

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY AND THE VIETNAM WAR 1962-1972

THE HIGHER DIRECTION OF THE ARMY IN THE VIETNAM WAR **David Horner**

The Australian Army's commitment to the Vietnam War between 1962 and 1972 had much in common with its commitments to previous wars. In the Boer War, the two world wars, Korea, Malaya and Malaysia, Australian Army formations and units came under the operational control of an Allied commander. Australia had little say over the higher strategic direction of the war or indeed over the strategy employed within each theatre of war. The main exception to that pattern was in the Southwest Pacific Area between 1942 and 1944 when the Allied commander-in-chief, General Douglas MacArthur, was based in Australia and discussed his strategic plans with the Australian government, even though ultimate direction came from the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Furthermore, the Commander of the Allied Land Forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey, had a measure of independence in determining how and where the units of the Australian Army would fight.¹

Of course, Australian governments have generally played a key role in deciding the level and nature of Australia's military commitments. It is true that the Australian government was not consulted before its troops were employed in the Gallipoli landing, but in the Second World War the government approved the deployment of its forces to Greece, demanded their relief at Tobruk, denied their diversion to Burma in February 1942 and refused their involvement in Java in 1945.

During the Vietnam War, again Australia had little say over the higher strategic direction of the war, and the Australian Army's formations and units came under the operational control of an Allied commander. But there were several variations in comparison with earlier wars. The first of these concerned the chain of command. In the First and Second World Wars the commanders of the Australian Imperial Force reported to the Minister for Defence. As in the Second World War, the Australian government decided to commit forces to Vietnam after receiving advice from the Chiefs of Staff Committee. But from the time of the initial deployment of members of the Australian Army Training Team in 1962, through the expansion of the commitment to a battalion in 1965, until 1966 when the force was expanded further to a task force, the commander of the Australian Army force in Vietnam reported directly to the Chief of the General Staff (CGS). In 1966, when the Australian force in Vietnam became triservice, the Commander Australian Force Vietnam (COMAFV) then reported directly to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee.² This arrangement had particular ramifications for the Australian Army in Vietnam. Although COMAFV reported to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, he was also commander of the Australian Army component of his force and in that capacity was responsible to the CGS for matters concerning training, doctrine, tactics, logistics and personnel, and these were generally the most pressing issues.

Fortunately, the problems created by this apparently divided control were alleviated by the personalities of the commanders involved. From his appointment in January 1963 until May 1966 the CGS was Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton. The first COMAFV was appointed in April 1966, but the following month Wilton took over as Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee. Thus the same man, Wilton, who had been responsible for the Australian Army in Vietnam since January 1963, continued to bear that responsibility until he retired in November 1970. Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly succeeded Wilton as CGS. Wilton and Daly held each other in high regard and worked closely and effectively during the Vietnam War. Daly continued as CGS until May 1971, by which time the main decisions concerning the withdrawal of the force had been made.

Other differences from earlier wars were the length of the commitment, its increasing unpopularity, and greater media coverage. Ultimately, after the Australians withdrew, the North Vietnamese took over the country. On the face of it then, the United States and Australia had failed in Vietnam, thus raising strong questions about the advice given to the Australian government by its military advisors and about the higher direction of the Army during the war.

In an attempt to understand the quality and nature of the higher direction of the Army this essay examines eight decisions or issues that determined the size, shape and purpose of the Australian Army's involvement in Vietnam.

The Commitment of the First Battalion

The most important decision was the government's decision in April 1965 to deploy an infantry battalion the following month. The idea of sending an infantry battalion to Vietnam first appeared officially in a paper prepared by the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) in December 1964 following information that the United States was considering sending ground forces to South Vietnam 'together with such ground forces as Australia and New Zealand might be able to provide'.³ The JPC consisted of the Directors of Plans of the three services plus representatives of the Departments of Defence and External Affairs. The key Army representative was Brigadier Ken Mackay, the Director of Military Operations and Plans. On 11 December the JPC advised that Australia had the capability to provide one infantry battalion, a squadron of the Special Air Service Regiment, logistic support elements, about ten extra instructors and naval ships to transport them.⁴

On 14 December 1964 President Lyndon Johnson suggested to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, that Australia provide 200 extra advisors and various naval craft. Two days later the Chiefs of Staff met and advised the government that the introduction of ground forces was 'the only way of achieving a solution to the South Vietnam problem'. They stated that Australia was 'in a position to offer now, if required, an infantry battalion for combat operations in South Vietnam'.⁵ The Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, was an air force officer, and no doubt the CGS, Wilton, played a key part in this decision. He had already visited Vietnam twice. The Director of Military Intelligence, Colonel Zac Isaksson, can clearly recall Wilton asking him whether a commitment to Vietnam was sustainable. Isaksson was convinced that the war was winnable. He thought that there was 'no doubt' that the Joint Intelligence Committee, of which he was a member, gave 'considerable weight' to his opinion, and he still believes that 'given those circumstances again, my advice would be unchanged'.⁶

At this stage the government refrained from committing a battalion, but the issue of Australian involvement was discussed with the Americans at a military conference in Honolulu between 30 March and 1 April 1965. The official historian, Peter Edwards, has shown that Air Chief Marshal Scherger, who represented Australia, went beyond his brief and offered a battalion.⁷ Brigadier Mackay accompanied Scherger and recalled that Scherger discussed with him in detail why a battalion was the most appropriate force to send to Vietnam.⁸ And Bill Major, a senior Army public servant, observed that the Army was very keen for Mackay to report favourably.⁹ Ian McNeill, in the official history, emphasises another shortcoming from this meeting. Scherger was required to discuss the general concept of operations for the ground troops in Vietnam, but he found that the Americans had not thought through an overall strategy. As McNeill commented: 'If Australia were to have any say in how [the political] aim might be achieved before it committed its troops, this was the opportunity ... Instead Scherger was given a preferred area of deployment for an Australian battalion and a role expressed blankly as "counter-insurgency" operations'.¹⁰

On return from Honolulu, Scherger reported to the Defence Committee which recommended the commitment of a battalion. Then on 7 April the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of Cabinet considered and approved the recommendation. Next month both Wilton and Mackay were present for a Cabinet meeting to confirm the deployment of the battalion.

The Roles of the First Battalion

The roles of the first battalion to be deployed to Vietnam (First Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment—1RAR) were determined in May 1965. In early May, Brigadier Mackay visited Vietnam where he found that the Americans planned to incorporate 1RAR into the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa airfield, near to Saigon. He signed a working arrangement with the US authorities there. When he returned to Australia the Defence Committee approved 1RAR's roles. The roles set out in the directives to the Commander of the Australian Army Force Vietnam (Brigadier O.D. Jackson) and the commanding officer of 1RAR, were:

- a. security of a base area;
- b. deeper patrolling and offensive operations as ordered;
- c. reaction operations as ordered in conjunction with ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) forces; and
- d. contingency planning.

