



CESSNOCK



SI VIS PACEM, PARA BELLUM,

RSL SUB-BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 Issue 4 October to December 2023

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Sub-Branch Executive

HANDY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Department of Honours and Awards	1800 11 321
ANZAC HOUSE	(02)9264 8188
RSL Defence Care	(02)80880388
Department of Veteran Affairs	1800 555 254
Home Care (Cessnock)	(02)40304706
Cessnock Council Community Services	49907247
DVA Home Care Services	1300 550 450
Royal District Nursing Service	1300 665 444
HACC Community Care Access Point	300 731 556
Hearing Services Australia	31 797
National Hearing Care Cessnock	{02}9091 8613
Cessnock Police	(02)49910199
Cessnock City Council	(02)49934100
VVCS- Counselling Service	1800 011 046
Cessnock Hospital	4991 0555
Cessnock Taxi Service	4990 1111
EMERGENCY SERVICES	000
RSL Hall	4991 4141

SUB-BRANCH NEWS

At the time of writing this issue our Sub-Branch has a new sponsor/supporter a local business, Sign Style 16B Charlton Street Cessnock. And we thank them sincerely for their generous support.

Abby Szczerbanik is in the process of completing her ATDP RPL so that she will become our official Advocate and will be able to assist in mentoring our trainee advocates Peter Kemp and David Owens.

Our Sub-Branch project to renovate and modernize our Hall kitchen has progressed to the next stage with Kitchen Flat pack being purchased at a substantially discounted price from Cessnock Bunnings for which we are very thankful.

The work to install the kitchen will commence early in the New Year so as not to interfere with meetings of the Sub-Branch and other hall users in the lead up to Christmas.

Our fundraising efforts this year have been very successful after some lean years during the COVID pandemic. Many thanks to Annegret Lewis and all the volunteers who gave up their time, and Bunnings Cessnock who hosted us, which contributed so much to this success and on the 4th November we assisted IGA Cessnock with a fundraising BBQ during their anniversary Celebrations..

BUNNINGS BBQ's UNTIL YEARS END 16 Dec volunteers for all or any part of each day are much appreciated.

Our Members Dinners for the year for the year are as follows:

Tuesday 5th December 2023 at 10am followed by our Christmas Lunch commencing at 11.30am for 12 noon

Don't forget every Thursday 9am to 1pm members social morning tea at the hall.

DISCLAIMER

This publication is produced for the membership of the Cessnock RSL Sub-Branch and complimentary copies are made available to other interested parties. It is written with due care, in good faith and from sources believed to be accurate at the time of writing. We gather information from certain sites and have no political affiliations. Neither the Cessnock RSL Sub-Branch nor the editors of this publication accept any responsibility for actions taken by readers.

RSL NSW NEWS

An invitation has been issued to RSL Lifecare to submit a business case for the Veterans wellbeing Hub at Maitland. Hopefully a final decision and start work by the end of the year

Circular 82/23 End-of-year administrative requirements

Dear Honorary Secretary,

As 2024 approaches, ANZAC House kindly requests that sub-Branches review their membership records in the sub-Branch Portal for currency and accuracy.

All 'Active' (formerly Financial) members will remain Active. Unlike in the past, members will not default to 'Inactive' (formerly Unfinancial).

Office Bearers are encouraged to make direct contact with members each year to determine their membership status, and ensure they wish to remain 'Active', and to review their address (both street and postal) as well as phone and email contact details in the sub-Branch Portal, so they can continue to receive the Reveille and email updates about the support and services available to them.

This also serves as a good opportunity to conduct welfare checks on members and their families who do not regularly attend meetings and other events, and to connect them with any support or services they may need.

For sub-Branches with large memberships this may be an onerous task, however this can be carried out at sub-Branch meetings, by phone roster (multiple people responsible for calling multiple members), or email, with the assistance of the ANZAC House Member Support Team.

A list of members and their contact information can be exported from the sub-Branch Portal. If you require assistance with doing this, please contact support@rslnsw.org.au or follow the instructions on page 13 of the [sub-Branch Portal User Guide](#). Please ensure that this information is stored securely to comply with The Privacy Act.

If you require assistance or have any questions, please contact your Member Support Team via support@rslnsw.org.au or call 1300 679 775.

Yours faithfully,

Jeff O'Brien

State Secretary

Circular 83/23 Join the Sport & Recreation program and win!

Dear Honorary Secretary,

The RSL NSW Sport & Recreation Program has been hugely successful this year, delivering more than 500 sporting and social events that provide connection for members, their families and the wider veteran community.

To ensure the program can reach as many communities as possible in 2024, ANZAC House is offering an incentive for sub-Branches that register for the program before February.

How to register and win:

To register your sub-Branch for the Sport & Recreation Program, [complete this form](#).

All sub-Branches that register for the Sport & Recreation program, or refer a sub-Branch to register for the program, will automatically be entered into a draw to win one of five prize packs.

Each prize pack includes:

- 1 x \$100 Visa Gift Card to use towards an activity
- 2 x RSL NSW Sport & Recreation T-shirts
- 2 x RSL NSW enamel mugs

Registrations must be completed between 1 December and 31 January.

