

**3rd Battalion  
The Royal Australian Regiment**



**Lt John William Wheeler**  
*2 March 1971*  
**Remembrance Service**

**The 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam Tour 1971**  
09.00 am

**Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2021**  
Norward Park Crematorium. 65 Sandford Street, Mitchell ACT 2911

**Apologies**  
*Mrs Ruth Ellis*

**Master of Ceremonies:** *Robert Whelan*

We gather together today as a unit to pay respects to the memory of our departed comrade and friend John William Wheeler.  
We recall with gratitude the privilege of knowing him, and we express our sincere sympathy to his remaining family, relatives,  
loved ones and friends.

For those of us who have not been here previously, this is a funeral.  
For those who have been here previously, it is more like a remembrance.  
For all of us, it is a last post ceremony.

**Introduction Welcome:**

Today we are fulfilling a promise we made to John at the time of his death.  
A promise that we have repeated many times over the years.  
Today we have the opportunity to do that in person.  
We have not forgotten you John William Wheeler.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving.**

*These words were spoken on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1971 at the cross of Long Tan.*

For the friendships we have made.  
For the help and understanding we have known.  
For the experiences we have shared together  
We thank you for your safekeeping

For those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.  
We ask that you care for their soul and grant them peace.  
We ask that you give strength and courage to those who have been wounded.  
We thank you especially for the love of our families and friends and  
We acknowledge the comfort and strength they have afforded us in time of war.

We ask that grant continue blessings upon us and our loved ones. AMEN

**Address:** *Colonel Peter Scott, DSO, (Rtd), (Commanding Officer 1969-1971)*

**Last Post Obituary:** *Colonel John Herlihy, CFC Rtd*  
Reading from Last Post Ceremony December 2020

**Obituary – John William Wheeler**

John William Wheeler was born in Sydney on Anzac Day 1948, the son of Roy and Enid Wheeler, and the grandson of an original Anzac. The family moved to Canberra, where John attended Lyneham High School.

John was keen to pursue a career in the Army, and was accepted into the Royal Military College, Duntroon in January 1966. He graduated in December 1969, and was allocated to the Infantry Corps, with the rank of Lieutenant.

In January 1970 John was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, based in Woodside, South Australia. In 1970 the Battalion was preparing for a second tour of Vietnam. John assumed command of 10 Platoon, D Company and spent that year training and readying his platoon for active service.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion arrived in Vietnam at the end of February 1971, and began familiarisation operations, in an area of supposed low enemy activity. That turned out not to be the case.

On the night of 2 March 1971, the rifle Companies of the Battalion took up defensive positions east of the Australian base in Nui Dat. Later that night, D Company came under attack by a Viet Cong force. John was moving between defensive positions, supporting and encouraging the men of 10 Platoon, when he was killed in a large explosion. Private Paul Manning was also killed that night, and Privates Strickland and Hammond were seriously wounded.

John Wheeler was 22 years old when he died. He was survived by his parents, and by his brother David and his sisters, Ruth and Louise. The remains of Lieutenant John William Wheeler rest in this place, Norwood Park Crematorium. A Memorial Plaque is installed at Lyneham High School, Goodwin Street, Lyneham ACT

Lt John William Wheeler is inscribed on the Roll Of Honour at the Australian War Memorial, among the more than 500 Australian servicemen who died while serving in the Vietnam War.

**Prayers:** *Please Stand*

Let us pray for all who have suffered as a result of war:

We pray for all who have been broken in battle.

For those who weep.

For those who feel anguish and for those who have lost the capacity to feel.

For those who carry the pain of past conflicts. Lord, in your mercy

**All: Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who have helped Veterans in their efforts to participate in the general community. Lord, in your mercy

**All: Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who mourn their dead, for those who have lost husband or wife, children or parents.

We pray Lord God that you would sustain and encourage them through their grief. Lord in your mercy

**All: Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that we will continue to serve our nation in whatever capacity we are able; particularly we pray for those who have been affected by the pandemic. We remember our friends and comrades who cannot be here at this moment of fellowship. Lord in your mercy...

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**The Royal Australian Regiment Prayer:****Col Peter Scott**

O God, we, the members of the Royal Australian Regiment, consecrate ourselves to you by giving ourselves body and spirit to your service and to the service of humanity. Cleanse us from everything that could mar this service. Grant that we may live our lives that at all times we put our duty first. Help us to think to speak rightly, to resolve bravely, to act kindly, and to live purely. Give us the courage to defend the cause of justice, freedom, truth, and the right to liberty. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**A Prayer for the Australian Defence Force:**

We pray for the members of the ADF: God our creator, protect and guide the men and women of the Australian Defence Force in peace and war. Give to those in positions of authority wisdom in their decisions and concerns for those under their command and give courage and dedication to those who serve. We especially pray for our Defence personnel serving in places of danger such as Afghanistan, Iraq, the Solomon Islands, East Timor and with the United Nations in various places around the world. Give us success in preserving the peace we enjoy today so that all Australians may enjoy peace in the future.

