



## AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

**4718855 Second Lieutenant David Paterson, 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian  
Regiment**

KIA: 20 March 1971



Today we remember and pay tribute to Second Lieutenant David Paterson.

David Paterson was born on 4 January 1945 in Port Adelaide, South Australia, the second of two sons born to Ernst and Dorothy Paterson.

Paterson attended Port Adelaide Primary School and later Woodville High School. He enjoyed swimming, played basketball at the St Claire Recreational Centre, and was a member of the Ethelton Swim Club, where, in 1966, he met Christine Weber, his future wife.

When Paterson graduated from high school he began teacher training at Western Teachers' College, receiving his diploma days before his 20th birthday. On 11 January 1965 he was accepted as the sole teacher at Mount Hill Rural School on the Eyre Peninsula. His students, of which there were 20, came to admire him for his unstinting efforts to guide and challenge them to achieve their best.

He settled quickly into the local community, assisted in organising local swimming carnivals and played Australian Rules football for Wharminda Football Club. He also played basketball in Cleve for the teachers' team. With an imposing height of 6 feet, 6 inches, he could not be missed on field or court.

During his two years at Mount Hill he continued his studies and was twice given a deferral from his National Service obligation. Paterson began his National Service training in 1967.

During initial training at Puckapunyal he was selected to attend an officers' course. He became a member of Class 1/67 at the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville.

One of his fellow graduates later recalled, "during intensive training [Paterson] proved to be an outstanding leader and a highly competent commander, and his boys loved and respected him immensely."

After successfully completing the course, Paterson was commissioned as second lieutenant on 14 July 1967 and posted as platoon commander to the Pacific Islands Regiment in Papua New Guinea. Here he played a vital role in educating local soldiers, particularly in the areas of civic and civil responsibilities.

Paterson completed his National Service commitment in January 1969 and despite his desire to return to teaching, he extended his commission, expressing a desire to serve in South Vietnam. He was posted as an instructor to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra in Queensland where he spent the next year training men for service in South Vietnam.

On 4 October 1969, during a period of leave, Paterson married his long-time sweetheart Christine at Mount Carmel Catholic Church near Port Adelaide.

At the beginning of January 1970 Paterson was posted to the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) based at Woodside in South Australia. He was sent to C Company and was made officer commanding 8 Platoon. At this time 3RAR was being brought up to strength and undergoing extensive training in preparation for deployment to South Vietnam.

In September, Paterson and Christine welcomed their daughter Sarah into the world. But time at home was limited as 3RAR continued to train for its deployment. Paterson was part of 3RAR's advance party that flew out of Australia on 11 February 1971 landing in Saigon the following day. The remainder of the battalion arrived later that month and began operations almost immediately after.

Paterson collapsed with heat stroke during the first patrol and his boots began to fail him. The size of his feet meant that he had to have boots made especially for him. With no spares available, he was forced to use tape and rubber bands to keep them intact.

On the morning of 20 March, after a five-day ambush operation, Paterson led his platoon back out on patrol. After an uneventful morning, a track with signs of recent use was found, and a forward scout noticed an enemy lookout sitting on a rock. The lookout also spotted the Australians and ran into the bush.

Paterson decided to split the platoon. He led half of the platoon towards the noise while the other half, led by his platoon sergeant, approached from a different direction.

Paterson's group dropped packs and advanced cautiously. As the men moved forward, they came under fire from automatic rifles, machine-guns and rocket propelled grenades.

Three men were immediately hit. Privates Alan Gould and Martin Macanas were wounded, and Paterson was shot in the head. Gould later recalled Paterson rolling over to tell him that he was ok but when he checked on Paterson again, he was dead.

The remaining members of the platoon engaged the enemy for several hours. Air support was supplied by gunships of No. 9 Squadron, RAAF, but locating positions on the ground was almost impossible. The diggers had used their only smoke grenade early in the contact and in an attempt to drop more smoke grenades to them, one of the gunships, was badly damaged.

It was not until close to 6pm when the wounded from 8 Platoon were evacuated. Paterson's body was flown out separately. His men described him as an "exceptional human being... fair, sensible and enormously popular."

His remains were returned to Australia. After a funeral service conducted by Chaplain Gavan Kennare, he was laid to rest with full military honours in Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide. He was 26 years old.

Paterson's name is listed on the Roll of Honour on my left, along with more than 500 others from the Vietnam War, and his photograph is displayed today beside the Pool of Reflection.

This is but one of the many stories of courage and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Second Lieutenant David Paterson, who gave his life for us, for our freedoms, and in the hope of a better world.

**Michael Kelly**  
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