If a sub-Branch refers another sub-Branch to the program, and they include that information in their registration, both sub-Branches will be entered into the draw to win.

Frequently asked questions:

Watch these short videos that answer common questions about the program:

- [How do I register my sub-Branch?](#)
- [How does my sub-Branch get started?](#)
- [What resources will be provided to support my sub-Branch?](#)

If you have any Sport & Recreation Program questions, or to request a presentation at your next District Council Meeting, please contact the Program Coordinator Jen Reynolds at jreynolds@rslnsw.org.au.

ours faithfully,

Jeff O'Brien

State Secretary

HVDC NEWS

The last meeting for 2023 will be held at Singleton Diggers Club on Sunday 10th December commencing at 10am.

THOUGHT FOR REMEMBRANCE DAY

EXTRACT FROM The Spectator magazine

As Penny Wong claims *how* Israel defends itself is what is critical and the Greens carp on about 'war crimes', many Western armed forces now want a gentler side to combat, and to create 'nice' soldiers. We must 'kill and show compassion at the same time,' says one British general. A military commentator wants the bayonet outlawed. There are calls for aggressive veterans to be weeded out.

This is a new-fangled idea. The armed forces before the flower-power revolution of the 1960s always feted their warriors. Alexander the Great had cities named after him; the Duke of Wellington was lauded all over the English-speaking world – Mount Wellington in Hobart is named after him; Audie Murphy became a USA film star after the second world war. It is only now that a new concept of warriors nicely waging war has arisen: the aggressive warrior must not be celebrated in peacetime.

Warfare is an enormously complex and difficult part of human societies. Today in many countries there is an effort to engage in it ethically. But this is fraught with problems. Knowing the scenarios, how would you answer the questions in bold below?

Experienced soldiers of the past realised that new recruits must be urged to be lethal, for good reason. **Were Australian forces using this handbook wrong?** A pocket book for troops, published in 1941 for the Australian Army, urged, 'Shoot to kill. If you do not, tomorrow morning, some of those men will sit behind fresh machine-guns. Their bullets will flay your flanks, kill good soldiers, perhaps kill you.... He who lets an enemy escape may be the means of the death of his best friend.'

Sixty years after the war, Australia's Nancy Wake, who was parachuted into France to work with the Resistance, was still accepting the need to be savage. She was made a Companion of the Order of Australia, and commented when asked by the media about her wartime experiences, 'I killed a lot of Germans, and I am only sorry I didn't kill more.' **Would you condemn Nancy for this?**

Was US Navy Admiral William F. Halsey wrong? He exhibited the enthusiasm he wanted his people to share in his characteristically blunt way to any personnel landing at Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. A large sign proclaimed: 'Kill Japs. Kill Japs. Kill more Japs. You will help to kill the yellow bastards if you do your job well.'

There is considerable hypocrisy in criticising such attitudes. You go to war to win, not to lose. Societies with their backs to the wall want people like Bomber Harris to come to the fore, and so he commanded the 1,000 bomber raids that levelled much of Germany in World War II. Decades later the same society says it

Is fine to allow people to pour paint over his statue in London. Taking prisoners is not an end in itself and can be very dangerous. Modern commentators usually argue prisoners must be given every opportunity to surrender. But injured Japanese in World War II were approached with extreme caution, because previous bitter experience taught Allied soldiers they would fight to the last, often with a grenade hidden inside a loincloth. So they routinely shot fallen Japanese to ensure they weren't still dangerous.

It's not always possible in warfare to take prisoners or treat them humanely. In the second world war Australian soldier Richard Weston was with three British tanks herding a large group of

Afrika Korps prisoners to the rear. They were delayed, and the Germans took the opportunity to run. Within seconds all three tanks opened fire with their machine-guns and kept shooting till none was left standing. **Is this a war crime?**

Should we investigate, and take away the Victoria Cross of Australia's Albert Jacka? In the Western Front Jacka stormed a trench with four enemy in it who were firing at him, inflicting several wounds. He kept going, however, and eventually the Germans '...flung down their rifles and put up their hands'. However, he shot three and bayoneted the fourth, explaining, 'I had to do it – they would have killed

me the moment I turned my back.' **Would you remove Jacka's VC?**

In a similar circumstance during the Falklands war, Lieutenant Mark Cox was leading a small platoon of men forward against the Argentines, and took fire from them, sustaining several dead and wounded. The British threw grenades into the Argentine position and then charged in to find three wounded enemy. Private Kevin Connery took the initiative and shouted, 'We can't leave live enemy in front of us,' and then despatched all three with a burst of automatic fire.

It is the reality of forward combat: to escort three prisoners to the rear would weaken your own force by 50

per cent, and expose all going to the rear to possible attack anyway. **Would you condemn these soldiers for war crimes?**

In New Guinea Australian soldier VX66349 noted his distress when, 'a patrol of ours found one of our mates, who had been missing. He'd been tied to a tree by the Japs, with a length of bamboo forced into his backside'. The soldier died a little while later, and VX66349 concluded, 'I went a little insane for a while, and when we'd cornered some Japs later on, the things we did to them now seem horrifying – but I guess that's war.' **Should we now find this soldier and prosecute him?**

What if you have only seconds to decide whether a person is a civilian or

the enemy? Civilians are often not civilians. Context is everything. From the Vietnam war, perhaps one of the most famous pictures is of a South Vietnamese soldier in a street shooting a man wearing civilian clothing. It has been played thousands of times: the message was loud and clear – this is the kind of atrocity that the South Vietnamese army did to their own people, with the backing of the US.