When General Wilton visited Vietnam in late June, in negotiations with the Americans he ensured that the brigade commander would consult the commanding officer of 1RAR before the battalion was deployed on any operation, and that the battalion would have a degree of autonomy during operations.

Early in July the Americans began planning to form a general reserve in Vietnam that could be deployed anywhere in the country and would include 1RAR. Wilton opposed the inclusion of 1RAR, believing that it might be involved in 'a succession of hazardous operations which would inevitably result in heavy casualties'.¹¹ The US commander, General Westmoreland, understood that 1RAR was restricted to operations within 35 kilometres of Bien Hoa, and he therefore sought to change this arrangement by seeking assistance from his superiors in Washington. In response, Wilton told Jackson that 1RAR could operate beyond 35 kilometres but could go no further than provinces adjacent to Bien Hoa. Wilton discussed the role of 1RAR with Westmoreland when he visited Vietnam in September, and eventually on 1 October Wilton informed Jackson that 1RAR was 'available for operations more distant from Bien Hoa'.¹²

The importance of this episode lies in what it reveals about the attitude of the Australian government, and particularly of the CGS, Wilton, who was determined to limit Australian casualties and not expose Australian troops to capricious American operations. Furthermore, Wilton and the Australians had a different philosophy from the Americans. Wilton believed that the Americans favoured a direct approach, using plentiful firepower to kill as many enemy soldiers as possible. Such an approach might result occasionally in heavy Allied casualties, and Australia could not afford to take the risk that its battalion might be the one that took the casualties. In any case, the Australians favoured a more methodical approach to counter-revolutionary warfare (as the Australian Army called it).

An Independent Task Force

As the Australian Army had a different concept for conducting counter-revolutionary warfare it was logical that as soon as 1RAR arrived in Vietnam, Wilton and his advisers began considering how the force could be built up to an independent task force. As Wilton put it:

Although for military tactical reasons we really had to be under operational control of the US command, I preferred not to be brigaded in an American position. I wanted to have as much independence within the force limitations as I could so I could keep a closer eye on it.¹³

By July 1965 planning was well under way. The American high command in Vietnam indicated that it would welcome such a proposal and when Brigadier Mackay visited Vietnam in early August 1965 he asked the Americans to reserve Phuoc Tuy Province for the Australian task force.¹⁴

A few days later the government directed that the Army not undertake any planning to deploy a task force.¹⁵ In any case, the Army, which had been authorised to raise eight battalions, would not have formed sufficient new battalions to sustain a task force until well into 1966. Of the battalions manned by regular soldiers, 1RAR was already in Vietnam, 3RAR was in Borneo where it was on operations against Indonesia, and 4RAR was scheduled to relieve 3RAR in October-November 1965, the latter battalion then being split to form another battalion, 7RAR. National Servicemen were just beginning to arrive in the other battalions. Therefore, 2RAR, 5RAR and 6RAR would not be ready for operations until at least March 1966, and 3RAR, 7RAR and 8RAR would not be ready until later. While a battalion remained on operations in Borneo the Army would have insufficient battalions to maintain a task force of any more than two battalions.

The government did not permit Defence to resume planning for a two-battalion task force until January 1966, by which time the US government was asking Australia for an increase to its commitment. After recommendations from the Defence Committee, on 2 March 1966 the Cabinet approved the deployment of a task force that would include a flight of eight RAAF Iroquois helicopters.

The initiative for expanding the force to a task force therefore came from the Army, which saw sound military reasons for it in terms of establishing an independent force, not for the diplomatic or strategic advantage of increasing the commitment. Much of the initiative came directly from the CGS, Wilton. As he said later, 'When we sent our first battalion up, it was the most we could do in terms of the size of the force. We'd always, I think, known in the backs of our minds that when our manpower and other resources permitted this would have to be increased.'¹⁶ The official history states that the 'self-imposed constraints within which Australia considered further military commitment revealed an ambivalence in the attitude taken towards the war'.¹⁷

The Location and Roles of the Task Force

On 12 March 1966, just four days after the Prime Minister, Harold Holt, announced that the task force was going to be deployed to Vietnam, Wilton and several senior staff officers visited Vietnam to decide on the location and roles for the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF). Wilton selected Phuoc Tuy Province for several reasons:

- it had not been under government control for several years and was likely that it would be an area of significant military activity;
- it was far removed from the borders of Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam;
- it had good access by sea and air;
- it was an area with which the Australian force could be readily identified;
- it was an area where it seemed feasible to separate the enemy from the population; and
- in terrain, it was not unlike that in which the Australian Army had trained and fought before.¹⁸

But there was another reason that was probably more important than most of the stated reasons. With the port of Vung Tau on a nearby and isolated peninsula, the Australian force could be evacuated or reinforced by Australian national resources should the situation in the province deteriorate markedly. Major General Alan Stretton, who as a lieutenant colonel accompanied Wilton during the visit, thought that 'Wilton showed remarkable military judgement and that there would have been a greater loss of life if the Australian force had been allocated to any other province.'¹⁹

In discussions with General Westmoreland, Wilton established the roles for 1ATF. First, 1ATF was to secure and dominate the assigned tactical area of responsibility in Phuoc Tuy Province. Second, it was to conduct operations related to the security of the highway linking Vung Tau and Saigon as required. Third, it was to conduct other operations in the province. Fourth, it was to conduct operations anywhere in the III Corps Tactical Zone and also to

conduct operations anywhere in the adjacent province of Binh Tuy, which was in the II Corps Tactical Zone, as agreed between Westmoreland and COMAFV. Thus Australia placed certain limits on the operations to be conducted by 1ATF. The task force came under the operational control of the commander of the US Army's II Field Force, Vietnam (IIFV), which controlled operations in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

Wilton's decision to locate 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province has not been seriously questioned, but the decision taken by Brigadier Jackson, and confirmed by Wilton, to base 1ATF at Nui Dat in the centre of the province has been criticised. Stretton thought it was one of the 'cardinal blunders' made by the Australian commanders in Vietnam.²⁰ The huge complex that was eventually developed had to be defended, thus reducing the numbers of troops that could be deployed on operations. If the troops had been located at Vung Tau fewer would have been needed to defend the base. Wilton rejected this argument. He wanted the troops based away from a populated area. Placing the base in the centre of the province posed a continuing threat to Viet Cong operations. And importantly, if the troops had been at Vung Tau the American high command might have wished to deploy them away from the province on the sort of deep operations that, from the beginning, he had wanted to avoid. Ian McNeill has shown that senior North Vietnamese and Viet Cong officers agreed that the location of 1ATF at Nui Dat presented a great obstacle to their operations.²¹ Notwithstanding these views, the CGS, Daly, thought 'with the advantage of hindsight' that 'it would have been a better proposition to develop Vung Tau as the Task Force base. In any future operation such as that I think it would be most unwise to set up two permanent bases.'²²

The decisions about the location of 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province and at Nui Dat within the province reveal more about the approach of the Army's high commanders. They were determined not to place the lives of Australians at risk in more adventurous American operations. Wilton put it succinctly:

