

Timeline – Battle of Long Tan

17 August 1966

2.43 am: North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops bombard the Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat for 22 minutes resulting in 67 mortar craters. 24 Australians are wounded – one seriously who loses a leg. 7 vehicles are damaged, and 21 tents damaged. The enemy artillery mainly and accurately targeted the Australian artillery, engineer lines and the FSCC command post.

2.50am: Australian counter-bombardment artillery and mortar fire commences.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P04959.046

Photo: *Members of 101 Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery, operating “D” Delta 105 mm L5 Pack Howitzer at Nui Dat, 1966. The four shirtless gunners are firing from a weapon pit surrounded by corrugated iron and reinforced with sandbags. Identified are: 1731284 Gunner (Gnr) Barry Faulkner; 215074 Bombardier (Bdr) Trevor Madeley, operating the gun’s breech after firing; 4410891 Gunner (Gnr) David Vonbertough, carrying a ranging disc to determine the charge and range to be used in fire support; and 13538 Sergeant (Sgt) Allan Grice. The numbers and arrows marked on the corrugated wall are direction finders in milliradians.*

4.10am: Australian artillery fire ceases.

4.50am: Lt Col Townsend, Commanding Officer of 6RAR orders B Company, 6RAR out on patrol to locate the enemy firing positions used to hit the task force base.

6.31 am: B Company, 6RAR with only 80 men, is dispatched to search for the enemy and it spends the day tracing enemy tracks.

8.00am: B Company locate first enemy mortar base plate position. They fan out and eventually locate sites for 5 x 82mm mortars and weapons pits for 35 men. They also locate tracks from the enemy party and follow it.

10.30am: The main track that B Company had been following fades away.

Midday: 6RAR now had three separate elements searching for the enemy in the general area of the base plate positions and to the north east of Nui Dat. A Company was 500 metres north of Nui Dat, 9 Platoon C Company was to the south of the known base plate positions and B Company was between the two, approximately 2km's south west of A Company and 1 km north east of 9 platoon. It was difficult to imagine that any significant numbers of enemy in the area could remain undetected. A Company reported heavy enemy jamming of its radio transmissions.

5.30am: A porter party with food rations arrives at B Company. B Company stays out overnight so they can continue the search the next morning.

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7.05am: B Company recommences the search but 48 men out of their compliment of approximately 80, return to Nui Dat for their scheduled R&R break (Rest & Relaxation).

8.00am: D Company HQ radio signaller L Cpl Graham Smith advises Major Harry Smith, Officer Commanding Delta Company, 6RAR, that he received a message for him to report to Lt Col Townsend for orders for a company patrol. Major Harry Smith issues an informal warning order to his company to prepare for a patrol.

8.30am: D Company begins to draw rations and ammunition, test fire their weapons and pack their equipment.

9.30am: Major Harry Smith holds an 'O' (orders) Group with his platoon commanders; 2Lt Dave Sabben (12 Platoon), 2Lt Gordon Sharp (11 Platoon), 2Lt Geoff Kendall (10 Platoon), NZ Artillery Observer Capt. Morrie Stanley, D Company CSM (Company Sergeant Major Kirby) and Harry's signallers, to let them know about the patrol. Their orders are to locate the enemy mortar positions, locate and engage the enemy and relieve B Coy. Harry could feel the disappointment among his men at missing the Col Joye and Little Pattie concert at Nui Dat. Everyone had been looking forward to this rare treat and a break from the monotony and boredom of life at Nui Dat. Some also felt that Harry's strained relationship with his boss Lt. Col. Colin Townsend (Commanding Officer of 6RAR) might have contributed to D Company drawing the short straw, once again.

9.45am: 9 Squadron RAAF pilots Riley & Grandin in one chopper and pilots Lane & Dohle in another, pick up the Col Joye and Little Pattie concert party from the US Airforce Base at Vung Tau and fly them to Nui Dat.

10.30am: The choppers carrying the concert party arrive at Nui Dat.

10.35am: B Company report that they have found enemy pits dug for 25 men and 22 empty tubes for 75mm RCL (Recoilless rifles) rounds.

11.00am: Concert setup and rehearsals begin.

11.00am: Delta Company 6RAR comprising three platoons, 10, 11 and 12, Company Headquarters and a three man Forward (Artillery) Observation party from New Zealand's 161 Battery (108 men), are sent out to relieve B Company and to continue the search for NVA and Viet Cong troops. D Coy leave the base at Nui Dat just as a group of visiting entertainers (including Col Joye and Little Pattie) are setting up their equipment for a much anticipated concert.

1.00 pm: Delta and Bravo companies rendezvous and B Company returns to Nui Dat for the concert. Delta Company Commander, Major Harry Smith, his three platoons, a company HQ group and three New Zealand artillery observers set off into the rubber plantation.

3.00pm: The Little Pattie and Col Joye and the Joy Boys concert begins at Nui Dat.

3.15 pm: D Coy enters the Long Tan rubber plantation..

3.35pm: 11 Platoon has their first contact at track crossing. They kill one enemy soldier and recover an AK47. The company formation used at the time means that D Coy HQ is approximately 200 metres to the rear left of 11 Platoon, 12 Platoon some 200 metres behind D Coy HQ and 10 Platoon some 200 metres to the extreme left of 11 Platoon.