However, the Western media did not usually report that Nguyen Ngoc Loan was executing the leader of a team of Vietcong terrorists who had killed the family of a fellow officer including his 80-year-old mother, his wife and his children. **Was Nguyen Ngoc Loan wrong?**

If a civilian picks up a weapon he instantly becomes a combatant. **War crime or reality?** Marine John Daube recalled, 'One day a Vietnamese boy about eight years old approached our group wearing a knapsack. It looked like the bookbags kids use today. It was in the middle of the summer, so we were pretty certain there was no school. A reflection of the sun highlighted a wire that ran over the kid's shoulder and down his arm. One of the Marines shot him. As the child fell, he pulled the wire and blew himself up.'

These are some of the dilemmas of warfare. Those who seek to condemn military forces for their actions would

do well to reflect on their complexity before they begin.

Got something to add? Join the discussion and comment below.

Dr Tom Lewis OAM is a military historian. In his service career with the ADF, he led a US Intelligence team in Baghdad in 2006 in some of most bitter fighting of that war. His book 'The Truth of War' is released by Big Sky Publishing in November 2023.

SOMETHING TO LIGHTEN YOUR DAY



Off the rails

by Martin Fish

how is the wife Ted?

not so good Les,
she's struggling
with the booze
at the moment!

thanks Luv, just pop it over
there next to the telly!

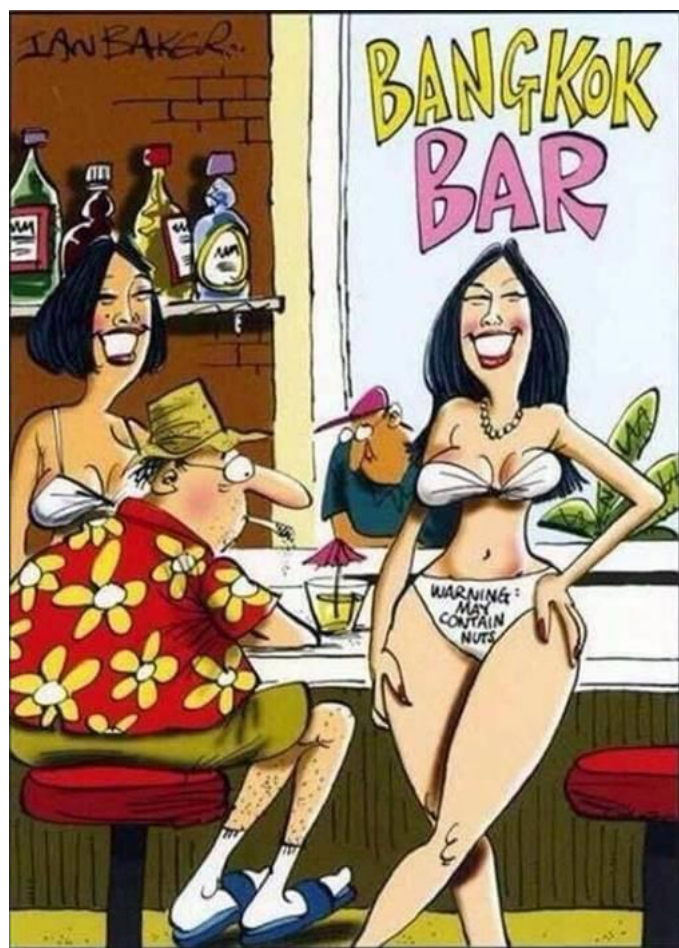


Martin Fish

**DRIVER: "WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO
WITH THIS SPEEDING TICKET?"**



**OFFICER: "KEEP IT, WHEN YOU COLLECT
FOUR OF THEM, YOU GET A BICYCLE."**



A bloke goes to Mt Druitt Council to apply for a job. The interviewer asks

him, "Are you allergic to anything?"

He replies, "Yes, caffeine. I can't drink coffee."

"Have you ever served in the military?"

"Yes." he says. "I was in Iraq for two years."

The interviewer says, "That will give you five extra points towards

employment." Then he asks, "Are you disabled in any way?"

The bloke says, "Yes. A bomb exploded near me and I lost both of my testicles."

The interviewer grimaces and then says, "Okay. You are a disabled ex-serviceman, you have enough points for me to hire you right now."

"Our normal hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. You can start tomorrow at 10:00 AM, plan on starting at 10:00 AM every day."

The bloke is puzzled and asks, "If the work hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00PM, why don't you want me here until 10:00 AM?"

"This is a Council job," the interviewer says. "For the first two hours we just stand around drinking coffee and scratching our balls. No point in you coming in for that."

OUR SUB-BRANCH SPONSORS

The Businesses/Individuals on these pages are the sponsor supporters of our Sub-Branch. Their continued support is very important to the continued successful operation of our Sub-Branch. Please support them as they support us.



Bryce Gibson

Selling Principal
0422 227 668

Since starting in Real estate at the tender age of 16, Bryce has dedicated his whole real estate career to helping his many clients and customers achieve their real estate dreams.