Quite frankly, those US divisions were flung around the place with great abandon, and became a bit of a meat grinder; they had tremendous casualties. Our task force was so good that I think they were tempted to put it into every crisis. If we hadn't been assigned an area of responsibility we would have been in the mobile reserve being shuttled all over Vietnam at a moment's notice. My God, we would have had lots of casualties ... I wouldn't be in that one!²³

Wilton also wanted to ensure that 1ATF had the best possible opportunity to conduct operations according to Australian tactical doctrine. In pursuing the latter aim the Australian commanders were hamstrung by the limited resources available to them. Wilton could not recommend the deployment of a three-battalion task force because it just could not be sustained in 1966. He was willing to deploy a two-battalion task force because, as he said, 'I reckoned our two battalion task force was worth any US three battalion brigade!'²⁴

One alternative would have been for the Australians to take over Phuoc Tuy Province completely. That is, Australia would have provided all the advisers to the South Vietnamese forces and other government authorities in the area. Major General Tim Vincent, COMAFV throughout most of 1967, has claimed that Westmoreland offered this opportunity to the Australians in June 1967. Vincent supported the idea but the CCS, Daly, told him that he could not find the 100 men required for the task. Wilton, by then Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, rejected the idea and Vincent thought that he was thinking of the repercussions if the war were lost.²⁵ A later COMAFV, Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan, believed that the effort would have been worthwhile as the province might have become a model for the rest of Vietnam.²⁶ Vincent must have raised these suggestions when Wilton and Daly visited Vietnam as there is no record of them in the messages from Vietnam, and they were not discussed in the Chiefs of Staff Committee.²⁷

Another alternative would have been to allow 1ATF to operate at greater distance from Phuoc Tuy. As Deputy Chief of the General Staff when 1ATF was deployed to Phuoc Tuy, Major General Arthur MacDonald developed the view that the Australian concept was too limited. In late September 1967 he visited Vietnam as COMAFV designate, and in discussions with

Westmoreland learned that the Americans thought that the Australians were not pulling their weight. Considering the plans to increase the size of the commitment (which will be discussed in the following section) MacDonald believed that:

We ought to be getting more political value out of that contribution. This was a wonderful opportunity to display to our allies what we were capable of doing. As far as operational ability was concerned we were far in front of anyone else in the country. We were hiding our light under a bushel in Phuoc Tuy.

Returning to Australia MacDonald informally discussed these ideas with Wilton who did not agree; he was afraid that the task force might be sent north.²⁸

The Expansion of the Task Force

The fact that 1ATF consisted of only two battalions and had permanently to devote at least two companies to the defence of Nui Dat was of great concern to General Westmoreland, who by January 1967 was talking about the need for a third battalion in Phuoc Tuy Province.²⁹ An exchange of signals between Canberra and Saigon in January 1967 provides some insight into the problem of having a two-battalion task force. With the prospect of a large Allied operation in Phuoc Tuy Province, Vincent asked the CGS to expedite the arrival of any scheduled reinforcements so that they could augment the base defences. The DCGS advised that 213 reinforcements had been despatched, but added that the Task Force commander, Brigadier Stuart Graham, was responsible for the security of his base and his operational tasks had to take this into account. 'The limitation imposed by having two battalions in the force and not three are well understood but this is a fact of life and must be lived with.'³⁰

When Daly visited Vietnam between 12 and 18 March 1967 Vincent explained the problem caused by having only two battalions. Daly replied, 'I can give you one if the pressure mounts too much but I cannot sustain it, so leave it as long as you can'.³¹ Daly then suggested a tank squadron.³² Vincent was thinking along the same lines, and on 22 June 1967 he sent Wilton a seven-page report with six pages of annexes arguing that tanks could operate successfully in Vietnam and that they would increase 1ATF's capacity to destroy the enemy. In a covering letter Vincent added that he needed additional helicopter pilots and other support troops, including engineers. This was on top of the additional battalion that had already been identified as necessary.³³ In the context of this request, on 15 July Vincent gave his forecast of events in Vietnam:

With the build up of the enemy country wide it would be reasonable to assume that his aim is to lengthen the war by stalemate i.e. his strength being sufficient to engage the resources of the Allies yet with his loss rate not exceeding his replacement rate. While his losses may be many times ours this tactic may well bring him to the goal he wants. He is operating on a total war effort (for him) whilst we are limited to the degree of effort because of escalation problems. And if he thinks he can hold us indefinitely then maybe he can win by tiring us out—whilst we thin out in Vietnam he still has an infra-structure in being and a South Vietnam too tired to make the super-effort to throw him out.³⁴

To Vincent the key was therefore to build up the capacity of his force quickly so that it could be really effective. The request for tanks was interesting, because it was opposed by the task force commander, Graham, a former Armoured Corps officer, who believed that the tanks could not be maintained successfully in Vietnam (although his opinion was not clearly stated at first).³⁵ Vincent, a former Signals Corps officer, was convinced that the tanks would provide additional firepower and mobility; as he put it the force needed 'an additional national military capability to counter the possibility of our being regarded as a casual army of the United States'. The tank squadron would be a 'valuable addition in this context'.³⁶ Wilton sought advice from the CGS, Daly, who replied that the addition of a tank squadron would 'significantly increase the operational capability of the force'.³⁷

In a series of meetings in July and August 1967 the Defence Committee, consisting of the Chiefs of Staff and the Secretaries of Defence, External Affairs and the Treasury, recommended additions to the force. At one stage the Defence Minister, Allen Fairhall, sent for Daly and asked for an unequivocal answer as to whether tanks would be effective. 'Yes', replied Daly, 'in the close support role', and Fairhall agreed to recommend their deployment to Cabinet.³⁸ On 6 September the Cabinet approved the addition of a tank squadron, a joint RAAF/RAN helicopter contribution, additional engineers and other support troops. It also approved in principle the deployment of a third battalion with an announcement to be made at a later stage. The need for an additional battalion appears to have been accepted throughout the year, but its deployment needed to be assessed in the light of the additional burden this would place on the Australian defence organisation (including the need to raise an additional battalion, 9RAR) and the level of threat in the Malaysia/Singapore region (Confrontation having finished the previous year).³⁹ In April 1967 Defence had advised the government that a third battalion would 'almost double the operational capability of the Force. The present Task Force is doing an effective and worthwhile job but it could do it more quickly if a third battalion could be made available'.⁴⁰

Thus while the government was sensitive to requests for additional troops from the United States, much of the initiative for increasing the size of the force came from the Army commanders in Vietnam and from Generals Wilton and Daly, who were keen to provide the most potent force possible in Phuoc Tuy Province. In October 1968, after the tanks had been in action for about six months, Daly advised the Defence Minister that he had called for a report on their effectiveness, and that the task force commander had stated that the tanks had proven to be 'an asset of considerable value'.⁴¹ Westmoreland certainly recognised that Wilton had argued strongly for the force expansions and hurried to congratulate him on his 'success in achieving this augmentation'.⁴²

The Barrier Minefield

In May 1967 1ATF began laying a twelve kilometre-long barrier minefield and fence from Dat Do to the sea. It was intended that local South Vietnamese forces would patrol and protect the minefield, but when they failed in this task the Viet Cong were able to remove thousands of mines and use them against the Australians. One task force commander estimated that between September 1968 and May 1970 50 per cent of 1ATF's casualties 'were from our own mines'.⁴³ Major General Alan Stretton, chief of staff at headquarters Australian Force Vietnam from April 1969 to April 1970, thought the minefield was a 'tactical error'.⁴⁴ Many others shared his view.