3.40pm: 11 Platoon Commander 2Lt Sharp gives Major Harry Smith a SitRep over the radio and requests permission to follow up the enemy. Harry gives permission and 11 Platoon begin rushing after enemy.

3.42pm: The first artillery rounds were fired and these were put down onto a grid reference just south of 11 Platoon's initial contact.

3.45pm: A Coy have just returned to Nui Dat after an exhausting 3 day patrol and have showered, changed clothes and just about to eat a "steak sandwich and have a beer".

4.08 pm: 11 Platoon is suddenly hit by major enemy force with at least 2 machine guns. Left hand section gets hit very hard, 2 Australians killed instantly.

4.09pm: Sharp orders the right hand section of 11 Platoon to move forward (forming a back the front L shape) to fire directly across the front of 11 Platoon, towards the most intense enemy fire.

4.10pm: 11 Platoon commander Sharp radios NZ Forward Artillery Observer Capt. Morrie Stanley requesting immediate artillery support. Enemy continues to attack 11 Platoon in large waves from the east with smaller probes from NW and SE.

4.10pm: B Coy told to hold at grid reference 458665 and wait for further orders.

4.11pm: Stanley warns Artillery of Fire Mission.

4.11pm: Stanley calls Fire Mission and advises 11 Platoon of incoming artillery.

4.12pm: The NZ 161 Artillery battery begins firing in support of 11 Platoon. There are 6 artillery guns in each battery back at Nui Dat. Two artillery batteries are Australian and one is New Zealand, all firing 105mm howitzers. There is also an American 155mm artillery battery at Nui Dat making a total of 24 artillery guns.

4.15pm: Sharp and 11 Platoon Sgt Bob Buick orders their right hand section to move back to protect the right hand flank of 11 Platoon (forming an upside down L shape).

4.15pm: Harry and D Coy CHQ continue to move forward to try and close the gap between them and 11 Platoon.

4.16pm: Sharp calls for artillery and reports attacks from left, front and right. He says, "It's bigger than I thought it was. They're going to attack us!"

4.19pm: Stanley requests upgrading of artillery to Regimental Fire Missions (all 24 guns). It is initially refused as other batteries are supporting other units. 1 battery is usually in support of each battalion and 1 in general fire support. 5RAR was to the north with 1 Australian battery supporting them, the NZ 161 Bty was supporting D Coy and the other Australian battery was in general support of the task force.

4.20pm: Harry gets on the radio and forcefully requests urgent, additional artillery support as requested by Stanley.

4.20pm: 2Lt David Harris aide to Brigadier Jackson (ATF Commander) and the most junior officer in 1ATF HQ was at the desk of the task force tactical operations centre when the messages started coming in. Working close to Jackson, Harris was privy to much of the intelligence information Jackson was receiving. He had also been greatly impressed by Keep's assessments before he had been medically shipped out to Vung Tau. Harris was convinced that an enemy main force unit had arrived somewhere near Long Tan. Over the spare radio in the operations centre he heard Smith describe the contact to Townsend. Harris recognised the significance of the green uniforms. He alerted Jackson who immediately came to the operations centre. Harris also phone Major Bob Haggerty commanding 1APC (Armoured Personnel Carriers) squadron and warned him that his standby troop might be needed.

4.22pm: First Fire Mission Regiment (all 18 guns) are fired in support of D Coy. The 6 x US 155mm battery guns are fired in support totalling 24 guns.

4.22pm: Adrian Roberts has a shower after returning from the concert. A soldier arrives and tells him he is required by his CO and that he needs to bring his map.

4.25pm: D Coy position is mortared. As it continues to move, around 20 mortar rounds keep falling on their previous position. Harry orders everyone to move around 1-200 metres north east which unintentionally widens the gap with 11 Platoon.

4.25pm: Artillery people attending the concert at Nui Dat start leaving to go to their artillery gun positions as they can hear artillery firing non-stop. Performers are alarmed at the artillery firing going on while they perform.

4.25pm: Harry radios 10 Platoon and advises them to make their way to 11 Platoon and support them.

4.26pm: Harry advises Townsend that the enemy is now probably company size (8-100 men) and that the enemy is now using mortars.

4.27pm: Harry radios 11 Platoon and advises that he is sending 10 Platoon to them.

4.28pm: Stanley converses with the MFC (mortar fire controller) on likely location of enemy mortars landing near D Coy. Darlington in the FSCC plots the bearing and orders the US 155mm to fire the counter bombardment mission. It neutralises the enemy mortars.

4.29pm: Harry radios 2Lt Sabben to bring up his 12 platoon and take over the defence of the D Coy HQ position.

4.30pm: Concert at Nui Dat breaks up partly because of rain and partly because of the artillery.

4.30pm: As 10 Platoon keeps moving towards 11 Platoon they move down and up a bit of a dip and onto level ground. They come across approximately 100 VC lying on their backs. Kendall sees to his immediate front that an enemy assault wave is moving due south going in on 11 Platoon. Kev Branch heard Kendall saying, 'This is it. Keep going, keep going' – Branch was thinking to himself 'Christ he's mad! We'll be able to shake hands with 'em soon!'

