

impressions

australians in vietnam

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VIETNAM WAS AUSTRALIA'S longest war. Australian military forces were involved from 1962 to 1973. More than 59,000 Australians served in Vietnam in the Army, Navy, Air Force or civilian tasks. Over 500 Australians died on active service. By comparison, more than 3 million Americans served in Vietnam, 58,000 of whom died. An estimated 1.5 million Vietnamese lost their lives, and some 4 million Vietnamese civilians became casualties.

Australian perceptions of the war have been shaped by television and newspaper reports, the photography and art of the time and by post-war art, literature, film, documentaries and music. Our memories have also been coloured by those of other countries, particularly the US.

Like all wars in which Australians have fought our involvement in Vietnam had many aspects. These include military operations both in the front line and 'behind the lines', political and home front debates and post war legacies. The *Impressions: Australians in Vietnam* exhibition is not intended as an all-encompassing chronological or historical survey of events, personalities and issues from the Vietnam War; it is a collection of impressions and personal stories from Australians who had direct experience of the war as participants or indirect experience as a close friend or relative of somebody with direct involvement. It gives an overview of what those people encountered and how the war continues to exert an influence 25 years after it came to a close.

This education kit consists of five double-sided sheets intended to guide you when viewing the exhibition and to assist you to gain more information from the images and objects on display. Some of the work will need to be completed at the exhibition with the following sheets:

Photographic evidence:

Australians in Phuoc Tuy province

Art study:

Australian artists and the Vietnam War

Compare and contrast:

Camera and paintbrush

Some of the work can be completed either at the exhibition, later in the classroom or as an extension project. These sheets are:

Mapping:

Locating a war

Poster study:

Anti-conscription and anti-war posters

These education activities have been designed to achieve the objectives of the 'National Profiles' adopted by the Australian Departments of Education in 1994. They can be used by individual students or by groups, with or without teacher direction, and during or after a visit to the exhibition.

All of the activities lend themselves to interpreting, describing, researching and discussing information about the service of Australian men and women in Vietnam and the impact of the war on our society. Teachers are encouraged to select the material to suit their students' ages.

As a follow-up activity school groups may wish to visit the Australian War Memorial's web site at -

<http://www.adfa.oz.au/~awm>

or visit the Vietnam Gallery at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. While in Canberra you could also visit the National Memorial to the Australian Vietnam Forces on Anzac Parade.

For further information on education programs you can contact:

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1962-1973

chronology of Australian military involvement in the Vietnam war, 1962-1973

1962

3 Aug 30 advisers forming Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) arrive in Vietnam to assist in training Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) elements.

1964

8 Jun Announcement of increase in AATTV to 80 advisers.

6 Jul First AATTV adviser, Warrant Officer Kevin Conway, killed in action in Vietnam.

14 Aug Six Caribou aircraft provided in RAAF transport flight.

10 Nov Australian Government introduces selective conscription of 20-year-old males by ballot under the National Service Act.

1965

Jan AATTV increases to 100 officers and warrant officers.

8 Mar First American combat troops arrive in South Vietnam with arrival of US Marines at Da Nang.

29 Apr Prime Minister Menzies announces the commitment of an infantry battalion to Vietnam.

May-Jun 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) and support forces totalling 1,100 men established at Bien Hoa to serve under operational control of the US 173 Airborne Brigade (Separate) as its third battalion.

Sep Morgan Gallup Poll: 56 per cent of Australians polled in favour of Australian involvement in Vietnam; 28 per cent in favour of withdrawal; 10 per cent undecided.

Sep 1RAR is expanded to a battalion group of 1,400 men with the addition of an artillery battery, engineer troop, army aviation reconnaissance flight and logistic support elements.

1966

Apr Prime Minister Holt visits Vietnam

8 Mar Australian Government announces increase of battalion group to an independent task force of two battalions with combat logistic support.

May-Jun 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF), totalling 4,500 men including 500 national servicemen, is established at its base at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy province (now Ba Ria-Vung Tau province). 1st Australian Logistic Support Group (1ALSG) is established at the nearby port and airfield facility of Vung Tau.

24 May Private Errol Wayne Noack becomes the first Australian conscript to die in Vietnam.

12 Jun RAAF provides Iroquois helicopter squadron to support 1ATF.

30 Jun Prime Minister Holt in Washington states that Australia is "All the way with LBJ".

18 Jul Conscientious objector William White refuses to report as a national serviceman.

18 Aug Battle of Long Tan: D Company, 6RAR, supported by artillery, beats off attacks by a combined Viet Cong main force regiment and provincial battalion.