The construction of the minefield raises important questions about the extent to which higher commanders should become involved in tactical decisions. Although the commander of 1ATF, Brigadier Graham, obtained the concurrence of the commander of II Field Force, he merely informed Vincent, who immediately visited the area, expressed some concern, but did not veto the project, which had already begun.⁴⁵ When he heard about the minefield, General Daly in Canberra 'had grave doubts about its effectiveness' but believed that it was a matter for the commander on the spot; he had no authority, he said, to order a change in operational methods.⁴⁶ Indeed, once the minefield was constructed it would have been a brave call by Vincent or Daly later in the year to order its removal, especially as the extent of casualties to Australian troops was not yet apparent, and it appeared to be effective in denying the area to the Viet Cong. The history of the Royal Australian Engineers, however, points out that authority to lay defensive, barrier and nuisance minefields was restricted to divisional commanders, and as the minefield was strictly speaking a nuisance minefield it should have been 'cleared within a month' of being laid.⁴⁷

Interviewed in 1976, General Wilton thought that criticism of the minefield was a case of 'being wise after the event'. He claimed that until he visited Vietnam in September 1967 he did not know of its existence. This is hard to believe as during May the engineer field squadron suffered five killed and eight wounded while laying the minefield, and the signals from COMAFV to Wilton during May clearly mentioned its construction (although in the context of wider operational plans).⁴⁸ Perhaps Wilton did not understand the minefield's extent and purpose at this stage. When he went to the task force he was shown the minefield 'with great pride.'

I started to ask questions about it, the background on it, but there is no reason why I should have known about it because it was quite within the authority of the task force commander to put it in ... Perhaps the only criticism really which one should level here would be that perhaps the commander concerned was a bit optimistic about the reliability of the Vietnamese allies ... I wouldn't criticise any COMAFV or the task force commander for putting out something which in the end lost its effectiveness. It is better than sitting on his backside and not trying anything.⁴⁹

In fact, when in mid 1969 1ATF began to suffer casualties from mines there was considerable concern in Canberra. In June 1969 1ATF had 30 mine incidents, mainly in the Dat Do area, resulting in seven Australians being killed and more than 40 wounded. Wilton wrote to the Defence Minister to assure him that measures were in hand to reduce the casualties.⁵⁰ Next month, on behalf of the Minister for the Army, the Secretary of the Department of the Army, Bruce White, sought explanations from both the DCGS and COMAFV on the security of the barrier minefield.⁵¹ By chance the DCGS was now Major General Graham, who as a brigadier had installed the minefield. In reply, Graham strongly defended his actions:

I was not naive enough to think that the fence would prevent infiltration of VC, though it would make it difficult for him to withdraw rapidly after an attack and this was an essential part of his modus operandi. The basic purpose of the fence was to control the previously unrestricted flow of supplies by vehicle, oxcart and sampan, by channelling their movement through a few check points.

He claimed that a check of mine incidents showed that most of the casualties did not come from mines lifted from the Australian minefield. He said that the possibility of the loss of mines was in his mind at the time, but that in any case the Viet Cong 'never had any apparent problem in procuring or manufacturing mines and booby traps'.⁵²

Already 1ATF had begun clearing the minefield, and the COMAFV, Major General Robert Hay, was not happy with the DCGS's response. As he put it in a signal on 4 August 1969:

We are now destroying the minefield not because the minefield has achieved its purpose but because there are many gaps in it ... and the minefield is a source of supply to the VC. Why cannot we say so and clear this up for good? The Australian press in this area know of this.⁵³

He did not pass on the more blunt comments of the Task Force commander, Brigadier Sandy Pearson, who told Hay that he was 'somewhat amazed ... at the answers given by Army to the press in Australia'. He thought that the Army would 'be in for a great ridicule if it continued in this vein. One very senior US officer had told him that the minefield was 'Australia's big mistake'. While he believed that there should not be recriminations over the laying of the minefield, he thought that a 'large proportion of the anti-personnel mines laid by the VC were from the minefield'.⁵⁴ A detailed examination of mine incidents in Phuoc Tuy Province confirmed that a large proportion of 1ATF mine casualties came from M16 mines in the area around the barrier minefield.⁵⁵

In February 1970 the Defence Minister sought Wilton's response to comments by the journalist, Denis Warner, that the minefield was the greatest Australian mistake of the war. Wilton reaffirmed his view that Graham's decision to build the fence and minefield was 'a sound one in all the circumstances' and had been effective in achieving its aim of providing a barrier to Viet Cong movement.⁵⁶

Casualties

Closely linked to the problem created by the Viet Cong lifting mines was the more general issue of casualties. Successive COMAFVs have testified that there was no political direction to limit casualties, but as Major General Hay commented, there was a general understanding that the loss of lives needed to be balanced carefully against military gains.⁵⁷ Of course the COMAFVs did not exercise operational control over 1ATF; but one COMAFV, Major General MacDonald, observed that if an operational mistake were made which caused large numbers of casualties he would not be able to hide from this responsibility.⁵⁸ Casualties were always a concern in Canberra, as Major Robert Joshua, GSO2 Operations at Army Headquarters, reminded the Deputy Director of Operations and Plans in February 1969:

There is considerable senior officer concern when casualties rise. The Chairman COS has a keen interest in even quite low level detail. When he was COS he came to the ops room two or three times a week to be briefed.⁵⁹

As mentioned, the operations near Dat Do in mid 1969 caused considerable casualties that prompted questions from the Army Minister. The issue surfaced again in February 1970 when 8RAR returned to the Long Hai hills, near Dat Do. The operation proceeded well until two mine incidents caused casualties, triggering a signal from Daly to the COMAFV, Major General Hay:

Most distressed and concerned at casualties being suffered by 8RAR in Long Hai area. In view of our experience I am at a loss to understand 1ATF undertaking operations in an area in which they have already been costly and of doubtful value. Please let me have a report urgently, including the aims of the operation and the responsibility for its initiation. At the same time please examine its scope in the light of the current situation and role of 1ATF.⁶⁰

Hay replied next day that until the incidents on 28 February he considered that 8RAR had achieved significant results for minimal casualties and that the operation was having a considerable effect on the enemy. He continued:

You will be aware of the action I took yesterday to prevent further offensive operations [when he visited headquarters 1ATF]. There has been constant pressure from both CG III Corps and CG II FFV over a long period to put Aust troops into the Long Hais. This has always been resisted by Comd 1ATF. The present 1ATF operations were the direct result of the substantial contact on 15 February .. I believe the long term impact of Operation Hammersley on pacification will be substantial.⁶¹

In his history of 8RAR, Bob Hall has shown that even before this intervention, headquarters 1ATF had taken action to reduce casualties by substituting air strikes for ground assaults—air strikes that were largely ineffectual.⁶²

In March 1970, soon after arriving in Vietnam to take over from Hay, Major General Colin Fraser called on Lieutenant General Julian J Ewell, commanding II Field Force. Ewell asked Fraser directly whether he was under orders to limit Australian casualties. Fraser replied that he had been given no such direction but that his own view was that in any projected operation casualties could only be justified if there was a sound military purpose offering prospects of substantial benefits from the operation. The type of operation which made no sense to him was to embark upon a short sortie into a defended objective, followed by a rapid return to the original deployment. Such operations had sometimes been undertaken when there were insufficient troops to seize and permanently hold the objective. Ewell accepted this view.⁶³

Operations against enemy bases continued until about April 1970, by which time two Viet Cong battalions had been withdrawn from the province and more attention was being given to patrolling and ambushing around the populated areas. But the COMAFV had not forgotten the experience of the earlier casualties. Thus, when in July 1970 the deputy US Commander in

Vietnam, General William B Rosson, listed some suggested tasks for 1ATF, General Fraser signalled Wilton with his proposed reply to Rosson. Wilton agreed, and Fraser therefore replied to Rosson that he concurred with the suggested tasks but added a note of caution: 'I am obliged to invite attention to the fact that the 1st Australian Task Force has mounted a series of operations against the Long Hais in the past, which have been costly in life and productive of limited military gains'. While recognising the importance of the area, Fraser thought that 'the base area should not be subject to direct assault until such time as there are reasonable assurances of long term denial'.⁶⁴ Fraser's successor, Major General Donald Dunstan, has said that if the situation had arisen he would have stopped any operations in the Long Hais.⁶⁵ There were no more Australian operations in the Long Hais.

Towards the Withdrawal?

The official historian, Peter Edwards, has argued that while the decisions concerning Australia's commitment to Vietnam were 'ill-advised in hindsight', they were 'at least understandable in the context of their times, especially in the mid-1960s'. 'Vietnam was the most difficult and complex challenge to face those responsible for Australia's defence and foreign policies since the critical stage of the Pacific War in 1941-42', and the policy-makers were collectively inadequate for the challenge.⁶⁶

While Edwards is critical of the decision-making process in 1965 and of the attitudes of the Menzies government which saw little need to have its decisions questioned or debated,⁶⁷ he is more critical of the government in the period from mid-1968 to late 1969. By April 1968, following the Tet Offensive, the Johnson Administration was moving towards Vietnamisation and eventual withdrawal. The Nixon Administration that came to power in January 1969 was committed to Vietnamisation and withdrawal. When at the end of 1969 the Gorton government raised the question of withdrawal with Nixon, the latter hinted that economic aid might balance the withdrawal of troops. As Edwards put it:

The hint was not pursued. If the Government in 1968-69 had developed a coherent strategy, including the withdrawal of troops, especially conscripts, from Vietnam, it would probably have spared Australia from much of the tension and division associated with the Moratorium protests, which did not begin until 1970 ... The failure even to address the possibility of such an approach in 1968-69 deserves more criticism than does the original commitment of 1965.⁶⁸

If Edwards is correct, the relevant question is whether the Australian high command—the COMAFVs, the CGS, the Chiefs of the Staff collectively and the Chairman of the Chiefs—should have presented the government with an alternative point of view to that of merely maintaining the force in Vietnam until victory was achieved. It is notable that many of the COMAFVs doubted the outcome of the war. When he left Vietnam in January 1967 Major General Mackay, having observed that the South Vietnamese were inefficient and corrupt, lacked outstanding leaders and had no will to win, he had grave doubts about the outcome. He claimed that while he did not express his views in his signals to Canberra he did mention them personally to Wilton.⁶⁹

When Major General MacDonald visited Vietnam in September 1967 he thought that the war was being won. But following Tet he lost confidence in American intelligence assessments and began to doubt the outcome. He discussed these views with Wilton (who visited him in March 1968) and perhaps Daly, and by the time he finished his tour in February 1969 he believed that the Department of Defence and the government were trying to work out how to get out.⁷⁰ There was less action in this regard than he thought. During the 1968 Tet Offensive Vice Admiral Sir Alan McNicoll, the Chief of Naval Staff, was visiting Saigon, and he accompanied MacDonald when he visited 1ATF on Operation Coburg. Like MacDonald he was shocked by the extent to which the Americans had been caught unawares and impressed by the futility of trying to intercept the Viet Cong in the jungle. He claimed that when he returned to Australia neither the Chiefs of Staff Committee nor the Department of External Affairs gave him an opportunity to comment on what he had learned.⁷¹ He thought that Wilton took it upon himself to run the Vietnam War and did not consult the Chiefs of Staff

very much on it. Daly, of course, was closely involved in the war, and on a day-to day basis had more communications with COMAFV than Wilton. Daly thought that that while the Allies were not losing the war they were not winning it either. He said that he made his views known to the government but that it was a 'political-foreign affairs matter', not a military one.⁷²

The Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Henry Bland, was not responsible for military operations, but he was surprised that Wilton did not take an independent Australian line in considering either broad strategic options or the operations in Vietnam. In October 1969 Bland visited Saigon where he met with the US commander, General Creighton Abrams. On return he reported his views to Fairhall. Soon, however, Wilton came to see him 'quite upset' that he had taken it upon himself to speak to Abrams. Wilton said that it was 'utterly improper—I am the one who deals with Abrams'. Bland claimed that the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Alistair Murdoch, sympathised with his views but was never willing to bring the matter to a head in the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Bland was struck by the contrast between the lack of direction in Canberra and the competence and professionalism which he found when he visited Nui Dat.⁷³

Serious discussion about the ramifications of the US withdrawal from Vietnam began in the early months of 1969, following the election of President Richard Nixon in December 1968. On 16 April 1969 Lieutenant General Ewell, the commander of II Field Force, issued a new directive to 1ATF changing its operational priorities. The first priority was to be pacification, the second was to be the upgrading of the South Vietnamese forces, and the third was to be military operations, subject to Saigon being secured at all times. As General Hay wrote, 'these were a complete reversal of previous instructions to the Task Force'.⁷⁴