4.30pm: Large waves of enemy are now attacking the 11 Platoon position from three sides. These waves are made up of 50-100 in two lines of one in front of the other. The Australian artillery takes out the reserve lines and 11 Platoon must fight off the first assault lines.

4.30pm: A Coy who has just showered and tucking into a well-earned meal after a gruelling 3 day patrol is warned to get ready to go and help D Coy.

4.31pm: 10 Platoon radios Harry of their first contact.

4.33pm: 11 Platoon commander, 21 year old Gordon Sharp is killed. Sgt Buick takes over.

4.35pm: Little Pattie is being driven around Nui Dat in Savage's APC.

11 Platoon make adjustments to artillery calling it in even closer.

4.35pm: Adrian formally warned that his APC's are required. He sends out order across the radio for all APC's to regroup at 6RAR HQ in Nui Dat.

4.35pm: 11 Platoon radio antenna is shot off, loses radio communications.

4.35pm: 10 Platoon radio operator Pte Brian Hornung is calling in artillery when he is shot through the shoulder. The round continues on through the radio taking it off the air.

4.40pm: Little Pattie and Col Joye are dropped off at the chopper pad to be flown back to Vung Tau. Col Joye is 'kidnapped' by a Sergeant who drove him away to drink with the soldiers. As the chopper departed Little Patti saw the continuous flash of artillery gun muzzles which she mistook for enemy explosions in the camp. Nobody tells her what is going on.

4.40pm: 10 Platoon attacks rear of enemy and enemy turns and runs. 10 Platoon attempts to move again but they are quickly attacked from 2 sides and then pinned down with 3 Australians being wounded. Kendall sends wounded back to D Coy position along with a message that his radio is gone.

4.45pm: 10 Platoon receives incoming mortar rounds. 10 Platoon's Sgt Rankin sees a blue flash at his feet, feels the air suck him up into the rubber trees and then he lands back on the ground with a thud but is miraculously unhurt.

4.45pm: Pte Bill Akell the reserve D Coy HQ radio operator learns that the 10 Platoon radio is out. He advises D Coy CSM Warrant Office Jack Kirby that he has a spare radio.

Kirby says "Go, go, go!" Akell not knowing exactly what direction 10 Platoon is, asks Dave Sabben. He then runs out through the Australian perimeter. On his way he comes across three enemy and kills them with a burst from his sub machinegun.

4.50pm: D Coy medic Cpl. Phil Dobson sets up a makeshift company aid post (CAP) in a small reverse hollow at the centre of D Coy's main position. (Eventually there would be 23 wounded Australians under his care and he didn't lose one of them). Dobson would also sometimes venture out under enemy fire to carry wounded back from the front-line positions.

4.50pm: Very heavy, monsoonal rain begins.

4.54pm: Jackson approves in principle the sending of A Coy out on the APC's, but he won't release them yet.

4.55pm: Akell arrives at 10 platoon with the spare radio. 10 contacts Harry and gives a Sitrep.

4.55pm: Some of 11 Platoon run out of ammo and resort to cheering the artillery as it crumps in amongst the enemy.

5.00pm: 11 platoon's radio is restored. Buick contacts Smith and advises Sharp is KIA (killed in action).

5.02pm: Harry requests an airforce airstrike and an ammunition resupply.

Debate in the FSCC at Nui Dat between Jackson, Raw (RAAF Commander) and the US Air Liaison Officer about sending choppers. US offered but it would take 20 minutes to get their choppers from Vung Tau. 2 x Australian choppers were at Nui Dat as they brought in the entertainment party. Raw demurs and says his standing orders won't allow him to send choppers in as the area isn't secure and they might lose the choppers. Jackson says "We'll I am about to lose a company, what the hell's a few more choppers and a few more pilots." (Witnessed by more than 5 people!)

Pilots Grandin and Riley enter the FSCC after listening to the battle unfold over their radio in their chopper. They overhear the last stage of arguments. Riley insists they fly and will fly alone if needed as it's his chopper. In the face of the US offer and his own pilots threatening to go anyway, raw finally gives the OK for the choppers to go.

5.05pm: 10 Platoon is ordered to withdraw back to the D Coy position as they cannot move forward to 11 platoon without sustaining significant casualties.

5.05pm: 10 APC's reach A Coy at Nui Dat. The 100 men of A Coy mounts the APC's but they are ordered to wait.

5.09pm: Buick advised to throw smoke to help the 3 x U.S. F4 phantom jets identify their position. Brian Halls throws a smoke grenade but made the mistake of throwing it immediately in front of their position blinding them so they could not see the enemy. With the monsoonal rain, the smoke wouldn't rise and just hung there so the jet pilots couldn't see it.

5.10pm: Airstrike arrives in area but cannot identify friendly positions due to the bad weather so Harry waves off the jets as he needs the artillery (artillery had to stop while they are in the immediate area) and asks for the jets to drop napalm away from 11 Platoon and on the suspected enemy rear areas.

11 platoons situation is desperate, they are almost surrounded, half are either wounded or dead and they are running out of ammunition.

5.10pm: Sabben now advised to take his 12 Platoon to 11 Platoon but leave one section behind to help defend the wounded and the D Coy HQ position as 10 Platoon are not back yet. This effectively reduces 12 Platoon from a strength of 30 to only 20.

5.15pm: Sabben and 12 Platoon (only 20 men) leave the D Coy perimeter.

