



COMMENTARY

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARMoured CORPS ASSOCIATION WA Inc

3/2020 ANZAC EDITION

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FROM THE PRESIDENT - ROBERT GESMUNDO

In this Special Commemorative Edition of Commentary, I send you this message.

As ANZAC DAY approaches much has been said about the imposed restrictions and many suggestions offered to Commemorate our Special Day.

I do hope that our Membership will Commemorate ANZAC DAY in one of the many opportunities suggest by the Media.

I would like to offer this reading in Commemoration and Respect.

He was that, which others cared not to be.

He went where others feared to go

And did what others failed to do

He asked nothing from those that could give nothing

And willingly gave himself to all.

He has seen the face of terror.

Felt the chill of fear

And warmed to the touch of love.

He has hoped, pain and cried.

At the very least in later days

He will be able to say with Greatest Pride

That he was indeed

A Soldier.

You will be sorely missed.....Mate

Lest We Forget

Wishing you all a safe and positive ANZAC DAY 2020.

Yours in Armour

Robert



At 1100 Hours on the 19th of April President Robert Gesmundo visited the Tenth Light Horse Memorial located on Fraser Road Kings Park. The Kings Park Board gave approval for two members of the Association to attend in accordance with social distancing rules in place at the moment.

President Robert laid the wreath on behalf of all members in surroundings, which also somewhat surreal, at the same time expressed the desire for current unit members, Association members, members of the XLHA and indeed the CORPS to commemorate the OLD BOYS of the Regiment in a tradition that dates back many years.

Indeed when these commemorations many members of the “Glorious Tenth” (Tenth Light Horse Regiment AIF) and those who served during WW2 with the 2/10th were present. Many of the 2/10th served overseas with other units as well.

Decorations won by members of the Glorious Tenth:

1 VC; 1 CMG; 3 DSO, 1 bar; 1 MBE; 9 MC, 1 bar; 15 DCM, 1 bar;
15 MM; 3 MSM; 48 MID; 4 foreign awards

Nominal Roll:	1429
Killed:	237
Wounded:	479

A SQN 10LH currently upholds the traditions and esprit de corps of the Regiment within 13 BDE and in support of other CORPS units in Australia. In recent years the unit has been very active in Australia and has provided many members to various operations around the country and overseas. As we speak unit members are currently employed helping to support activities to reduce the impact of the current virus. To them especially our thoughts are with you today

At this time we also remember members of the Association who have died during the year.

TREVOR SUTCLIFFE

NORM MANNERS

GARNET BUCKLEY

BARRY CLEMENTS

Our member Laurens West has produced a audio visual presentation of the 2017 Old Boys Parade and the file is attached. It is well worth watching. Also from Laurens the sign he has to place outside house on ANZAC DAY.



FROM THE RSL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Please abide by all Government direction in regard to social distancing. Some suggestions from the RSL in regard to household observance of ANZAC Day

Lighting a candle and joining our ANZAC Day driveway Dawn Service at 5.55am on April 25. Tuning in to ABC Radio, 6PR, 96FM and 6IX for the dawn commemoration that will include *The Ode*, *The Last Post* and one-minute's silence#DrivewayDawnService

Firing up a family barbecue or a traditional gunfire breakfast of bacon, eggs and sausages ... plus a mug of (rum-spiked) tea or coffee to toast the fallen.

Tuning into a special ANZAC Day commemorative broadcast on TV (more details to come).

READING COL KEN ASHMAN AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION HAMMERSLEY

The Vietnam war was closely followed in Australia through in-country tv and newspaper reports. On 2 march 1970, an AAP report from Vung Tau informed newspaper readers in Australia, and overseas, that a few days previously, nine Australians had lost their lives in South Vietnam, and another 29 had been wounded. Most were members of the 8th battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment - 8rar - and most were the victims of land mines.

The headlines "9 Australians die in Viet minefield were stark, eye-catching, and the story told of a tragedy". Fifty years on, the words of an anonymous journalist recall one of Australia's darkest days of the Vietnam war and I quote:-

"Vung Tau ... doctors, nurses and wards men here, and at Nui Dat, are to-day caring for 29 diggers wounded by two mine explosions and enemy contacts on 'black saturday'.

