

## A Brief Background to the Vietnam War.

Between 1962 and 1975, 523 Australians died during their service in Vietnam.

Australia announced to send military instructors to Vietnam on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1962. The first Australian troops committed to Vietnam arrived in Saigon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1962. This group of 30 advisers were collectively known as the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV). As the war escalated, so too did the pressure for an increased Australian commitment. This commitment grew to involve the Navy, Army, and Air Force as well as civilian support such as medical/surgical aid teams, war correspondents and officially sponsored entertainers. By the time of the final withdrawal of the Australian Embassy Guard on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1973, approximately 60,000 Australian men and over 500 Australian women had served in the Vietnam War. Of these, 523 died, and 3,131 were wounded. The Department of Veterans Affairs reviewed and subsequently extended the date range for Vietnam from 1972 (when Australian combat forces were withdrawn) to 1975 (when the war ended with the North Vietnamese capturing Saigon). After the withdrawal of the 1st Australian Task Force from Phuoc Tuy Province in 1972 a few members of the Australian Army Training Team remained until 1973 and there was also a small army guard detachment in the Australian embassy until the very end. QANTAS crews flew some 600 flights into and out of Vietnam during the war.

In early 1975 the communists launched a major offensive in the north of South Vietnam, resulting in the fall of Saigon on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April. During April a RAAF detachment of 7–8 Hercules transports flew humanitarian missions to aid civilian refugees displaced by the fighting and carried out the evacuation of Vietnamese orphans (Operation Babylift), before finally taking out embassy staff on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1975.

From the time of the arrival of the first members of the AATTV in 1962, almost 60,000 Australians, including ground troops and air force and navy personnel, served in Vietnam; 523 died due to the war and over 3,000 were wounded. The war was the cause of the greatest social and political dissent in Australia since the conscription referendums of the First World War. Many draft resisters, conscientious objectors, and protesters were fined or gaoled, while many soldiers met a hostile reception on their return home. This was a national shame.

Australia's participation in the war was formally declared at an end when the then Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck issued a proclamation on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1973. The only combat troops remaining in Vietnam were a platoon guarding the Australian embassy in Saigon (this was withdrawn in June 1973).