5.15pm: 11 Platoon's Buick advises Harry that their situation is desperate. He is almost surrounded, suffering heavy casualties, cannot withdraw and almost out of ammunition.

5.20pm: 12 Platoon's first contact with enemy.

5.20pm: Harry requests airborne reinforcements.

5.20pm: 10 Platoon arrives back at the D Coy position.

5.25pm: A large group of around 200 enemy appear in front of D Coy's position (in front of where 10 Platoon were located). D Coy hear whistles and bugles and are then hit by two waves of assaulting enemy troops. Artillery takes out the reserve line and then D Coy would have to take out the first assault line with small arms fire. Not all enemy lying out there were dead or wounded and it was from these 'hidden' enemy that D Coy suffered their most casualties. They'd crawl forward and snipe at any Australians they could see. Stanley calls the artillery in ever closer down to within 100 metres at this point.

5.25pm: Townsend has strong words with Jackson about releasing A Coy and the APC's out to help D Coy. Jackson is concerned that the attack on D Coy is a ploy to further reduce the defences at Nui Dat so the enemy could attack the main base.

5.30pm: Jackson finally approves the release of A Coy and the APC's to go to help D Coy. Both Jackson and Townsend are seriously worried about possible ambushes waiting for them.

5.30pm: Pilots Grandin and Riley, Dohle and Lane move to the chopper pad. They fly their two choppers from their chopper pad to the 6RAR pad to load the ammo resupply.

5.35pm: Buick calls artillery on his own position. Stanley refuses but Buick advises Stanley that they are practically out of ammunition, they are surrounded and that they only have 10 able men left. Stanley stays the course and does not bring it in any closer as it is already 30-50 metres in front of 11 Platoon. Buick thinks Stanley made adjustments as the next few salvos are very effective at taking out the most immediate enemy assaults.

The sheer physical exertion of manning and firing the artillery was being compounded by a difficulty in breathing. A lethal haze was developing around the artillery guns and it could not disperse because of the monsoonal weather. Two men passed out from the fumes.

5.40pm: Lightning hits the artillery positions knocking one NZ switchboard operator several metres back and another unconscious. The lightning also knocks out the Tannoy speaker system which is used to communicate orders to each gun and blows one of the dunnies to smithereens. They now have to resort to shouting orders through a daisy

chain of men. Most of the spare Nui Dat personnel (cooks, drivers, admin) are now helping to keep up the supply of artillery ammunition to the artillery.

11 being attacked in force from 3 sides. Now estimates that there are 10 KIA and 8 WIA out of the original total of 28 men in 11 Platoon.

5.45pm: Townsend issues orders to Roberts and his APC's carrying A Coy to go out to D Coy. They leave the 6RAR area towards the Nui Dat perimeter.

Artillery in support of 11 platoon now dropping to well within 50-100 metres of their position – danger close.

5.50pm: Choppers with ammo depart Nui Dat. They initially struggle to lift off in the storm with the weight of the ammunition. Soon after take-off the choppers lose sight of each other. The intensity of the rain reduced the efficiency of the rotors and the engine in each chopper was in danger of flaming out. The Huey's could only fly dangerously just above the treetops at a reduced speed and their visibility was only about 50 metres.

5.50pm: Artillery now stopped so choppers can fly in ammo resupply.

5.50pm: APC's reach the perimeter wire of the Nui Dat base. Unbeknownst to Troop Commander Roberts, engineers had closed the gap. They then had to stop and wait and find someone who knew where the gap in the wire was, but the engineers were having their evening meal. While the APC's waited with engines rumbling, some of the infantry watched the frenzied activity in the nearby artillery positions. Every available man, cook, driver, clerk, anyone around was slaving to feed the guns. It was then that the men of A Coy and the APC's began to understand how desperate D Coy's situation is. Finally, an engineer arrives and pulls the barricade aside and the APC's rumble off.

5.55pm: 12 Platoon in heavy contact but they decimate around 40-50 NVA. Sabben attempts to move forward again but is then attacked from two sides and eventually pinned down. 12 Platoon requests artillery to help.

5.55pm: Just after the APC's begin moving out from Nui Dat Townsend advises the APC's to stop and come back and pick him up. Adrian sends 2 APC's back to get Townsend but continues towards D Coy.

6.00pm: Choppers above D Coy position. They contact D Coy CHQ and ask for smoke to be thrown.

6.02pm: 12 Platoon throws smoke towards 11 Platoon's position hoping they will see it and come to 12 Platoon's position.

6.03pm: Chopper pilots advise that they see red smoke (wrong colour) and have to abort and go around again. They most likely saw the smoke thrown by 11 Platoon and not by D Coy HQ.

6.05pm: 11 Platoon moves towards the yellow smoke which is thrown by 12 Platoon. 11 Platoon's Radio operator, Grice is killed as soon as he gets up.

6.05pm: 12 advises Harry that survivors from 11 have reached their position but enemy attacking him from 3 sides. Harry orders them back to the D Coy position. Sgt Paddy Todd is accidentally left behind. Earlier, Todd was wounded through both ankles by a mortar which landed right next to him. He tells the others he is OK but after they

leave he gets up only to realise he cannot stand. He starts crawling towards the D Coy position.