Bryce is the Selling Principal of LJ Hooker Cessnock and leads an experienced, skilled and dedicated team to ensure your level of service is second to none.

Bryce has many qualifications including being a Licensed Real Estate Agent, a Licensed Stock & Station Agent, a Licensed Business Agent, a Licensed Strata Managing Agent and Licensed Auctioneer, Certified Practising Valuer.





CREIGHTONS

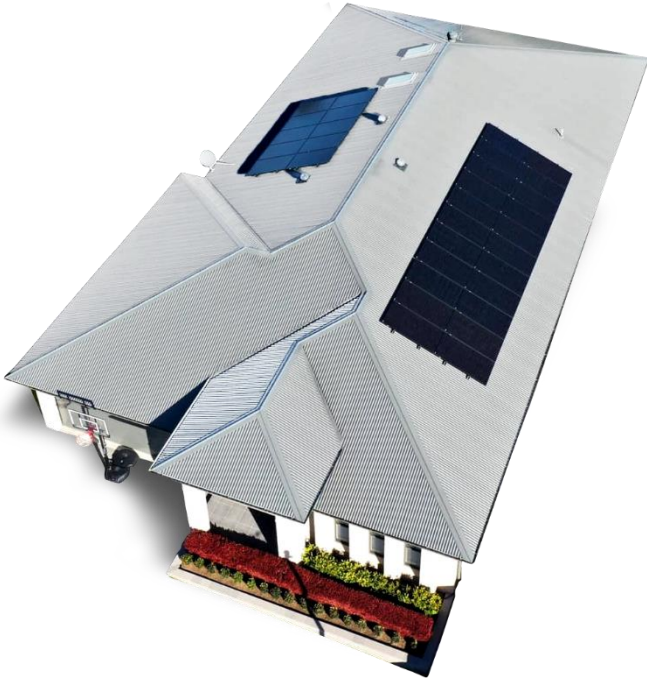
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Corflutes

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Reflective Tape

Marquees

Wine Labels

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Engraving

Vinyl Lettering

Wraps

Wrist Bands

Business Cards

Key Rings

End Flags



Tags

Window Frosting

Stubby Coolers

Bow Flags

Light Boxes

Pens

Posters

Auction Signs

3D Lettering

Flyers

Feather Banners

House Signs

Magnets

Coffee Cups

Stubby Coolers

One Way Vision Screens

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Blackboards

Media Walls

Commercial Signs

HISTORICAL FEATURE

LEST WE FORGET

Operation Coburg (24 January – 1 March 1968) was an Australian and New Zealand military action during the [Vietnam War](#). The operation saw heavy fighting between the [1st Australian Task Force](#) (1 ATF) and [North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam](#) (PAVN) and [Viet Cong](#) (VC) forces during the wider fighting around [Long Binh](#) and [Bien Hoa](#).

American and South Vietnamese intelligence reports had indicated that an imminent PAVN/VC offensive during the [Tết New Year festival](#) was likely, and in response the Australians and New Zealanders were deployed away from their base in [Phuoc Tuy Province](#) to bolster American and South Vietnamese forces defending the Long Binh–Bien Hoa complex north-east of [Saigon](#). 1 ATF deliberately established [fire support bases](#) astride the PAVN/VC [lines of communication](#) in the vicinity of the village of [Trang Bom](#), expecting that they would attempt to destroy them.

The Australians subsequently clashed with the VC during early patrols in [Area of operations](#) (AO) Columbus, while later Fire Support Base (FSB) Andersen was repeatedly subjected to major ground assaults. Although the operation was mounted too late to prevent the attacks on Saigon, the Australians and New Zealanders successfully disrupted the PAVN/VC lines of communication, limiting their freedom of manoeuvre to attack the Long Binh–Bien

Hoa complex, while they were also able to successfully interdict their withdrawal, causing heavy casualties.

The operation was also significant as it was the first deployment of 1 ATF outside its [Tactical Area of Responsibility](#) (TAOR) in Phuoc Tuy, and in this it set a precedent for later operations outside the province. Meanwhile, the remaining Australian forces in Phuoc Tuy Province also successfully repelled repeated VC attacks against [Bà Rịa](#) and [Long Điền](#), as part of the [Tet Offensive](#) that had engulfed population centres across [South Vietnam](#).

Background^{[\[edit\]](#)}

Military situation^{[\[edit\]](#)}

Main articles: [Tet Offensive](#) and [Military history of Australia during the Vietnam War](#)



Major South

Vietnamese population centres and installations targeted by the Viet Cong during the 1968 Tet Offensive

At 18:00 on 29 January 1968, [South Vietnamese forces](#) began a 36-hour ceasefire in celebration of the arrival of the [Year of the Monkey](#). Earlier, the PAVN/VC had declared a seven-day ceasefire as part of the Tét festival, that was normally a period of truce and for community gatherings and family reunions in Vietnamese society.^[1] However, unbeknown to the South Vietnamese and their allies, the North Vietnamese leadership had decided to use the ceasefire to launch a large offensive in the south in order to break the deadlock that had developed in the conflict—despite the reluctance of [Democratic Republic of Vietnam](#) President [Ho Chi Minh](#) and Defence Minister [General Vo Nguyen Giap](#).^[1]

