

What was significant about the battles or campaigns New Zealand was involved in?
[unedited text]

During their time in Vietnam the New Zealand soldiers were largely under the command of the Australian Regiment. For this reason many of the battles New Zealand was involved in were over shadowed by the Australian troops.

One significant battle New Zealand was involved in was the battle of Long Tan in August 1966. During this battle 2500 Viet Cong attacked an Australian force of around 100 troops. The monsoon conditions were in favour of the Australian troops as it gave them cover from the waves of advancing enemy. The New Zealand artillery provided crucial support for the Australian soldiers. The battle lasted 3 hours and over 3000 rounds of artillery were fired on the Viet Cong positions. The ANZAC forces were able to defeat the Vietnamese, with 18 Australians killed and 24 wounded. This was considerably less than the North Vietnamese who lost many, with at least 245 dead and over 500 wounded.

This battle was a significant military victory for both the Australia and New Zealand. The New Zealanders' role as fire support saved the soldiers from being overrun and strengthened ANZAC ties.

Arguably the most significant battle of the Vietnam War was the Tet Offensive in January 1968. This was an offensive launched by the Vietcong over the Tet holiday period (the lunar new year). Over the Tet period there was to be a temporary truce. The North Vietnamese broke this truce and attacked approximately one hundred cities in South Vietnam, hoping to cause a popular uprising amongst the South Vietnamese people. In some cities the communists were repelled within hours, whilst in others the fighting continued for weeks. From a military perspective the offensive was a failure for the North Vietnamese as they suffered large casualties and did not achieve the expected popular uprising. No New Zealanders were killed during this offensive.

From a political perspective the Tet offensive was a huge defeat for the Allies (America, Australia and New Zealand). The Media had a huge role to play in the political defeat as this was the first time that war footage was shown on the news. Graphic images of fighting were shown to households all around the world. Once the public saw the desperate fighting and the allied casualties they began to question their countries involvement in Vietnam and public opinion turned anti war. The political leaders at the time, such as the President of America, Lyndon B Johnson and New Zealand's prime minister, Keith Holyoake. They began to question whether a military victory in Vietnam was possible. This Battle is significant as it marks a turning point in public opinion on the Vietnam War.

Question:

What immediate and long term effects did the Vietnam War have on Veterans, their families and the communists?

Answer:

The Vietnam War had many significant effects not only on the soldiers who served, but also their families and the wider New Zealand community.

The group most affected by the war was the Veterans. They suffered in various ways, depending on their personal experiences in Vietnam. Some of the immediate effects on the veterans included physical wounds from fighting, sickness (such as malaria) and

mental illness such as nightmares and drug addiction. Some of the effects the veterans carried long term and these would affect them for life. The long term effects carried by veterans included physiological problems such as depression, PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and nightmares.

Throughout the course of the war the Allies used a chemical defoliant, code named Agent orange. This chemical has had many side effects which not only affected the soldiers who were exposed to it but also their children, grandchildren and the Vietnamese people. The effects of this chemical were not known to the soldiers who used it. One Veteran severely affected by exposure to chemicals was Captain Mike Gillooly. He was so exposed that Veterans Affairs judged him 305% disabled.

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The families of the soldiers who served in Vietnam were facing their own struggles while their fathers and husbands were away fighting a war overseas. Many families had moved to Asia and lived in army accommodation in countries such as Singapore. The long absences were stressful on the wives and children of soldiers. The families of the soldiers did not return from war were left without grieving and would be deeply affected by the Vietnam War. The families of veterans who were exposed the chemical defoliant Agent Orange were to experience major health problems.

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The Vietnam War affected almost every community in New Zealand, from the army community, the youth and even the government not only in New Zealand but also globally. The Vietnam War sparked wide spread discontent from the outset. Many groups in New Zealand disapproved of the country's involvement in the conflict, saying it was not of any interest to New Zealand security. As the war dragged on, support for the Vietnam War waned. There were many peaceful anti war protests, however as time passed by the protests became more violent and aggressive. In 1957, 2 people were arrested in Auckland at a protest against the visit of South Vietnam's premier. Again in 1959, 30 people were arrested after throwing fire crackers at an election meeting addressed by the Prime Minister.

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The effect of the war on the veterans, both, mentally and physically still affects them today. The decision of the government not to acknowledge their service and the lack of support and compensation for returned soldiers was the cause for a feeling of discontent amongst the veterans and their families. The families suffered marriage break ups, birth defects and stressful relationships both during the conflict and after the war. The wider New Zealand community was torn apart by the antiwar protests and the negative feelings towards the government and soldiers who fought in the war.

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Today the perspective of the public of New Zealand has changed dramatically from that of the people during the 1960's and 1970's. We have become more accepting of the fact that it was the soldiers doing their job and the government being pressured by the United States to contribute both economically and militarily. For the veterans who returned to New Zealand, their service was finally recognised in 2008 at tribute 08, a formal welcome home parade for veterans and their families.

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