**For Our Nation:**

Lord our God, source of all wisdom and goodness, guide the leaders of our nation to judge wisely, rule fairly, and make decisions for the good of all people. May they lead our nation in the way of justice and peace and promote harmony within our country. Amen.

**For Peace:**

Father of all, we are your family, and you call us to live together as brothers and sisters. Help us to overcome the barriers that divide people and nations. Bless every effort being made to bring peace and understanding to the world, so that we may learn your ways and serve your will. Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer:***All*

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Prayer of Remembrance:***All*

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we remember with thanks-giving those who made the supreme sacrifice for us in time of war. We pray that the offering of their lives may not have been in vain. By your grace enable us this day to dedicate ourselves to the cause of justice, freedom, and peace; and give us the wisdom and strength to build a better world, for the honour and the glory of your name. Amen.

**Laying of Wreaths:**

3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion RAR wreath layer with honour and respect:  
Wreaths and/or Poppies

David Horner D Coy 3 RAR

**A Reading:****Requiem For A Soldier***By Amici Forever**Read by Tony Cox*

1) *You never lived to see  
What you gave to me  
Your shining dream of hope and love  
Your Life and liberty*

2) *With a host of brave unknown soldiers  
For your company, you will live forever  
Here in our memory*

3) *In fields of sacrifice  
Where Heroes paid the price  
Young men who died for old men's wars  
Have Gone to paradise*

4) *We are all one great band of brothers  
And one day you'll see we can live together  
When all the world is free*

5) *I wish you'd lived to see  
All you gave to me  
Your shining dream of hope and love  
Your Life and liberty*

6) *We are all one great band of brothers  
And one day you'll see - we can live together  
When all the world is free*

**The Ode:**

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.*

**All:**

***We Will Remember Them***

***Lest We Forget***

**Last Post**

**One Minute Silence:**

**Advance Australia fair:**

*Australians all let us rejoice, for we are young and free,  
We've golden soil and wealth for toil, our home is girt by sea;  
Our land abounds in nature's gifts of beauty rich and rare;  
In history's page let every stage Advance Australia Fair;  
In joyful strains then let us sing Advance Australia Fair.*

**Master of Ceremonies:**

*Announcements*

## **Remember Them 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion RAR Vietnam 1971**

*12<sup>th</sup> February – 16<sup>th</sup> October 1971*

*“Old Faithful”, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment’s (3RAR), second tour of duty in the Republic of South Vietnam commenced on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1971.*

*During 1971 the Battalion participated in ten diverse operations from search and destroy, ambush, bunker assault, armoured and air assault. The Battalion’s first contact took place only four days after arrival in-country. The following night the VC probed D Coy defensive position for nine hours but were beaten off with superior fire and air support. Lt John Wheeler and Cpl Paul Manning were killed in this engagement.*

*Op Briar Patch 1, the unit’s next operation, was a search operation to the north and east of the Horseshoe. On 17<sup>th</sup> March 9 Pl C Coy engaged a group of four VC, On 20<sup>th</sup> March half of 8 Pl C Coy contacted HQ D445 in a bunker system north of Xuyen Moc resulting in the death of 2Lt David Paterson and Pilot Officer Ron Betts, co-pilot of Bushranger 71. 3RAR, reinforced by companies of 2 RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion with artillery and armoured support began searching west of Xuyen Moc.*

*The enemy were located on 31 March and a fierce contact followed. One member of A Coy 2RAR/NZ Battalion and a crewman of a ‘DUSTOFF’ helicopter were killed. The direct support helicopter with the CO on board was shot down but the pilot and CO were unhurt.*

*Op Overlord, the last Task Force operation of the Vietnam war, commenced on 5 June with the newly arrived 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion, 2/8<sup>th</sup> US Cavalry with tanks, APCs and artillery supporting 3RAR searching for 3/33 Regt and D445 Battalion in Long Khanh Province. Contact was made by 5 Platoon B Coy on the 7th June resulting in the enemy fleeing but not before 9 Sqn RAAF Flight Lieutenant Everitt Murray “Lofty” Lance, 9Sqn RAAF Cpl David John Dubber MID and Lt Ian Mathers, Artillery FO were killed.*

*On 18th June the Battalion deployed on Op Hawker during which the Aslt Pl Pnr, 2Pl A Coy and then 9 Pl C Coy all had contacts with the enemy. During Op Iron Fox the Battalion established a blocking position for 4RAR/NZ Battalion which experienced heavy contact with 1/274 VC Regt. During Op Inverbrackie B Coy and 8 Pl C Coy both engaged enemy elements.*

*On the 18<sup>th</sup> August the Prime Minister announced the withdrawal of the Task Force by Christmas. The next and last major engagement involved B Coy on 31st August and 1<sup>st</sup> September.*

*Operations in Vietnam concluded on the 1st October, the Battalion departed Vietnam on HMAS Sydney on the 6th October and returned to Adelaide, Australia on the 16th October.*

## **Remembrance Service For Lt John William Wheeler**

**The 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam Tour 1971  
Canberra ACT  
4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

*Tony Cox*  
[www.3rar.com.au](http://www.3rar.com.au)