The withdrawal of American troops as a result of Vietnamisation was announced in a communique from the US Military Assistance Command on 14 June 1969.⁷⁵ In his discussions with the US commander, General Abrams, Hay thought that the Americans were over-optimistic about the ability of the Vietnamese Army to survive if the Allied forces were withdrawn.⁷⁶ This view was shared by Hay's chief of staff, Stretton, who wrote that 'everybody realised the futility of the whole war', and that Vietnamisation was a 'face saving device'.⁷⁷ A later COMAFV, Major General Fraser, however, thought that Vietnamisation was the only feasible concept, while Wilton later commented that it was 'a pity it didn't start earlier'.⁷⁸

The implications of withdrawing Australian forces from Vietnam had first been considered by the Joint Staff in the Defence Department in November 1968.⁷⁹ It was one of the first tasks for the Joint Staff that had been formed only the previous month. The Joint Planning Committee produced a report in May 1969 and updated the report in August 1969. The Defence Committee considered the latter report on 11 September 1969, when the DCGS, Major General Graham, representing the CGS, took the lead in the discussion and argued strongly that 1ATF constituted a balanced force and should not be reduced by one battalion. If a reduction was ordered the whole task force should be withdrawn. Other members of the Committee pointed out that 1ATF had been built up progressively and the public was aware of this. Further, perhaps a South Vietnamese battalion or a US battalion could replace an Australian battalion. Graham remained unmoved.⁸⁰ The problem was, as Gordon Blakers, the Deputy Secretary B in the Department (the deputy secretary responsible for strategic policy), reminded Sir Henry Bland shortly before the Defence Committee meeting, that in television interviews in June and August the Prime Minister, Gorton, had emphasised that 1ATF was a self-contained force and to withdraw parts of it would be 'quite ridiculous'. This made it 'difficult to bring about a suitably graduated Australian participation in the overall reduction programme'.⁸¹

Despite his earlier comments, on 21 September Gorton urgently asked for the views of the Chiefs of Staff on a possible withdrawal. In the absence of the other chiefs, Wilton and Daly jointly advised that a 'premature reduction or withdrawal of our forces would cause further pressures on the US to withdraw their forces in the minimum time without regard to the "criteria" and "principles" already expounded by President Nixon. It was therefore in Australia's strategic interest to maintain all our present forces in Vietnam unless:

- (a) An agreement is reached with Hanoi for a mutual withdrawal.
- (b) The stage is reached in a US withdrawal plan, which realistically observes 'the criteria' and 'principles', when our Task Force can be completely withdrawn by agreement with the US (and South Vietnam).
- (c) The US decide to withdraw their forces in minimum time without proper regard to the 'criteria' and 'principles'.

... Under present circumstances and failing an agreement with Hanoi for mutual withdrawal, we could not withdraw the Australian Task Force and its supporting units from Vietnam in progressive stages without endangering the safety of the Force.⁸²

This advice remained largely unchanged when the Cabinet considered the Defence Committee's views on 9 December, except the Defence Committee had now admitted that the task force could be reduced to two battalions if a US battalion were available to be placed under operational control if necessary.⁸³

It was this Cabinet meeting that led to Gorton's cable to Nixon of 13 December seeking his 'long-term thinking' so that Australian withdrawals could be based on joint Australian-American planning. It is likely that Wilton thought that Gorton had gone too far. Wilton had agreed that the cable would state:

The Military advice relating to our Army task force is that any adjustment could call for co-ordinated Australian/United States Military planning.

The final text, as approved by Gorton read:

As to our Army Task Force our military advice is that all our ground force units should, if possible, be withdrawn as one unit though it is possible this might be avoided if there were co-ordinated Australian/United States planning.

Wilton thought that this paragraph made it look as though the Chiefs of Staff had recommended withdrawal. On the night of Saturday 12 December he discussed the matter with Sir Henry Bland and the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Sir James Plimsoll. He then telephoned the Minister for Defence, Malcolm Fraser, who had succeeded Fairhall the previous month, and Fraser promised to bring Wilton's views to the Prime Minister. The cable remained unchanged, but later that night Gorton telephoned Wilton who pointed out that the proposed text applied only if the government had decided for political reasons to reduce the force. Gorton argued that the text was 'a logical interpretation of the military advice in the event of a government decision for political reasons to withdraw or reduce the Task Force under present circumstances'. Gorton asked Wilton to confirm that this was the military advice. Wilton did so and the cable was sent as Gorton wished.⁸⁴ One suspects that Wilton was not happy as he made a detailed three-page note of the matter for file.

While the American reply was not encouraging it did raise the possibility that increased Australian economic aid might offset a reduced troop strength. Gorton spoke to Nixon by phone but the details of the conversation were not released. On 15 December Nixon announced further troop reductions. Next day Gorton stated that when the military situation in Vietnam allowed the Americans to make another substantial withdrawal then 'in consultation with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, some Australian units will be included in the numbers scheduled for such a withdrawal'.⁸⁵ As Peter Edwards commented: 'It was the beginning of the end of the Vietnam commitment, but all too obviously it was an immediate reaction to an American announcement, not the first phase of a carefully considered Australian defence strategy.'⁸⁶

The new Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, moved quickly to take some initiative. On 18 December he wrote to Wilton and asked for 'various possibilities' to be canvassed by the Chiefs of Staff and Defence Committee. He was not convinced that the withdrawal of one

battalion, even with the proviso of an American battalion being made available, was 'the only appropriate solution or indeed whether . . . it is relevant'. For planning purpose the chiefs should be considering a much lower level of threat in Phuoc Tuy Province. More effort should be put into training the South Vietnamese in the Province, and as 'we develop a training role there should be a lesser requirement for our forces to continue in their current roles'.⁸⁷ The course was set for the withdrawal of one battalion before the end of 1970.

High Command Problems

This brief discussion of some of the key decisions and issues concerning Australian operations in Vietnam reveals the difficulties faced by the Australian high command in Canberra. The first of these concerned the coalition nature of the war. The strategic policy for the war was made in Washington, and Australia was not consulted. As mentioned, perhaps the Honolulu conference in March/April 1965 provided an opportunity to influence American strategy, but the reality was that given the disparity in the size of the American and Australian commitments perhaps Australia could not have expected to be consulted.

From 1965 to 1972 the Australian forces in Vietnam came under the operational control of an American commander. The conditions under which they operated were spelt out in directives that were agreed between the US commander in Vietnam and General Wilton, acting on behalf of the Australian Chiefs of Staff and the Australian government. From 1966 onwards the directive concerning the operations of 1ATF remained largely unchanged. It seems that little thought was given in Australia towards changing the directive, which adequately dealt with the Australian government's concerns to protect the Australian force and limit casualties that might have been incurred on adventurous American operations.

The second difficulty was caused by the Australian command structure. As the commander of 1ATF came under the operational control of the commander of II FFV the Australian higher commanders—COMAFV, the CGS and Wilton—were reluctant to interfere in his tactical handling of operations in Phuoc Tuy Province. COMAFV had no direct operational authority over 1ATF, although he certainly retained national command of the force.