6.07pm: On the way back to the D Coy position 12 Platoon see a large enemy force of around 150 soldiers waiting to move. Sabben orders them to stop and aim their machineguns down the avenues of trees. They open up and blasted them. Unknown to them Sgt Todd was between them and the enemy. Todd hugs the ground and quietly curses his situation.

6.08pm: B Coy asks Townsend to go to D Coy. Townsend finally approves. B Coy move towards D Coy.

6.08pm: Choppers call for smoke to be thrown again. Correct smoke identified. The first chopper dives on the position and they push the ammunition out and it drops out so accurately almost into the lap of Kirby that it almost kills him. Riley's chopper then directs the second chopper into the same position and they also push their ammunition out.

6.13pm: 12 Platoon and the survivors from 11 Platoon are now at the D Coy's position. D Coy are finally all together in one place, in all round defence.

6.15pm: Artillery restarted as soon as choppers are clear.

6.15pm: As Sgt Todd was dragging himself grimly through the rain and mud and about half way back to the D Coy position there was a bit of a hedge which the enemy were running along. As he had a brief rest he saw two enemy approaching. At 20 metres he fired his SLR. He kills one and wounds the other. He carries on towards D Coy.

6.15pm: Kirby begins running about, distributing ammo to everyone, sometimes under fire and frequently joking about with his young soldiers to keep their spirits up.

6.15pm: APC's reach the swollen creek. Townsend again orders Adrian to stop. Adrian leaves one APC to guard the river. 6 APC's barely cross the swollen stream. They all spin and turn in the swollen river with water right up to the top of the APC's. It looks like they won't make it across, but they eventually do make it.

6.19pm: In the 1ATF HQ / FSCC tension is so deep that some notice that those present – listening to the radio, are projecting themselves out from the tent and into Harry Smith's location – they all seemed to be drained of colour by the intensity of the feeling in the group.

6.20pm: Problems emerge in the artillery positions caused by the continuous firing and heavy rain. When a shell is fired the resulting fumes are toxic especially if not dispersed. There was no wind and the rain is falling vertically preventing any dispersion of the fumes. Soon the sheer exertion of manning the guns was compounded by difficulty in breathing. A tremendous responsibility rests with the individual on the gun crew. Each round fire is potentially as lethal to Australian troops as it is to the enemy. Sites on each of the artillery guns are also fogging up under the humidity compounding the accuracy of aiming them.

D Coy comes under heavier contact from 3 sides.

Artillery is being brought in even closer to D Coy's position.

Back at Nui Dat empty artillery shells are piling up rapidly around the artillery guns and men are frantically trying to keep ammunition coming.

The artillery is being called to within less than 50-80 metres of D Coy position – danger close.

6.20pm: Heavy enemy machineguns sweep the D Coy position with concentrated fire from the east and south-east.

6.20pm: Harry advised Townsend that the enemy could be reorganising to attack their position in force. Two platoons are about 75% effective. One platoon has been almost completely destroyed. He is organising for all round defence. Harry advises that if the APC's aren't there soon, don't bother.

Alone, out in the shambles of rain, mud, trees, bodies and scattered equipment crawled the wounded Barry Meller from 11 Platoon. On and on he went, not knowing which direction he was moving at any given time.

6.22pm: Adrian Roberts receives 3rd order to halt APC's and wait for Townsend.

6.25pm: APC's enter the rubber and have their first contact with the enemy. Initially the APC's thought they were Australians and Roberts had them hold their fire. Then a VC fired and the spell was broken. One of the A Coy soldiers on top of an APC swiftly brought up his M16, got a running figure in his sights – forgetting that the line of sight is some 5 cm's above the barrel – his barrel was not above the gunshield of the .50 and his 5.56mm round drilled a neat hole through it. The APC's weren't aware of the presence of the Viet Cong D445 Battalion (around 500-600 enemy) until they were right on top of them and they stood up out of the scrub. The APC's had come out of the rain surprising them as much as the enemy surprised the Australians. D445 were moving around the flank of the C Coy position in order to close the back door and completely surround them.

Sgt Frank Alcorta from A Coy 'jumps from the top of his APC' and in typical 'John Wayne' style dispatched quite a few enemy. Alcorta was now alone on the ground with his magazine empty so A Coy's Lt Dinham screamed for the APC to lower its rear ramp so they could get out and not leave their Sgt out there alone.

Peter Dinham's platoon of 30 or so A Coy infantry dismount from their APC's and attack the enemy in extended line.

Adrian orders infantry back into the APC's as they must get to D Coy.

6.28pm: Sgt Paddy Todd crawls towards the D Coy position. He is fired upon by Australians who think he is enemy. He waves his hat and shouts, "Don't shoot, don't shoot! You silly bastards, it's Paddy Todd!" Buddy Lea runs out with another soldier and they carry him in, still under fire.

Buddy Lea is taking Todd back to the medic Dobson at the Company Aid Post in the middle of D Coy's position when they spot some enemy. Todd says, "Hey Buddy have a look there." Buddy says, "That'll be A Coy, they're on their way." Todd says, "We'll, they must have changed uniforms mate because they are all in black!" Buddy drops Todd and pops behind a tree. One VC was in front of the other. Buddy steps out and lets go with his sub machinegun but one of the VC was too quick and got Buddy in the left shoulder. However, Buddy's burst of fire kills the two VC. Todd laughs. It was unbelievable to

Todd as it look like a fight at the OK Corral. Todd says, 'You silly old bastard.' Buddy's 2IC Jack Jewry see's that Buddy is wounded, comes over to help and as he kneels down to bandage Buddy he falls across Buddy's back. Jewry is killed instantly by an enemy bullet.

