p><b>WEAKNESSES/ DIFFICULTIES of my inquiry process</b></p>	<p>The weaknesses/difficulties that came to light during my time on this research project was that during the end of finding my sources I could not find any more good sources that I could use for my focus questions. This meant that I spent more time finding sources than I wanted to. Because of the time, it took to find good sources I spent less time doing my annotation of the sources. A difficulty that I had was trying to find a book for one of my sources. As this battle is very small compared to the whole of the Vietnam war, there are not many books talking about it. I looked through the XXXXX school and XXX town library online to try and find a book that would answer my focus question. Next time I think I should do a greater depth of preliminary reading to make sure I have access to quality sources and more detail to allow for better coverage of my question.</p>
<p><b>COMPARE THE USEFULNESS OF SOURCES</b></p> <p><i>Describe and give reasons</i></p>	<p>Most of the sources that I did gather were useful, but towards the end of the research, found the sources were becoming less useful. One of the best sources I had for usefulness was source 6 (<a href="https://battleoflongtan.com/timeline/">https://battleoflongtan.com/timeline/</a>). This source was a big timeline of the whole battle. It was the biggest source I had for my research. It might not have been the most reliable out of the other sources as most of my other sources were government websites. But it was still pretty reliable and its depth of information and the details it provided of the battle was what made it the most useful to me.</p>
<p><b>RELIABILITY of SOURCES/EVIDENCE</b></p>	<p>Almost all of the sources I had were government websites so their reliability was quite high. But there were a few that were not as reliable as the others I had. The way I did my reliability is I found where the source came from and what other information is on the site if it was a site. That's why I have a lot of government websites. Also, I would cross-reference the sources I had with the government websites as I already knew that they were reliable.</p>
<p><b>ISSUES THAT AFFECTED THE INQUIRY PROCESS</b></p> <p><i>Describe and give reasons</i> <i>e.g. decisions you would change, did you have to alter questions, where else could you have looked for sources, how would this additional information have been useful</i></p>	<p>I found that there would be no perfect source that would answer the question, which means that I had to read between the lines. Things I would change would be that I should have gotten more accounts from soldiers in the war because even though their memory may not be so good because of the traumatic experiences I think their voice is crucial and would make a difference to my research project. Also, time management could have been better as I was rushed to get this done on time, so the annotations were rushed. But this is because the finding of the sources took longer than expected.</p>