Nine Australians died in the action. Exhausted staff at both hospitals spent long hours treating the wounded as they were assisted from Australian and American helicopters, into a clearing ward. Surgeons and theatre staff at the 1st Australian task force hospital at Vung tau, worked non-stop for 15 hours on the Long Hai ... mine casualties from the 8th battalion, and later on soldiers 3 from the 6th battalion, wounded by rocket fragments and bullets in the duc thanth area .Six diggers were in the hospital's intensive care unit early today, in a reported serious condition. Eight soldiers and field engineers died instantly in two mine explosions about 50 yards apart, in a small rock-surrounded valley another soldier died of injuries later.

A RAAF Iroquois helicopter which was winching down an Australian was caught in the second blast, and sustained 23 holes.

Dead and wounded lay in the field for about 20 minutes before the first American dust-off (medical evacuation) helicopter arrived. It hoisted up five badly wounded diggers and ferried them to Vung Tau about 12 miles away. It was the worst mine incident since the Australians came to Phuoc Tuy province in 1966."

Though the operation on which most of these casualties occurred was never named in this story, we now know that it was Hammersley, and that on 28 february 1970 - 'black saturday' was the day on which more Australians became landmine casualties than on any other day during the Vietnam war. Yet, while these words speak of tragedy, they remind us too of the courage displayed by those who served - of the soldiers on the ground and the aircrew who risked their lives to rescue the wounded and they remind us also of the tireless dedication with which medical personnel tended to men wounded on the battlefield.

Today we honour all who served on Operation Hammersley, and we remember those who lost their lives in the Long Hai hills in early 1970.



Top Left: Black Hats commemorate the lives of TROOPER HUGH CARLYLE AND LANCE CORPORAL BARRY JOHN WHISTON at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier AWM. Wreath Layers are 3 Troop Leader 3 CAV then CAPT Ken Ashman, Troop Officer 2LT Craig Mitchell, with Graeme Unmack RAEME.

Photographs from 50th Anniversary Ceremony, Vietnam Memorial including Black Hats present.

Photographs taken at the Assembly area for Hammersley and Nui Dat.





OPERATION HAMMERSLEY

Rising up to 300 metres above the coast of Phuoc Tuy Province, the Long Hai hills were not far from the Australian logistics base at Vung Tau, but for the men who served in a combat role in South Vietnam, the contrast between the beachside base and the forbidding, rugged hills no more than 20 kilometres distant could not have been greater. About ten kilometres from end to end, covered in large boulders and undercut by tunnels, the Long Hais were a refuge for local Viet Cong who took advantage of the terrain to escape air strikes and evade Australian patrols. They were also a base, a training area and a staging point for communist forces in Phuoc Tuy.

By the beginning of 1970 the Australians had launched six operations in these hills at a cost of 26 dead and more than 100 wounded, many of them mine casualties. Neither these forays nor aerial bombing and defoliation had had any serious effect on the enemy base, and once Australian troops completed their operations, the Viet Cong returned.

On 10 February 1970, C Company of the 8th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (8RAR), was sent to secure Fire Support Base Isa at a quarry in the Long Hai's western foothills. The operation, supported by tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs), combat engineers and mortars, was named Hammersley. While members of 17 Construction Squadron removed stone from the quarry to resurface an important provincial road, C Company was to carry out reconnaissance and ambush operations in the surrounding countryside.

None of the infantrymen leaving Nui Dat that day knew that enemy units were operating in strength—perhaps as much as a Viet Cong battalion—in the Long Hais. The first contact came quickly. An APC mounted Australian platoon fought a brief skirmish with about eight Viet Cong on Hammersley's first day. Soon afterwards one of the armoured vehicles struck a mine.