The higher command structure back in Australia posed even more difficulties. Wilton, as Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, had no statutory command authority, although he represented the Chiefs of Staff who collectively were responsible for operations. The CGS fulfilled a crucial role. As COMAFV was also the commander of the Australian Army component in Vietnam he reported directly to the CGS for a wide range of matters. Further, the CGS was also a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and, except for perhaps the Chairman, he knew more about the operations in Vietnam than any other member of the committee. Indeed, from a broad policy perspective, it is likely that Wilton and Daly knew more about the situation in Vietnam than any other senior officers in Canberra. Between 1962 and 1971 Wilton visited Vietnam on fifteen occasions.⁸⁸ Daly visited almost as frequently.

The relationship between the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the Secretary of the Department of Defence was still evolving. The Secretary had his own civilian policy planning staff that worked in conjunction with the Joint Planning Committee and the Joint Staff. There was no proper Joint Staff in Canberra. Initially all planning and policy matters were considered by the Joint Planning Committee which had an independent two-star officer as chairman, but relied on the operations and plans staffs of the three services for its main work. In November 1965 Defence established a small Joint Services Planning Group, but a Joint Staff with operations and policy sections was not created until October 1968. It was still quite small. Similarly, the Joint Intelligence Organisation was not formed until 1970.

The third difficulty was created by the wider strategic situation. Confrontation with Indonesia that began in 1963 and continued into 1966 meant that Australia had to maintain forces in Malaysia and be prepared to deploy forces to Papua New Guinea. The Army was too small for its many tasks. Throughout the 1950s the Australian government had been reluctant to spend funds on the Regular Army. Admittedly, even when it decided to increase expenditure in 1963 and 1964, the Army had difficulty attracting recruits. The upshot was that if the Army

was to retain a prudent reserve in Australia it could afford to deploy only one battalion to Vietnam in 1965 and two battalions in 1966, even if the government had wished to send more. The small size of the force in Vietnam during 1966 and 1967 severely restricted the options open to the Australian commanders.

Ultimately, the higher direction of the Australian forces in Vietnam rested with the government, not its civilian and military advisors. Peter Edwards has shown that the Prime Minister, Menzies, his deputy John McEwen, and other senior ministers, Harold Holt, Paul Hasluck and Shane Paltridge, played the key roles in deciding to deploy 1RAR to Vietnam in 1965. But they were less interested in the finer details of whether the Australian troops were actually achieving their purpose. It is true that Service ministers, and particularly the Minister for the Army, were sensitive to administrative or disciplinary bungles that might reflect badly on their administration. In retrospect, however, Wilton considered that the government interfered very little in the operations of the force.⁸⁹

Sir Allen Fairhall, the Minister for Defence from January 1966 to November 1969, was a highly competent administrator who took an interest in the technical side of military acquisitions. He was also a strong supporter and advocate of Australia's commitment to Vietnam. But he does not appear to have challenged the Chiefs of Staff by asking them to consider alternatives in Vietnam, and despite later claims that the Prime Minister, Gorton, perhaps favoured a withdrawal there was no directive from the Prime Minister in this regard. The new Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, took a more activist approach. As mentioned, in December 1969 he directed the Chiefs to come up with options for the withdrawal of forces. On 1 May 1970 he directed that COMAFV expand his monthly report to include 'a description of the objectives underlying the operations of the previous month, set in the context of our longer term objectives'. He wanted an assessment of the extent to which objectives were being achieved.⁹⁰

Less than four months after Fraser became Defence Minister, Sir Arthur Tange succeeded Sir Henry Bland as Secretary of Defence. Tange has observed that until then,

The Vietnam show was really run by Army and the Defence Department's attitude was to act as an adding machine for the three services' budgets and the Defence Minister's job was to get them through a reluctant cabinet.

Fraser wanted to overthrow these attitudes and he 'exerted his power far more than his predecessors including Fairhall'. Soon, according to Tange who approved of this attitude, there were 'injured feelings all over the place'.⁹¹ Eliot Cohen in *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, argues that 'the best civilian leaders are those who meddle and ask tough questions of their military subordinates'.⁹² It seems that perhaps the Australian high command in the Vietnam War did not have enough of this meddling.

For all that, the Australian public has much to be grateful for. The Australian Army deployed its units to Vietnam in such a way that casualties were kept to a minimum. In Vietnam the force operated with honour and skill, and within the bounds of resources available, 1ATF in Phuoc Tuy Province and the Training Team throughout the country generally achieved more than the forces of other nations. After the war the Army did not have to rebuild its morale and ethos as was necessary with the United States Army. The Army high command must be given credit for these outcomes. Lessons were learned. The new command arrangements that emerged in 1976, particularly the appointment of the Chief of the Defence Force Staff with statutory command authority over the Defence Force, grew out of Wilton's experiences in the Vietnam War. The Australian Defence Force that we know today with its joint command and staff structures—the ADF that performed so well in East Timor in 1999-2000—owes much to the efforts to rectify the higher command deficiencies that came to light in the Vietnam War.

Endnotes

1. Another exception was the small expedition to German New Guinea in 1914, when strategic direction was in the hands of the Australian government.
2. Eventually, non-Army units in Vietnam included an Iroquois squadron, a bomber squadron and a Caribou flight from the RAAF, and a clearance diving team, helicopter pilots and a destroyer from the RAN. These elements came under COMAFV. This essay concentrates on the Army commitment, which was for the longest duration and was by far the largest.
3. Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992), 337.
4. Report by the Joint Planning Committee, 11 December 1964, National Archives of Australia (NAA), A1945/39, 248/4/100.
5. Minute by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 16 December 1964, loc cit.
6. Brigadier OH Isaksson to author, 15 July 2002; OH Isaksson, *Encounters in Asia: A Soldier's Story* (Nathan, Qld: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1997), 54.
7. Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 358-60.
8. Major General K Mackay to author, 10 October 1985.
9. Mr K W Major (First Assistant Secretary, Department of the Army) to author, 7 April 1986.
10. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 64.
11. Letter, CGS to Army Minister, 6 July 1965, Australian War Memorial (AWM), 121, 161/A/4, and NAA, A1945, 248/4/124.
12. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 121.
13. Army Historical Programme, Interview with General Sir John Wilton, 9, 13, 14 September 1976, 21, AWM 107.
14. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Major General K Mackay, 8 March 1972, 12, AWM 107; McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 182-4.
15. Secretary, Department of Defence, to CGS, 18 August 1965, AWM 121, 161/A/5.
16. Wilton interview, 13.
17. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 205.
18. Major Ian McNeill, 'An Outline of the Australian Military Involvement in Vietnam, July 1962-December 1972', *Defence Force Journal*, September/October 1980, 45. McNeill based this information on papers prepared for the 1971 CGS Exercise.
19. Alan Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm* (Sydney: Collins, 1978), 182.
20. *Ibid*, 213.
21. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 200.
22. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, 22 November 1974 and 4 June 1975, 22, AWM 107.
23. Wilton interview, 26, AWM 107.
24. *Ibid*, 21.
25. Major General Tim Vincent, address to History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy Association, 7 November 1985. Also, Army Historical Programme, Interview with Major General D Vincent, 20 March 1972, 44, AWM 107.
26. Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan to author, 23 December 1985.
27. In a cable to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, on 28 January 1967 the Australian Ambassador in Saigon said that Westmorland had considered transferring Australian advisers in the 1 Corps area to Phuoc Tuy Province and replacing them with US advisers in the II Corps area. AWM 121, 161/G/1.
28. General Sir Arthur MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.
29. Australian Ambassador, Saigon, to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 28 January 1967, AWM 121, 161/G/1.
30. COMAFV to CGS, 19 January 1967; DCGS to COMAFV, 10 February 1967, AWM 98, NN, COMAFV-CGS, 1 Jan 1967-28 Feb 1970.
31. Vincent interview, 17, AWM 107.
32. Army Historical Programme, Interview with Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, 22 November 1974 and 4 June 1975, 61, AWM 107.
33. Vincent to Wilton, 22 June 1967, Vincent Papers (held by author), and NAA, A1946/26, 1967/1176 Part 1.
34. Vincent to Daly, 15 July 1967, Vincent Papers.
35. Signal, Graham to CGS, 3 September 1967, AWM 101, 26.
36. Signal, Vincent to CGS, 4 September 1967, AWM 101, 26.
37. CGS to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, 31 July 1967, Department of Defence, CCOSC Files, Box 18, Section File Part 4.
38. Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly to author, 26 November 1985.
39. Cabinet Minute 6 September 1967, Decision No 563(FASD), NAA, A5840 XMI, Volume 2.