Oct American President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, visits Australia.

19 Nov Morgan Gallup Poll: 63 per cent in favour of conscription; 37 per cent in favour of sending conscripts to Vietnam.

26 Nov Holt Government returned to power in general election by greatest electoral majority in Australian federal politics to that time.

22 Dec Australian Government announces further increases in the military contribution to Vietnam.

1967

Mar RAN provides a guided missile destroyer to operate with US 7th Fleet in Gulf of Tonkin.

19 Apr RAAF provides squadron of Canberra bombers.

May Morgan Gallup Poll: 62 per cent in favour of the war; 24 per cent in favour of Australian withdrawal; 14 per cent undecided.

17 Oct Australian Government announces increase in 1ATF by the addition of a third battalion and a tank squadron.

Oct RAN provides aircrew and ground staff for a helicopter flight with US Army.

1968

30 Jan North Vietnamese and Viet Cong commence Tet Offensive against South Vietnamese cities.

12 Feb Prime Minister Gorton indicates that Australia will not increase its commitment to Vietnam.

May National Service Act amended to impose two-year civil gaol term for draft resisters.

May/June 1ATF involved in battles defending Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral.

7-9 Jun Prime Minister Gorton visits Vietnam.

1969

Jan Peak of 8,300 Australian service personnel (more than 7,000 Army) deployed in Vietnam.

25 Jan Formal truce negotiations begin in Paris.

31 Jan American forces in Vietnam reach peak strength of over 540,000.

8 Jun President Nixon announces the beginning of withdrawal of American combat forces.

Aug Morgan Gallup Poll: 55 per cent in favour of Australian withdrawal; 40 per cent in favour of continuing the war; 6 per cent undecided.

4 Oct US Gallup Poll: 58 per cent of Americans believe United States involvement in the war in Vietnam is a mistake.

14 Oct John Zarb, the first Australian to be found guilty of failing to comply with his call-up notice, is convicted in Melbourne and sentenced to two years gaol.

15 Oct Large scale anti-war demonstration in Washington.

1970

22 Apr Prime Minister Gorton announces the reduction of Australian forces in Vietnam: one battalion of the three battalion task force will not be replaced at the end of its tour (November).

- 8 May First moratorium demonstration: 120,000 march in Australian cities to call for an end to Australian involvement in the war.
- 18 Sep Second moratorium: 100,000 march in Australian cities; over 300 people arrested.

1971

- 30 Mar Prime Minister McMahon announces gradual withdrawal of 1,000 personnel to take place during following three months.
- 24 Apr In largest of US anti-war demonstrations, 500,000 people converge on Washington.
- 30 Jun Third and final large anti-war rally in Australia; 110,000 demonstrate in Australian cities.
- 18 Aug Australian Government announces that 1ATF will be withdrawn before Christmas 1971 and the logistic support forces shortly thereafter.
- 8 Dec Last major withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam: 1ATF completes its withdrawal with the departure of the last battalion (4RAR).

1972

- 12 Aug Last US ground combat troops withdrawn from South Vietnam but over 43,000 airmen and support personnel remain.
- 5 Dec Following election of Labor Government on 2 December, conscription ended and imprisoned draft resisters released.
- 18 Dec Almost all Australian troops (AATV) withdrawn from Vietnam, leaving a small Australian Embassy guard.

1973

- 11 Jan Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck proclaims the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam by Australian forces.

- 23 Jan President Nixon announces that agreement has been reached for 'peace with honour'; ceasefire to commence 27 January.
- 26 Feb Prime Minister Whitlam announces the establishment of diplomatic relations with Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi), but retains diplomatic recognition of Republic of Vietnam (Saigon).
- 29 Mar Last US military forces leave Vietnam.
- Jun Last Australian troops leave Vietnam.

1975

- 25 Apr Australia closes embassy in Saigon and last Australian personnel withdrawn.
- 30 Apr RVN President, Duong Van Minh, surrenders unconditionally as North Vietnamese Army troops enter Saigon.
- 15 May Victory parade by NVA forces in Saigon.

1976

- Jul Reunification of Vietnam declared as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV).

Issues to explore in the classroom and library

- *Vietnam Veterans' Association*
- *Agent Orange Inquiry*
- *Boat People*
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Welcome Home parade*
- *National Memorial to the Australian Vietnam Forces*



recommended reading and viewing

The Vietnam War is the subject of a vast and growing number of publications, documentaries and works of fiction. The following list plus the references mentioned in the work sheets provide a selection of recommended reading and viewing for those intending to present this education program.