The conditions are so bad now that many of the D Coy soldiers were having to manually put rounds up the spouts of their weapons. Rifle and machineguns were jamming up as the mud, water and dirt started to seize the working parts.

6.32pm: Stanley calls in artillery even closer to within 30-50 metres of the D Coy position – Danger Close. The FSCC at Nui Dat refuse saying it is unsafe.

6.33pm: Harry gets on the Radio and says, 'Give us the fucking guns where want them or you'll lose the bloody lot of us.'

6.35pm: First major human wave assaults begin on the D Coy position. There would be 2 lines of between 60-100 NVA and VC attacking. With the assault group around 150 yards out, the artillery would come in and wipe out the reserve group who would be about 100 yards behind the first assault group. Survivors from this wave would then join the next wave as the pass by and so on. D Coy would have to fight off the assault wave with small arms fire. The assaults would be preceded by whistles and bugles and supported by machine guns. The main thrusts went in on D Coy on the east, south-east and south. The brunt of this fighting was taken by 12 and 10 Platoons. 4 more Australians were killed and several wounded in this period.

Stanley under pressure and stress is worried about artillery hitting the Australians and calls Stop! Stop! Stop! He is given calming support by Fire Controller and fellow New Zealander Harry Honner over the radio. Stanley regathers himself and recommences the artillery fire.

Company Sergeant Major (CSM) Kirby continues to move around D Coy's perimeter checking in on the wellbeing of his men, distributing ammunition, carrying wounded back from the front lines and keeping everyone's spirits up. As enemy mortars fell on them, as enemy bullets pounded into them and the force of the Australian artillery impacted on them the Australians kept trying to dig into the mud with their bare hands to get some cover but to no avail.

Kirby sees an enemy wheeled machine gun setting up less than 50 metres away from the D Coy front lines. Knowing that this could decimate their position, he lunges out from the D Coy perimeter and kills the machine gun crew, put the machinegun out of action and safely returns to D Coy defensive position.

6.35pm: The APC's have their second contact. They encounter a group of around 100 enemy. The enemy begin attacking Cpl Carter's APC fitted out as an ambulance. Roberts watches an enemy RCL (recoilless rifle – bazooka) crew line up Carter's APC. Roberts cannot raise them on the radio. The first round hits a tree which partially falls across Carter's APC. The second round hits the branches of the tree they just shot down. Carter, his .50 machinegun jammed, leaps up on top of his APC with his WWII Owen machinegun and kills this RCL crew and a few people around it. The APC driver was throwing up magazines.

Roberts sends one of the APC's back to Nui Dat with one wounded aboard. There are now only 6 APC's moving toward D Coy. Roberts orders the APC's to break contact and continue to move toward D Coy.

6.45pm: Smith orders D Coy to "shrink the perimeter and surround the wounded".

6.48pm: More waves of 2 lines of between 80-100 NVA and VC attack D Coy's position from 3 sides. Many of the D Coy soldiers now begin to think they won't get out alive.

6.50pm: Townsend's party of 3 x APC's join the 6 APC's with Adrian. They continue forward in contact with enemy.

6.52pm: Stanley keeps calling in the artillery even closer and walking it from left to right and back again across the fronts of the D Coy positions.

6.55pm: More waves of two lines of between 80-100 NVA and VC attack D Coy's position.

6.55pm: The APC's assault to the east and sweeps through the major concentrations of enemy.

7.00pm: 28 men of B Coy arrive at D Coy's position.

7.10 pm: 3 Troop's APCs arrive at D Company's position, dispersing the enemy and ending the battle.

7.20pm: Defensive lines are organised with the additional 100 A Coy soldiers and the 9 APC's. Ammunition and water are distributed to the beleaguered and exhausted D Coy soldiers.

7.25pm: 6RAR Commanding Officer Lt. Col Townsend provides a hurried Sitrep by radio to 1ATF HQ advising that he estimates that D Coy is now non-effective and that there is 15 dead and 40 wounded. It seems like a disaster to everyone, more so to Jackson and the others back at Nui Dat.

7.30pm: As so much artillery has been fired, an urgent ammunition resupply of 1,000 rounds is requested. This cannot be trucked in from Vung Tau due to the risk of enemy ambushes so it is brought in by Chinook choppers.

7.40pm: Roll calls are conducted across the D Coy men to determine who is dead, wounded and missing.

7.45pm: Lt. Col Townsend regroups the force and calls in the company commanders for an assessment.

8.35pm: Townsend radios an updated Sitrep to 1ATF HQ advising that own casualties appear to be 5 dead, 16 wounded and 15 missing. Townsend advises Jackson that as it was night, they could not secure the battlefield or locate the 15 missing soldiers from 11 Platoon.