Five days later, on 15 February, another Australian platoon sprung a successful ambush against a company-sized group of Viet Cong. The Viet Cong survivors reacted quickly and a pitched battle developed as artillery and mortar fire fell among the enemy. When more Australian infantry appeared riding on tanks, the Viet Cong withdrew. One tank crewman recalled seeing 'dark humps, which were literally spread all around' as he reached the scene of the fighting, before realising that they were the bodies of fallen enemy soldiers.

Hammersley was looking like a success and the Australian Task Force Commander, Brigadier Stuart Weir, saw the chance to inflict a decisive defeat on the local Viet Cong's D445 Battalion, veterans of Long Tan and foe through more than three years of war. He decided to expand the operation.

On 16 February Australian infantry, supported by tanks and APCs, began combing the hills seeking survivors from the previous day's fighting. Two days later, Australian troops captured a teenaged Viet Cong soldier. He pointed out enemy positions and escape routes, and the Australians planned their next assault. Again using armour and infantry mounted in APCs, they advanced against well-concealed, heavily-fortified Viet Cong bunkers. Soldiers in the APCs could hear mines exploding and one man remembered seeing 'flashes of RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) fire going overhead'. Three rounds struck one APC, wounding the two crewmen and five infantrymen inside. There was an 'orange flash' said one whose next memory was 'picking myself up from under bodies'. Two Australians leapt from their APC under fire, prising the burning vehicle's rear door open. They rescued the wounded infantrymen but couldn't get to the crew. Two others braved enemy fire to attach tow ropes to the stricken APC but as they got underway an enemy soldier threw in a satchel charge, killing the two men inside and wounding another outside.

For the Viet Cong survival as a cohesive unit was at stake. The Australians were trying to cut off their escape, penning them into a valley overlooked by high cliffs. Months in the area had given the enemy time to prepare a formidable defence of bunkers, tunnels and pits, along with countless landmines and booby traps. With the casualties from the APC fresh in their minds, Australian infantry prepared to assault over this dangerous ground while others held blocking positions on the flanks. Artillery and helicopters added to the weight of firepower arrayed against the Viet Cong.

The tanks fired into the bunkers, advancing until they struck a deep creek. Suspecting the presence of anti-tank mines, the crews withdrew, coming under heavy fire from bunkers now reoccupied by a determined enemy.

A ferocious fight ensued as the Australians tried to extricate themselves and the enemy closed, firing RPGs at the armoured vehicles. An infantry platoon in APCs came under heavy fire as they moved to block an enemy escape route. One APC was hit just after its infantrymen dismounted. The blast knocked them off their feet, wounding some. Other infantry and tanks moving to enter the fight struck landmines and had to withdraw.

That night the Australians maintained a tight cordon to prevent the enemy slipping away and waited to resume the attack in the morning. After years of trying, it seemed that they were in a position to engage D445 Battalion on ground of their own choosing. They had the enemy trapped but knew that any victory would come at a cost—possibly a high cost—in men's lives.

By early 1970 Australia's commitment to the war in Vietnam was winding down; public opinion was turning against the country's involvement, and there was widespread bitterness at the use, and death, of conscripts. There was little appetite politically or at the highest levels of the military for a battle that would result in heavy Australian casualties. Weir, knowing how hard the enemy was prepared to fight and the nature of the position they occupied, decided he needed a B-52 strike to clear the area. 8RAR were ordered to move back three kilometres. Some soldiers were stunned. The Viet Cong would have the chance to escape.

Two days passed before the B-52s were available. Their bombs hit the target but when an Australian major reached the scene, he found little evidence that the enemy had been damaged. Several days of sweeps yielded little sign of the Viet Cong, who knew that local villagers had been warned of the air strike and had left the area. An Australian veteran later reflected, 'maybe in hindsight it was the right decision, to pull back rather than hook in, but when you are there at the time, you know bloody well that, sure, you are going to take casualties, but if you clean that battalion out, then you owned the province'.