- *The official history of Australia's involvement in South-east Asian conflicts 1948-1975*, is an eight-volume series being produced by the Australian War Memorial. Six volumes have already been released, and they provide a comprehensive and authoritative account of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Students should not be intimidated by the thickness of these books, as each is thoroughly and extensively indexed, making information easy to find and apply. Volumes published to date include:
 - Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian air involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1995
A detailed account of RAAF involvement in Vietnam.
 - Dennis, Peter and Grey, Jeffrey, *Emergency and confrontation: Australian military operations in Malaya and Borneo 1950-1966*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1996
The first sustained scholarly account of Australia's involvement in Malaya. Includes the Confrontation initiated by Indonesia to destabilise the emergent Federation of Malaysia.
 - Edwards, Peter, *A nation at war: Australian politics, society and diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1997
Deals with the growth of the protest movement and the response of the Menzies, Holt, Gorton and Whitlam administrations to the protests while wrestling with diplomatic pressure from powerful allies and strife-torn neighbours.
 - Edwards, Peter, with Pemberton, Gregory, *Crises & commitments: The politics and diplomacy of Australia's involvement in South-east Asian conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992
Deals with the political and diplomatic issues which led to Australian military commitment in the Vietnam War.

- McNeill, Ian, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army in the Vietnam War 1950-1966*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1993
Examines the escalating commitment of Australian forces to Vietnam, first as a training team in 1962, then as a single battalion in 1965 and finally as a task force in 1966.
- O'Keefe, Brendan G., *Medicine at war: Medical aspects of Australia's involvement in South-east Asia 1950-1972*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1994
A comprehensive study of military medical matters, including malaria and 'Agent Orange'.

Other valuable references include:

- Breen, Bob, *First to fight: Australian diggers, NZ Kiwis and US paratroopers in Vietnam, 1965-66*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988
A unit history of the first tour of duty in Vietnam by the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment; offers some interesting comparisons between the Australian and American units which served together.
- Frost, Frank, *Australia's war in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987
A critical study of the Australian Task Force's operations in Vietnam.
- Grey, Jeffrey and Doyle, Jeff, *Vietnam: War, myth and memory: Comparative perspectives on Australia's war in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992
A collection of essays including studies of the anti-war movement, Vietnam veterans' memorials and military commitment to the Vietnam War.
- Karnow, Stanley, *Vietnam: A history*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983
Still the best single-volume account of the Vietnam War and a splendid read. (A revised edition was issued in 1996.)
- King, Peter (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the second Indochina War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983
An important collection of essays including studies of Australian military operations in Vietnam and the role of the Australian media during the war.
- McAulay, Lex, *The Battle of Long Tan: The legend of Anzac upheld*, Hutchinson, Hawthorn, 1986
A highly readable account of Australia's best known battle in the Vietnam War; the author offers his personal

interpretations on the Viet Cong perspective on the battle.

- McNeill, Ian, *The Team: Australian Army advisers in Vietnam 1962-1972*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984
A detailed and highly readable account of the diverse roles of this elite unit.
- McNeill, Ian, 'An outline of the Australian military involvement in Vietnam, July 1962-December 1972', *Defence Force Journal*, No. 24, September/October 1980, pp. 42-53
An excellent overview of Australian military involvement in the Vietnam War.
- Murphy, John, *Harvest of fear: A history of Australia's Vietnam War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993
A scholarly interpretation of Australian society, politics, diplomacy and the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War.
- O'Neill, Robert J., *Vietnam task: The 5th Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment 1966/67*, Cassell, Melbourne, 1968
A contemporary account of the first tour to Vietnam in 1966-67 by the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, written by the battalion's intelligence officer.
- Pemberton, Gregory (ed.), *Vietnam remembered*, Weldon, Sydney, 1990
A collection of individual interpretations of Australia's involvement in Vietnam.
- Rowe, John, *Vietnam: The Australian experience*, Time-Life Books, Sydney, 1987
A pictorial coverage of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War which provides a good overview for students.
- Short, Anthony, *The origins of the Vietnam War*, Longman, London, 1989
A detailed study of the background to the conflict and American involvement.

Audio Visual

- *Long Tan: The true story*, (60 minutes), Communication Features, 1993
This documentary video examines the Battle of Long Tan from the perspective of the participants and includes interviews with Australian, New Zealand and Viet Cong survivors of all ranks.
- *The sharp end*, (56 minutes), The Notion Picture Company, Sydney, 1992
This video is a compilation of footage of the war, the home front, the politics and includes interviews with veterans and victims of the war and the protest movement.