8.45pm: After speaking with Lt. Col Townsend, Brigadier Jackson is seen walking over to a chair. He sits down and then buries his head in his hands. Everyone thinks it has been a disaster as nobody knows what, if anything has been done to the enemy, there is a large number of Australian dead and wounded and 15 Australians are still missing.

9.15pm: On their own and against orders various members of A Coy bravely crawl out into the pitch-black night to see if they can find any of the missing Australians. They can hear moaning but whenever they get close it stops. They return empty handed.

10.45 pm: D Coy, A Coy and the APC's move off into the pitch-black night and light rain to a landing zone on the edge of the rubber plantation. There are four dead, eight stretcher cases and six walking wounded. D Coy travel on the APC's and A Coy and B Coy walk out behind them with each man having to hold the webbing of the man in front so as not to get lost in the dark. All the while everyone is still expecting an enemy attack again.

11.05pm: D Coy and the APC's reach the landing zone area and the APC's form a box square around the D Coy soldiers. To help guide the choppers, each APC turns its internal light on and opens a top hatch for the choppers to see.

11.25pm: A Coy and B Coy arrive at the landing zone position.

Midnight: The first chopper arrives at the landing zone to evacuate the D Coy dead and wounded. It was a US Air Medical Chopper. It landed quickly with its lights on and took out the three most serious wounded. More slow dustoff's took place by the seven RAAF Iroquois' without lights turned on. The D Coy dead and wounded were flown to the Army hospital at Vung Tau.

19 August 1966

12.50am All chopper evacuations are completed.

02.45am A Fire Mission Battery was called onto an area near the Long Tan plantation, the last 8 rounds are fired.

At some point during the night Townsend orders Harry to take D Coy back to Nui Dat first thing in the morning as they have been through so much. Harry has a strong argument with Townsend saying no way, they are his men out there and they must be the ones to go back and find them and see what, if anything, they have done to the enemy.

4.00am Townsend radios 1ATF for the remaining APC's to bring out 6RAR HQ, C Coy and a section of mortars. He also obtains a US chopper airlift to bring out one company from 5RAR. This left only two rifle companies of around 200 soldiers to defend Nui Dat.

5.15am US Lt General Seaman sends US Major Piper and a group of US Staff Officers to Nui Dat by choppers to ascertain what they could about the battle. They met a very ashen faced and almost speechless Jackson as 1ATF HQ. No one felt that they'd had a major victory, they believed they'd had a major defeat.

6.55am 2 Troop of 1 APC Squadron with the remaining elements of 6RAR onboard, leave Nui Dat and roll east towards Long Tan. At the same time, D Coy 5RAR was lifted by US Army choppers to a landing zone near the D Coy position.

7.30am Townsend gathers the officers and gave his orders for the assault back into the battle area. 15 Australians were still missing and it was not known what the enemy would do or where they were.

7.40am Jackson arrives at this assembly point by chopper just as Townsend is giving his orders.

8.45am The Australian force begins moving back to battlefield with artillery and airstrikes still firing into the plantation. D Coy lead the way on the APC's, headed towards 11 Platoon's final position with the other elements sweeping the surrounding features and area.

9.21am D Coy 5RAR reports one VC body sighted.

9.50am D Coy 6RAR reports 12-15 enemy bodies.

10.00am Jackson departs Long Tan battlefield back to Nui Dat.

10.10am Jackson radios a SITREP to HQ AFV (Australian Force Vietnam) in Saigon.

10.20am D Coy 6RAR asks for a bulldozer to bury approximately 100 enemy dead. As the scale of the losses is evidenced by the numbers of bodies and widespread devastation so did the realisation that D Coy had achieved a stunning victory.

10.35am D Coy come across a wounded Barry Meller from 11 Platoon who is waving and leaning against a rubber tree.

10.45am D Coy come across the final 11 Platoon position and discover the remaining 13 missing are all dead still in the firing positions with their fingers still on the triggers of their weapons, facing outwards towards the enemy. The rain has washed them clean and they all still seemed to be alive. This sight had a profound effect on all who witnessed it and many a tear was shed. They also discover a very weak and seriously wounded Jim Richmond lying in the mud and calling out "Sgt Buick, Sgt Buick".

11.05am D Coy 6RAR report that they have found the 15 missing Australians. 13 KIA and 2 wounded. By this time, some 113 enemy bodies and 2 enemy wounded had already been discovered.

2.35pm The toll of enemy dead rises to 168.

Gen Westmoreland and his staff and a press contingent visit the battlefield arriving by chopper. Nobody believed that a small group of 108 Australians and New Zealanders had fought such a pitched battle against an overwhelmingly larger force and won. Westmoreland and others had to see it firsthand in order to believe it. Westmoreland tours the battlefield along with Harry Smith and Geoff Kendall. They come across a group of D Coy diggers digging graves and burying enemy bodies. The General walked up to Australian soldier, Wild Bill Doolan and said, 'You've done a good job fellows but this is the dirty part'. Doolan replied, 'She'll be right mate. We can handle it.' This address to the US General in dry, classic Aussie style created newspaper headlines.

4.15pm The toll of enemy dead has risen to 180 but many drag marks and blood trails were discovered indicating many more dead and wounded had been dragged away from the battlefield.

6.10pm The toll of enemy bodies has risen to 188.