Primarily the brainchild of General [Nguyen Chi Thanh](#), the upcoming offensive would be timed to provoke a popular general uprising among the South Vietnamese people against the government and its American supporters.^[2] Yet prudence required that the South Vietnamese maintain 50 per cent of their forces on standby, while American and allied forces under [General William Westmoreland](#)—the [Free World Military Forces](#)—remained on full alert.^[1] However, despite such measures the fighting at [Khe Sanh](#) had largely succeeded in diverting American resources and attention away from Saigon and towards the [demilitarized zone](#), affording the PAVN/VC the element of surprise.^[3]

Meanwhile, after a number of VC units mistakenly began the planned offensive against South Vietnam a day early—attacking several towns in [I](#) and [II Corps](#) on the morning of 30 January—the President of the [Republic of Vietnam](#), [Nguyen Van Thieu](#), subsequently cancelled the ceasefire.^[4] Regardless, the offensive proper began in the early hours of 31 January when 85,000 to 100,000 PAVN/VC troops simultaneously assaulted population centres and allied installations across South Vietnam.^{[1][2]} US and South Vietnamese intelligence reports of the impending attacks had afforded some forewarning, and although failures had caught some allied units unprepared, they did not come as a complete surprise.^[4] Indeed, the growing threat had earlier prompted [Lieutenant General Frederick Weyand](#), commander of [III Corps Tactical Zone](#), to request the use of the [1st Australian Task Force](#) (1 ATF)—now at full strength with three infantry battalions and support arms—outside of their usual base in Phuoc Tuy Province in order to defend the vital bases in the Long Binh–Bien Hoa complex north-east of Saigon.^{[Note 1][Note}

^[2] The request was subsequently approved, although the Australians only agreed on the basis that one of their battalions—[3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment](#) (3 RAR)—would remain at [Nui Dat](#) to secure it in case of attack.^[7]

Opposing forces^[edit]

On 24 January 1968, 1 ATF headquarters under the command of [Brigadier Ron Hughes](#) inserted by air into their new [area of operations](#), between Bien Hoa and Long Khanh provinces east of Bien Hoa, approximately 55 kilometres (34 mi) from Nui Dat.^[7] Initially the force would consist of two battalions—[2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment](#) with Victor Company [Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment](#) (RNZIR)^[8] and [7 RAR](#)—with armour from [A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment](#), 105-millimetre (4.1 in) [M2A2 Howitzers](#) from [106th Battery](#) and 108th Battery, [4th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery](#), [161st Royal New Zealand Artillery](#) as well as aviation assets in support; while later elements of 3 RAR including Whisky Company RNZIR, would also be committed.^[9] Coincidentally they would be operating in the same area that [1 RAR](#) had fought in as part of the US [173rd Airborne Brigade](#) in November 1965. On that occasion 1 RAR had encountered heavy resistance in a series of bunker systems protecting key VC supply lines at [Gang Toi](#).^[7] This time 1 ATF would establish itself astride the PAVN/VC lines of communication in the expectation of provoking an aggressive response. Within days the Australians would establish a [fire support base](#) in order to deny the PAVN/VC access to suitable sites for launching 122-millimetre (4.8 in) rocket attacks on the important allied bases and installations in the Long Binh–Bien Hoa complex,

including [Bien Hoa Air Base](#) and the large Long Binh Logistics Depot.^[9]



Australian [Iroquois](#) helicopter from [No. 9 Squadron RAAF](#) inserting troops during the battle

As part of the plan to protect these bases a combined US-Australian force would establish a screen to interdict movement along the northern approaches to Long Binh–Bien Hoa. 1 ATF was subsequently allocated the north-eastern sector, into a new area of operations named AO Columbus.^[10] Only sparsely inhabited, AO Columbus was situated east of Long Binh between Highway 1 to the south, and the Song Dong Nai river to the north. Rectangular in shape, it measured 26 kilometres (16 mi) from east to west and 17 kilometres (11 mi) from north to south. The west of the AO was mainly covered in jungle, whilst grassland predominated in the east.^[10] Meanwhile, Bien Hoa Air Base itself would be defended by the US [199th Light Infantry Brigade](#), occupying AO Uniontown to the west. Across the Song Dong Nai the US [101st Airborne Division](#) occupied AO Manchester, while the South Vietnamese [18th Infantry Division](#) defended its TAOR to the north-west.^[11]

The [concept of operations](#) for Operation Coburg called for two infantry companies from 7 RAR to move by road with the rear echelon units in order to secure FSB Andersen, that had been established 1 kilometre (0.62 mi) north of [Trang Bom](#) for easy access to Route 1.^[12] The remainder of the battalion was deployed by helicopter along with 2 RAR and V Coy, while the 4th Field Regiment, RAA was inserted by road.^[13] The Task Force Maintenance Area was subsequently located at Andersen, with 1 ATF re-supplied throughout the operation by elements of [1st Australian Logistic Support Group](#) deployed forward in Long Binh.^[14] FSB Harrison was located 10 kilometres (6.2 mi) to the west of Andersen^[12] with both bases positioned so that each could support the other in the event of attack.^[15] A small number of [SASR](#) patrols would be used to provide reconnaissance for the task force.^[16]

