

VIETNAM

The decision to commit Australian troops to Vietnam came about as a result of fears resulting from Indonesian incursions into the newly formed Malaysian confederation of states together with the growing communist threat in South East Asia and increasing recognition that Australia should be seen to support the United States.

The initial commitment consisted of a team of military advisers, the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam (AATTV) who arrived in Vietnam in August 1962.

The first deployment of Australian ground forces came in 1965, when the 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) and supporting troops were assigned to serve with the US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate). Although highly successful, this assignment highlighted the difference between Australia and US tactics and equipment levels.

In March 1966 the Australian government announced its intention to create a single and relatively independent Australian Task Force with elements provided by New Zealand. This came largely as a result of political pressure from Washington, but it was also a sound military decision. The Task Force comprised up to three infantry battalions with supporting arms and services located at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province, with major logistics support at Vung Tau.

Conscription was introduced in order to provide staffing for the greatly expanded Army presence in South East Asia and almost half of those who served in Vietnam were conscripts.

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The Royal Australian Navy presence in Vietnam commenced with the Clearance Diving Teams and was later supported by the deployment of Australian destroyers operating with the US Seventh Fleet. The Navy also played a significant role in troop transport and logistics, as well as providing the highly regarded RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam.

The Royal Australian Air Force provided fixed wing support from 1964, helicopters for logistic support, troop movement and medivac facilities from 1966 and Canberra bombers based out of Phan Rang. Aircraft were also based at Ubon in Thailand and support was provided from Butterworth in Malaysia.

The Task Force withdrew in December 1971, while the AATTV members remained until December 1972. The last RAN vessel, HMAS Sydney departed from Vung Tau in February 1972, while the majority of RAAF personnel were withdrawn by August 1971.

Almost 60,000 Australian served in Vietnam. 501 were killed and about 2,400 wounded. Many continue to suffer as a result of that service.



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