20 August 1966

245 enemy bodies recovered but scores more enemy graves and bodies were found after this and for the next 2 weeks. However, the Australian government had set a deadline for the body count so as to advise parliament and the media and so to this day the official death toll has been frozen at 245.

A memorial service is held in the Nui Dat tent lines of D Coy 6RAR. Confronted with the rows of empty bunks and tents, many burst into tears.

21 August 1966

5.40pm 6RAR arrive back at Nui Dat after two days of searching, burying enemy dead and recovering enemy weapons.

Back in the base the mood was subdued as the diggers, exhausted, moved back into the tent lines where the kit of the casualties was glaringly missing. In Dave Sabben's tent, which he shared with Gordon Sharp, half the tent was now just an empty bed. Sabben just sat and stared at it for a while trying to come to grips with the implications of what they'd been through.

A memorial was held in the tent lines of D Coy.

22 Aug 1966

D Company, 6RAR are sent to Vung Tau en masse, for a well-earned R&R break. Ironically, Vung Tau was also used as a rest centre for the Viet Cong.

2 September 1966

The government of South Vietnam realised that the Battle of Long Tan was significant and wished to award decorations to the Australians involved. But at almost the last moment, with the ceremony already arranged and those attending it already in place, word was received from Australia that the traditional policy of non-acceptance of foreign awards was to be observed.

This was embarrassing both to the Vietnamese and to the Australians, and a compromise was reached. The Australians paraded and were presented with dolls in Vietnamese national dress, and also cigarette-cases and lighters. When those who had been selected for awards returned to their units, there were some hilarious scenes as they tried to convince their fellows that they really had been presented with dolls.

It says much for the often-maligned Vietnamese that they went ahead with the ceremony, persisting in observing the spirit of honouring their allies. Many another nation would have reacted to the last-minute decree by officially seeing it as an insult. It also says much for the sense of humour of the Australian soldier that the incident was borne and accepted without much rancour, though once again he had been treated shabbily by the people in Canberra.

Before and after Long Tan, many South Vietnamese decorations and awards were accepted by individuals and units. At least 622 awards are known to have been made by the US and GVN authorities to individual Australians, plus four unit awards. Two of the latter went to AATTV — the US Meritorious Unit Commendation and the GVN Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation and the third, a similar GVN

award, to 8RAR. The fourth was the Presidential Unit Citation awarded to D Company for the Battle of Long Tan.

Only the unit awards are officially recognized by the Australian authorities and allowed to be worn. Because of the confusion policy at the time, individual awards are not recognized.

Messages of congratulations for the Battle of Long Tan streamed into 1ATF from the Australian and US hierarchy. From Harold Holt, Prime Minister of Australia, from General William Westmoreland, from General Jonathan Seaman Commander IIFV, and from General Cao van Vien Chief of Staff, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

11 January 1967

On Luscombe Airfield at the 1ATF Nui Dat base in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam, gallantry awards for the Battle of Long Tan were presented to 11 Australian soldiers in a simple but impressive ceremony.

Nine of the awards were won by officers and men of Delta Company, of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, for their heroism at the epic battle of Long Tan just four months earlier on 18 August 1966.

Awards included a Military Cross, a Distinguished Service Medal, three Military Medals and six Mentioned in Despatches. The former Commander of the Australian Task Force, Brigadier O.D. Jackson, who himself was awarded a Distinguished Service Order for his outstanding leadership during two years in Vietnam, presented the awards.

Accompanying Brigadier Jackson was Australia's new Task Force Commander, Brigadier S.C. Graham, who was met at the ceremony by the senior RAAF officer at the Task Force, Group Captain Peter Raw.

After addressing the parade, Brigadier Jackson presented the Military Cross to Major Harry Smith, of Hobart, who commanded Delta Company during its historic battle. Major Smith's citation stated that his leadership, calmness and determination, and disregard for personal safety inspired his soldiers to beat off enemy of vastly superior numbers.

28 May 1967

U.S President Lyndon B Johnson, awards The Presidential Unit Citation (ARMY) for Extraordinary Heroism to D Company, Sixth Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment.

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States and as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, I have today awarded the Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for extraordinary heroism to D Company, Sixth Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, The Australian Army.

D Company distinguished itself by extraordinary heroism while engaged in military operations against an opposing armed force in Vietnam on August 18, 1966. While searching for Viet Cong in a rubber plantation north-east of Ba Ria, Phuoc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam, D Company met and immediately became engaged in heavy contact. As the battle developed, it became apparent that the men of D Company were facing a numerically superior force. The platoons of D Company were surrounded and attached on all sides by an estimated reinforced enemy battalion using automatic

weapons, small arms and mortars. Fighting courageously against a well-armed and determined foe, the men of D Company maintained their formations in a common perimeter defence and inflicted heavy casualties upon the Viet Cong. The enemy maintained a continuous, intense volume of fire and attacked repeatedly from all directions. Each successive assault was repulsed by the courageous Australians. Heavy rainfall and a low ceiling prevented any friendly close air support during the battle.

After three hours of savage attacks, having failed to penetrate the Australian lines, the enemy withdrew from the battlefield carrying many dead and wounded, and leaving 245 Viet Cong dead forward of the defence position of D Company.

The conspicuous gallantry, intrepidity and indomitable courage of D Company were in the highest tradition of military valour and reflect great credit upon D Company and the Australian Army.