PAVN/VC forces identified in AO Columbus included a battalion group from the VC [274th Regiment, 5th Division](#), a battalion of the PAVN 84A Artillery (Rocket) Regiment equipped with 122-millimetre (4.8 in) rocket launchers and 82-millimetre (3.2 in) mortars and a small element of the *Dong Nai* Regiment, as well as other Main Force elements of the 273rd Regiment from the VC [9th Division](#). Local force elements included a number of company and platoon strength units in addition to various district and village guerrilla forces. These forces were believed to be lying in wait to attack the nearby American bases as part of the planned offensive.^{[7][17]}

Battle[\[edit\]](#)

Patrolling in AO Columbus, 24 January – 16 February 1968 [\[edit\]](#)



New Zealanders from W Coy, RNZIR patrolling during Operation Coburg, February 1968

The Australians began an intensive patrol program in AO Columbus^[9] and were soon fighting up to [platoon](#)-sized VC units in a series of bunker complexes.^[7] Between 25 and 29 January the Australians conducted [reconnaissance-in-force](#) operations and a series of minor patrol clashes followed up to the end of January.^{[9][18]} On 26 January B Company, 2 RAR fought a two-hour action against about 25 VC entrenched in a bunker system. While on the same day 9 Platoon, C Company, 2 RAR also assaulted and occupied a camp initially believed to be of similar strength and held it for 19 hours after repeated attacks from a VC force estimated to be of company strength.^[11] Meanwhile, whilst providing flank security the New Zealanders in V Company, engaged in a series of skirmishes which resulted in 12 VC dead and many weapons captured with two New Zealanders wounded.^{[19][20]} On 27 January there were heavier contacts still, resulting in 14 Australians wounded and one VC killed.^[11]

Although 1 ATF was well placed to deny the PAVN/VC the use of its AO, it was increasingly obvious that there was little role for the SAS. Indeed, the heavy presence of VC prevented them from operating normally, and the first attempt to insert a patrol was called off due to the presence of hostile forces in the vicinity of the landing zone; two VC were subsequently killed and the patrol was extracted after only 30 minutes.^[16] A second attempt lasted only fifteen minutes longer, and they were also extracted following a brief contact. Finally, two patrols were joined in an effort to provide more protection, and on 29 January they patrolled out from 7 RAR battalion headquarters. After only 30 minutes the Australians encountered a small party of VC; however, they tried again two hours later but were detected. The following day they tried for a third time and were contacted. Unable to operate effectively, the SAS patrols were withdrawn and returned to Nui Dat on 1 February.^[21]

Meanwhile, on 29 January D Company, 7 RAR contacted a battalion concentrating in bunkers during a two and half-hour battle^[7] that saw nine Australian casualties, including one killed, while seven VC were also killed.^[11] On 31 January VC overran the village of Trang Bom, just 1,500 metres (1,600 yd) south-west of FSB Andersen. The Australians reclaimed it that afternoon only for the VC to attack again the next day. Once again the Australians recaptured it, this time in savage house-to-house fighting involving D Company, 2 RAR and A Squadron, 3 CAV.^[22] C Company, 3 RAR was subsequently inserted to assist with the protection of FSB Harrison.^[11] In response to the attack on Trang Bom, D Company, 7 RAR was dispatched forward to search the area. The lead platoon advanced on a VC camp—later found to be battalion-size—and was almost destroyed in the

ensuing firefight. With half the platoon soon becoming casualties, another platoon was moved forward to aid their extraction. Close support from artillery protected the Australians from further casualties however, and the VC were eventually forced to withdraw.^[23] Six Australians had been killed and 36 wounded in the engagements up to that point, while one New Zealander had also died and one wounded. More than 40 VC had been killed and nine wounded.^[24]

In the early hours of 31 January key installations in the Long Binh–Bien Hoa complex in AO Uniontown had come under [heavy attack by the Viet Cong 5th Division](#), as part of the second prong of the VC attacks against Saigon.^{[24][25]} With the Tet offensive erupting across South Vietnam, Bien Hoa Air Base received heavy rocket fire that caused extensive damage to buildings, aircraft, and facilities, while the Long Binh Logistics Depot and the prisoner of war camp were also hit.^[24] Over the next three days the US 199th Light Infantry Brigade—later reinforced by the US [11th Armored Cavalry Regiment](#) and an infantry battalion from the US 101st Airborne Division—were forced into heavy combat fending off PAVN/VC indirect fire and ground attacks. By 1 February the Americans had gained the upper hand however, winking out the last remaining PAVN/VC following a sweep of Bien Hoa that cleared the town.^[26]



An Australian SASR patrol

The attacks on Bien Hoa forced a change in tactics for the Australians, and 1 ATF's mission was quickly changed from reconnaissance-in-force to a blocking operation designed to intercept withdrawing PAVN/VC forces.^[24] Between 31 January and 1 February, the Australian battalions moved into company blocking positions and a number of minor contacts occurred, resulting in some VC casualties and the capture of more weapons and equipment. Once in position, the intensity of these clashes increased as the Australians sprung platoon ambushes.^[24] Indeed, during early February, the nature of contacts in AO Columbus began to change, with the Australians increasingly faced by larger [company](#)-sized Main Force units located in static defensive positions.^[9] During the first week of February the VC began streaming through the AO, retreating from Saigon in the wake of heavy losses during Tet. Although the VC managed to avoid becoming decisively engaged, around 90 were killed and five captured, as the Australians maintained their blocking positions.^[27]