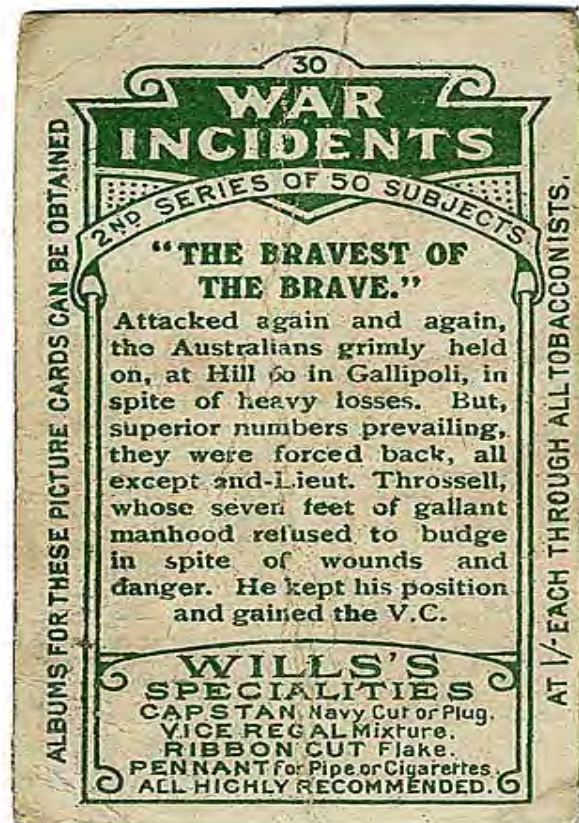
Even with the enemy having retreated, the Australians continued to suffer casualties on Hammersley. On the morning of 25 February two APC crewmen were wounded when their vehicle ran over a mine, an infantryman was killed and two others wounded when 8RAR's Headquarters Company detonated a mine, then a tank crewman was wounded by another mine and the tank destroyed.

Three days later an Australian platoon was preparing an ambush, moving cautiously behind two engineers checking for mines and booby traps. They reached the ambush site but as men concentrated near the platoon headquarters one of the engineers triggered a mine. Seven Australians were killed in the blast, and thirteen were wounded, one fatally. Only three men near the blast were unharmed, and they began feeling their way toward the wounded. Then another soldier, directing a helicopter to the landing zone, stood on a mine. He was killed and another two men were wounded.

By the end of the day, at enormous personal risk to those on the ground, the site was cleared. It was the worst day for mine casualties in Australia's war in Vietnam. One Hammersley veteran remembered the strain of, 'waiting for these bloody things to go off ... we just looked at each other. We couldn't believe they were sending us in'. The incident, already upsetting to the men of 8RAR, was made all the more tragic for the mines being almost certainly Australian, lifted from the controversial Barrier Minefield north of the Long Hais. It made headlines in Australia, strengthened anti-war arguments and led to questions about the wisdom of repeatedly sending men into the Long Hais to be killed and wounded, often by mines, for little result.

Although Operation Hammersley officially ended on 3 March 1970 with the return of the Australians to Nui Dat, one company remained to protect the quarry site at Fire Support Base Isa, while elements of 8RAR continued to pursue D455 Battalion into the Long Green, where two members were killed on 6 March 1970. They have always been remembered by 8RAR as casualties of Operation Hammersley. While the operation saw 70 Australian servicemen killed or wounded, estimates of Viet Cong dead ranged from 40 to more than 100. In Phuoc Tuy the Viet Cong continued to use the Long Hais as a base, remaining there for the final years of the Australian Task Force's presence in South Vietnam.





SQN 10LH OLD BOYS PARADE

**10LH MEMORIAL FRASER AVENUE KINGS PARK
SUNDAY THE 23RD OF APRIL AT 9AM
ASSOCIATION DRESS WITH BLACK HAT AND MEDALS**

The unit has advised they will be mechanised on arrival with vehicles parading on the outlet road at the rear of the memorial with troops dismounting and marching on from that area. The Association has been asked to be on parade also and to that end we will meet at the memorial at 0845 Hours 15 minutes prior to their arrival.

From RAACAWA Archives: Promotion of 2017 OLD Boys Parade. Laurens West has provided an audio visual of this commemoration service which has been sent out under separate file — a good coverage

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