40. Secretary, Department of Defence to Minister for Defence, 20 April 1967, NAA, A1946/26, 1967/1176 Part 1.
41. Daly to Minister for the Army, 28 October 1968. (He requested that the report be passed to the Minister for Defence). NAA A6835/1, 1.
42. Signal, Westmoreland to Wilton, 20 October 1967, CCOSC Files, Box 34, File, Signals between CCOSC and COMAFV.
43. Frank Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 95.
44. Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm*, 213.
45. Vincent address, 27 November 1985, and to author, 2 December 1985.
46. Daly to author, 26 November 1985.
47. P J Greville, *The Royal Australian Engineers 1945 to 1972: Paving the Way* (Moorebank, NSW: Corps Committee of the Royal Australian Engineers, 2002), 783.
48. Ibid , 772. Signals, COMAFV to Wilton, 14, 24, 30 May 1967; CCOSC files, Box 32. File, Signals between CCOSC and COMAFV, opened 3 May 1967.
49. Wilton interview, 34-5, AWM 107. Wilton discussed the task force's operations with Brigadier Graham in the morning of 16 September and visited the Horseshoe feature, the northern anchor of the minefield, that afternoon, Itinerary of Visit, AWM 98, R875/2/110.
50. Wilton to Defence Minister, June 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 29, File, Miscellaneous 1969 the file copy does not have the exact day).
51. Secretary, Department of Army, to DCGS, 30 July 1969, NAA, A6836, 2.
52. Major General Graham to Secretary, Department of Army, 1 August 1969, NAA, A6836, 2.
53. COMAFV to Secretary and DCGS, 4 August 1969, AWM 98, 698.
54. Draft letter, Brigadier CMI Pearson to COMAFV, 18 July 1969, AWM 98, 584.
55. Greville, *Paving the Way*, 773.
56. Wilton to Defence Minister, 16 February 1970, CCOSC Files, Box 29, File, Miscellaneous 1970.
57. Vincent interview, 13, AWM 107; Major General R A Hay to author, 5 November 1985.
58. MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.
59. Major R Joshua to DDMO, 3 February 1969, AWM 121, 4/B/6.
60. Signal, Daly to COMAFV, 28 February 1970, NAA A6836, 2.
61. Signal, Hay to CGS, 1 March 1970, NAA A6836, 2. Also, Hay to Wilton, 1 March 1970, CCOSC Files, Box 34, File, Incoming signals for CCOSC 1970. The previous day Hay had signalled Wilton and Daly that the Australian losses were 'hard to justify' and that he would discuss the future of Australian operations in the Long Hais with the Commander of 1ATF on the afternoon of 1 March. Daly had apparently not seen this signal before he despatched his. Hay to Wilton and Daly, 28 February 1970, loc cit.
62. Robert A Hall, *Combat Battalion: The Eighth Battalion in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 53-4.
63. Letter, Major General CAE Fraser to author, 10 August 1985.
64. Letter, Rosson to Fraser, 23 July 1970, and Fraser to Rosson, 1 August 1970, AWM 98, 700; signal, Hay to Wilton, 24 July 1970; signals, Wilton to Hay, 28 and 29 July 1970. In the later signal Wilton advised Hay that 'you should be reluctant to agree to any mission outside Phuoc Tuy Province, other than in the vicinity of its border, or against D440 or D445 battalions, or for specific tasks of a few days duration'. CCOSC Files, Box 32, File, Outgoing signals COSAFV261 to COSAFV446.
65. Lieutenant General Sir Donald Dunstan to author, 23 December 1985.
66. Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), 344.
67. Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, 380.
68. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 348-9.
69. Mackay to author, 10 October 1985.
70. MacDonald to author, 13 December 1985.
71. Vice Admiral Sir Alan McNicholl to author, 6 March 1986.
72. Daly to author, 26 November 1985.
73. Sir Henry Bland to author, 29 April 1986.
74. II FFV Memorandum, 16 April 1969, NAA, A6835/1, 5. Letter, Major General Hay to Ambassador Ralph Harry, 4 October 1969. AWM 98, 584.
75. MACV Communique, 14 June 1969, AWM 98, R579/1/24, Part 2.
76. Hay to author, 5 November 1985.
77. Stretton, *Soldier in a Storm*, 207-8.
78. Fraser to author, 8 August 1986; Wilton interview, 50, AWM 107.
79. See AWM 121 68/3016.
80. Defence Committee Minute 11 September 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 26, File 1858 Part 1.
81. Blakers to Secretary, Department of Defence, 10 September 1969, loc cit.
82. Wilton and Daly to Defence Minister, 22 September 1969, loc cit.
83. Defence Committee Minute 5 December 1969, loc cit.
84. Note for File by CCOSC, 17 December 1969, loc cit.
85. Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton, PM No 88 1969, 16 December 1969, loc cit.
86. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 241.

87. Fraser to Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 18 December 1969, CCOSC Files, Box 26, File 1858 Part 1.
88. Once in each of 1962 and 1964, twice in 1965, thrice in 1966, once in 1967, twice in each of 1968, 1969 and 1970, and once in 1971.
89. Wilton interview, 47, AWM 107.
90. Fraser to Wilton, 1 May 1970, Wilton to COMAFV, 4 May 1970, AWM 98, R723/1/13, Vol 6.
91. Sir Arthur Tange to author, 4 March 1986.
92. Dust jacket of Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).