C Company, 7 RAR had been detached in order to protect the task force headquarters as well as to act as a reserve, and was particularly heavily engaged

during this phase. The force had been gradually patrolling, when 6 kilometres (3.7 mi) north of Trang Bom on the morning of 5 February, it contacted a large VC force consisting of a regimental headquarters and three companies in a well constructed defensive position defended by several heavy machine-guns. The Australians assaulted the position on three occasions over the next three days in vicious fighting supported by airstrikes, artillery and helicopter gunships.^[24] During one such attack on 7 February, Lieutenant Mark Moloney—one of the company's platoon commanders—charged forward with six [M72](#) rocket launchers to attack a series of bunkers single handed. Moloney succeeded in destroying several before he fell badly wounded; he survived, and for his actions was recommended for a [Victoria Cross](#). Moloney's award was never made however, although Gunner Michael Williams and Corporal Graham Griffith were both awarded the [Military Medal](#) for their actions under fire.^[28]^[Note 3] The battle continued for seven hours, with the Australians eventually routing the defenders in the bunker system in a battle later hailed as "probably one of the most brilliant actions ever fought by an Australian rifle company." However, amidst the confusion of Tet such efforts went largely unnoticed by the press.^[24]

Early the same morning the night harbour occupied by the New Zealanders from V Company had been attacked by a VC force consisting of elements of three companies from the 274th Regiment, shortly after stand-to at 06:15. The incident proved to be the most intense fighting involving New Zealand forces in South Vietnam to that point, and over the course of an hour the attack was successfully repelled with the assistance of highly accurate artillery support from the

108th Battery, RAA operating in direct support, as well as from mortar fire. The VC withdrew following the arrival of a light fire team of gunships, leaving behind 13 dead and a number of other blood trails. Nine New Zealanders were wounded in the engagement, six of whom subsequently required evacuation by helicopter.^[30]

Elsewhere, Tet had also engulfed Phuoc Tuy Province and although stretched thin the remaining Australian forces there were soon drawn into heavy combat as VC units simultaneously attacked the main provincial towns. Dunstan was forced to dispatch the Task Force reaction force from Nui Dat, with A Company, 3 RAR under the command of Major Brian Howard moving to reinforce South Vietnamese government forces following an attack by a 600-strong force from the VC [D445 Battalion](#) on Bà Rịa, the provincial capital, before first light on 1 February.^[31] Fighting from street to street in a series of firefights at close quarters the Australians successfully repelled the attack, killing 40 VC.^[32] Later, on 3 February, D Company, 3 RAR spoiled a harassing attack on Long Điền, and conducted a sweep of Hoa Long.^[33] Overall, the fighting in Phuoc Tuy between 1–9 February resulted in 50 VC killed, 25 wounded and one prisoner. Five Australians were killed and 24 wounded.^[34]

While the Australians in AO Columbus had successfully interrupted the pre-positioning of PAVN/VC forces on one of the main approaches to Saigon, in hindsight they had been deployed too late to interfere seriously with the offensive.^[4] Over the period 9–12 February 1 ATF redeployed, moving south back towards the fire support bases. The remaining companies of 3 RAR subsequently relieved 7 RAR and moved north on 11 February, with W

Company from RNZIR joining them on 12 February, while 2 RAR and V Coy RNZIR returned to Nui Dat on 13 February. FSB Harrison was abandoned and all command and support elements concentrated at FSB Andersen.^[34] Contact was minimal during this period, with just three VC killed.^[35]

Fighting at FSB Andersen, 17–28 February 1968^[edit]



Defensive position at FSB Andersen, South Vietnam 1968

The Australian defence of FSB Andersen was left to 3 RAR, [M113 armoured personnel carriers](#) from 1 Troop A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, and a troop of engineers from [1st Field Squadron](#). Artillery support was provided by [161st Field Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery](#) and the American 155-millimetre (6.1 in) [M109 self-propelled](#) medium guns of [B Battery, 2/35th Artillery Regiment](#). A radar detachment from [131st Divisional Locating Battery](#) was also attached as were elements of [161st Reconnaissance Flight](#).^[36] A Company, 3 RAR together with the supporting arms was left to defend the base, while the other three 3 RAR rifle companies and the New Zealanders of W Company continued reconnaissance-in-force operations throughout the AO.^[36] Airstrikes and artillery also targeted known VC

base areas, however the number of ground contacts was limited.^[37]

