

# Operation Overlord including the Battle of Long Khanh

## CALL TO REMEMBRANCE

Col Peter Scott DSC (Rte'd)

7<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Your Excellency General, The Honorable David Hurley AC DSC, Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Distinguished Guests, Families of those lost during the operation, Veterans, Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you a warm welcome to this place on this day.

Secondly, I wish to congratulate and thank the staff of DVA for arranging this service and Tony Cox, Organiser and Coordinator of the 50-year anniversary of Operation Overlord for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

More than 2,500 soldiers and airmen from Australia and the United States --- defeated the 3rd Battalion, 33 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment on 7 June 1971 after their training base in Long Khanh Province of South Vietnam had been located the previous day.

Under the command of Brigadier Bruce McDonald MC, units of 1<sup>st</sup> Task Force deployed to the north of the main Australian Base of Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province. **This massive simultaneous deployment** involved three infantry battalions--- 3RAR, 4RAR/NZ, and the US Army 2/8 Battalion.

They were supported by:

- Centurion tanks of C Squadron 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment.
- Armoured Personnel Carriers of A Squadron 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment;
- 4 Field and 12 Field Artillery Regiments armed with 105mm guns.
- US Army Battery C, 5/42 Artillery with 155mm guns.
- 1 Field Engineer Squadron.
- 161 Reconnaissance Flight with Sioux helicopters.
- as well as 9 Squadron RAAF with Iroquois helicopters and a US Army Assault Helicopter Company flying Cobras.

**This mass deployment** was supplied with ammunition, explosives, fuel, engineer stores, and rations from the Task Force Maintenance Area located at Nui Dat. Casualty evacuations was mainly by helicopter to the Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau in the South of Phuoc Tuy Province to ensured swift transit for medical treatment.

The main battle commenced at 6.53 am on 7 June when 5 Platoon B Company 3RAR engaged members of the 3/33 NVA Regiment at point-blank range. The Artillery Observation Officer Lt Ian Mathers moved forward to control artillery fire and walked into an enemy fire lane and was killed instantly. A few diggers of 5 Platoon were wounded.

During the melee, 5 Platoon commander Graham Kells called out to his Duntroon classmate Bruce Cameron in his Centurion tank of C Squadron--- **“come on mate get down here-- we need you ”**. I sent D Company to cooperate with the tanks and engage the enemy in bunkers from the northwest. The whole battle lasted an exhausting eight and one-quarter hours.

The firing and explosion of all this ammunition, the whistling of artillery rounds, helicopters flying overhead firing rockets and machine guns and the smoke of battle, went on all day.

This noise of battle was emphasized with the crash of a resupply Iroquois helicopter resulting in two RAAF crew, Flt Lt Everitt ‘Lofty’ Lance and Cpl David Dubber losing their lives.

When all the dust had settled--- the tanks, APCs, and rifle companies of 3RAR discovered two enemy training areas. One belonging to 3/33 NVA Regiment consisting of 46 bunkers and a second consisting of 30 bunkers vacated by D445 Local Force Viet Cong Battalion. The field engineers, together with 3RAR Pioneer Platoon, destroyed all these bunkers with explosives over the next five days.

Tragically, 274 Regional Force Viet Cong Regiment, another enemy force ambushed half of the 1<sup>st</sup> Task Force Headquarters Defence and Employment Platoon on two of three APCs southwest of the operational area. The last APC in line was struck with a Rocket Propelled Grenade which set off a mini-gun liner full of Claymore mines, killing both crewmen and five of the Defense & Employment Platoon soldiers. Three soldiers were wounded, one very seriously. A disastrous result at the end of Operation Overlord.

It should be emphasized that half the strength of every unit consisted of National Servicemen who were completing their two-year obligation overseas. They could not be distinguished from the regular soldiers whom they served alongside. Many were killed and wounded during the war in Vietnam, many decorated, and many were junior commissioned officers and Non-Commissioned Officers.

Nobody really knew what to expect that day. Members of 5 Platoon who were not wounded, held fast **in the face of withering enemy machine gun fire**. There were many feats of courage by soldiers of 6 Platoon, B Company, 3RAR in rescuing the crew of the downed helicopter.

The crews of the centurion tanks displayed extraordinary heroism in crashing through the enemy held bunker system under heavy enemy fire.

The crews of the Bushranger helicopter pilots displayed total disregard for their own safety in providing intimate fire support to the troops and tanks on the ground. The gunners were totally exhausted in supporting the diggers and tankies in contact.

This operation was different from previous operations conducted over the previous five years but the result was the same, complete domination of the enemy matching the exploits of the Australian Soldiers in World Wars 1 & 2 and Korea.

The action on this day was the most intense for the Australians in 1971, with the entire task force deployed for the operation. Everyone contributed to the success of the operation, I am immensely proud to have been the Commanding Officer of 3RAR, and to stand here on behalf of the whole task force.