Late on the evening of 17/18 February the PAVN/VC launched an assault on FSB Andersen.^{[9][38]} The first attack was preceded by a heavy rocket and mortar barrage in the early hours of the morning, followed by two waves of infantry each of company size. The attack focused on the south-west of the perimeter manned by 3 RAR's echelon and mortar platoon, as well as an American medium artillery battery. The perimeter wire was subsequently breached, but the attack was repulsed by mortar counter-battery fire, Claymore mines and the heavy weight of machine-gun fire from armoured personnel carriers and the American gunners.^[9] The PAVN/VC barrage had had a devastating effect, falling among the American and New Zealand gun positions, the mortar lines and the battalion echelon, as well as scoring a direct hit on an Australian engineer standing patrol.^[39] A second attack shortly after, this time from the north, was repelled by small-arms fire from the forward Australian pits.^[9] Total VC casualties were unknown, although four bodies were found on the wire at dawn, while numerous bloodstains and bandages were found during a later sweep of the perimeter and a suspected mortar base-plate location.^[39] Seven Australians and one American were killed, while 22 Australians and three Americans were wounded.^[38]



A 105 mm M2A2

Howitzer from 161 Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery (RNZA), fires during Operation Coburg

As a result of the growing threat to the Australian base, the decision was made to reinforce FSB Andersen, with C Company, 3 RAR flown in by the time of the second attack two nights later.^[9] The APCs had also been redeployed to cover the south-east ridge and the southern approach from Trang Bom.^[39] The PAVN/VC assault commenced just before midnight on 19 February, this time focussing on the south-east, and was preceded by heavy machine-gun fire. The attack was stopped short of the wire, regardless the forward pits were hit by rifle grenades, while the Assault Pioneer positions were attacked with satchel charges.^[9] The only casualties were four VC killed.^[38]

The final attack on 28 February also began with a mortar attack, but the PAVN/VC assault wave was broken up by mortar fire, and was forced to withdraw to the east.^[9] Three Americans were wounded.^[38] A clearing patrol later revealed that the VC had inserted a mortar team to the edge of the rubber trees by night in a [Lambretta](#) and a cart and had then manhandled the tubes into position.^[39] 3 RAR's defence of FSB Andersen was the first occasion in the history of their operations in South Vietnam that an Australian fire

support base had been subjected to a ground assault^[39] while during all three attacks the cavalry and artillery in support had played a key role in the defence.^[40] Throughout the later part of the operation the patrolling rifle companies had systematically searched the AO and although contact was infrequent the patrols had been effective in denying the subsequent use of the area to launch rocket attacks against the bases in Long Binh and Bien Hoa.^[39]

Aftermath^[edit]

Casualties^[edit]



Weapons captured during the operation displayed at Nui Dat, 19 February 1968

Operation Coburg ended on 1 March 1968 with 3 RAR and W Coy RNZIR redeploying to Nui Dat by air. The fighting had cost the Australians 17 killed and 61 wounded, while allied casualties included two New Zealanders killed and 15 wounded,^{[41][42][43][Note}

^{4]} PAVN/VC casualties included at least 145 killed, 110 wounded and 5 captured, with many more removed from the battlefield.^{[38][Note 5]} Large quantities of weapons and equipment were also captured by the Australians.^[38] Overall, Coburg was considered a

success by the Australians and Americans. Although they had been inserted too late to prevent the attacks during Tet, 1 ATF had successfully disrupted the PAVN/VC lines of communication, limiting their freedom of manoeuvre to attack the Long Binh–Bien Hoa complex, while the Australians had also successfully interdicted the VC withdrawal, causing heavy casualties.^[47] The operation was also significant because it had been the first deployment of 1 ATF outside Phuoc Tuy, and in this it set a precedent for later operations outside the province.^[38] The [Royal Australian Regiment](#) and the 3rd Cavalry Regiment were subsequently awarded the [battle honour](#) "Bien Hoa", one of only five presented to Australian units during the war.^[38]

Assessment^[edit]

At the strategic level the general uprising never eventuated, and in late February the offensive collapsed. Suffering more than 45,000 killed—against South Vietnamese and allied losses of only 6,000 men—it had been a tactical disaster for the PAVN/VC.^{[48][49]} Regardless, the offensive was a turning point in the war. Prior to Tet American commanders and politicians had talked confidently about winning the war, arguing that Westmoreland's strategy of [attrition](#) had reached the point where the PAVN/VC were losing soldiers and equipment faster than they could be replaced.^[48] Yet the scale of the fighting, and the surprise and violence with which the offensive was launched, had shocked the public, contradicting such predictions of imminent victory. Confidence in the military and political leadership collapsed, as did public support for the war in America. Ultimately, Tet was a publicity and media triumph for the PAVN/VC and Hanoi emerged with a

significant political victory.^{[34][50]} In its wake President [Lyndon Johnson](#) announced that he would not seek a second term in office.^[51]

Subsequent operations[\[edit\]](#)

Tet had a similar effect on Australian public opinion, and caused growing uncertainty in the government about the determination of the United States to remain militarily involved in Southeast Asia.^[52] Amid the initial shock, Prime Minister [John Gorton](#) unexpectedly declared that Australia would not increase its military commitment in South Vietnam beyond the current level of 8,000 personnel.^[53] The war continued without respite however, and between May and June 1968 1 ATF was again deployed away from Phuoc Tuy in response to intelligence reports of another impending offensive. The Australians subsequently took up positions north-east of Saigon during [Operation Toan Thang I](#) to interdict PAVN/VC lines of communication, fighting a series of significant actions over a 26-day period that became known as the [Battle of Coral–Balmoral](#).^[54]

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