

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY AND THE VIETNAM WAR 1962-1972

ANZAC BATTALIONS: AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

In 1962 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II approved an alliance between the then New Zealand Regiment and the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). Subsequently, after reorganisation of the New Zealand Regiment, the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1RNZIR) was allied to the RAR on 15 March 1968.¹ In the First Australian Task Force (1ATF) in Vietnam, the close affiliation and eventual integration of sub units of 1RNZIR and 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), were officially recognised, and on 1 March 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion became the first ANZAC Battalion in the Vietnam Campaign.² Something similar had been established during the First World War, when camel-mounted ANZAC Battalions were formed as part of the Imperial Camel Corps in Palestine in 1916.³

As a unit in 1ATF, 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion handed over to 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion on 1 June 1968. On 21 May 1969, 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion assumed its new title until it was replaced in the rotating cycle of the three RAR Battalions by 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion on 15 May 1970. Once more 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion took over operational responsibility from 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion at midnight on 23 May 1971.

From 16 October 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion became 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion Group to cover the withdrawal of 1ATF from Nui Dat and shortly afterwards, from South Vietnam.⁴ Upon the embarkation of the Battalion on HMAS Sydney on 8 December 1971, the title disappeared from the order of battle. (The 'D' Company Group from 4RAR that remained to provide protection to 1 Australian Logistics Support Group at Vung Tau until 29 February 1972 did not have any New Zealanders on its strength.)⁵

What was an ANZAC Battalion?

An ANZAC Battalion's role was the same as that of any Australian infantry battalion operating in 1ATF: 'To seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture him, to seize and hold ground and to repel attack, by day or night regardless of season, weather or terrain.'⁶ However, where the ANZAC battalions varied from their fellow battalions was in their structure and even this changed as the campaign progressed.

The first 'V' (for Vietnam) Company ('V' Coy) from 1RNZIR deployed from Malaysia to South Vietnam and joined 6RAR on 13 May 1967. The company then came under command of 2RAR when the main body arrived at the end of the month. Initially the battalion comprised five rifle companies and the additional New Zealand Mortar and Assault Pioneer Sections. Given the larger strength of the ANZAC Battalion it was not long before it was given the task of holding the Fire Support Base (FSB) at the Horseshoe. 'A company-sized position established by 5RAR early in 1967 on a crescent-shaped hill located approximately 8000 metres south-east of the 1ATF base' at Nui Dat.⁷ Indeed this task seemed all too frequently to be allocated to subsequent ANZAC Battalions on the basis of their additional rifle company strength and the ANZAC companies became familiar with this area overlooking the village of Dat Do and the minefield stretching to the south.⁸

The first two Victor Companies ('V', 'V2') deployed to South Vietnam for six-month tours. Then in December 1967, after the Australian government's decision to commit a third infantry battalion to South Vietnam, an additional New Zealand company and its fair share of Support Company Sections was deployed to join the ANZAC Battalion. Designated Whisky Company ('W') , it arrived from Malaysia in December 1970. For a short time, 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC)

Battalion had six rifle companies, but in February 1968 'D' Coy was disbanded.⁹ From then on the subsequent tours of duty for 'V3', 'V4' and 'V5' were for twelve months. Changeover for 'W1', 'W2' and 'W3', which also served for a year, remained off-set to the Australian Battalion elements which generally changed over in May each year. This meant that the ANZAC Battalions were fortunate in having one rifle company with six months current operational experience in country while the remaining elements deployed into theatre. The disadvantage was that the particular Whisky Company had to adjust to the operational style of two battalions and perhaps did not identify quite so closely with a battalion as did the Victor Companies who did their tour with essentially the one ANZAC battalion.

Actually, 'V6' was in training to replace 'W3' towards the end of 1970.¹⁰ When the decision was made to reduce 1ATF by one Australian Infantry Battalion in October, it was also decided not to replace the third Whisky Company.¹¹ 'W' completed its tour on 10 November 1970 and rejoined 1RNZIR in Malaysia. This then reduced the strength of the ANZAC battalions back to four rifle companies.

'V6' replaced 'V5' in May 1971 and served with 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion until the Battalion's withdrawal from South Vietnam in December 1971. Overall, 1RNZIR provided a total of nine Rifle Companies with support and administration elements from May 1967 to December 1971. Given that 'V' and 'V2' served only six-month tours, the net figure balances out at eight rifle companies (for twelve-month tours), the equivalent of two RAR Battalions, each of four rifle companies. This was a sizeable and timely contribution from a staunch ally. It reduced the load on the training system in Australia where the designated ANZAC Battalions trained three, not four, rifle companies. Exercises had to be written and conducted taking this into consideration so that Battalion Headquarters was properly prepared to command the four companies it would have on deployment.

The ANZAC Battalions started in May 1967 with five rifle companies, and except for December 1967-January 1968 when there were six rifle companies in 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion, continued until November 1970 to be the largest unit in 1ATF. Just as well too, for it covered the build up to and tapering down from the most intense period of ground combat of the campaign during 1968 and 1969. It was a savage reduction that effectively cut the number of rifle companies in 1ATF from thirteen to eight from the end of 1970. Although the level of enemy activity had reduced, the responsibility of the Commander 1ATF for the security of the province had not and the area to cover remained the same. The task just became harder for those that remained!¹²

Preparation and Training

As the Australian Army expanded rapidly from the middle to the end of the 1960s, the Royal Australian Infantry Corps found itself hard pressed to meet its growing overseas commitments and man its fair share of training and staff obligations at home. 3RAR and 4RAR were on operations in Malaysia and Borneo during Confrontation with Indonesia from 1964 to 1966. The 1st Special Air Service (SAS) Company was expanded to become the SAS Regiment,¹³ and 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9RAR were raised. Selected Australian infantry officers, warrant officers and senior NCOs were posted to the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) which more than doubled in strength with the raising of a new Medium Range Reconnaissance Battalion, 2PIR, in 1965.

Infantrymen also formed the backbone of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) and the Jungle Training Centre (JTC) at Canungra. 'The Regiment now entered a period of rotation between areas with three Battalions in Vietnam, one in Malaysia and the other five in Australia, all moving on one or two year cycles ... Units often could not return to their 'home' city after a Vietnam tour because other units had of necessity occupied their barracks. Families were unable to establish permanent homes.'¹⁴

Such was the case with the three RAR Battalions that formed the basis of rotational relief of the ANZAC Battalions. Second, 4th and 6th Battalions RAR all started training for their first deployments to Vietnam from Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane but after their return to Australia

from Vietnam each had moved to join 3TF in the newly constructed Lavarack Barracks in Townsville. There were some distinct advantages in moving into newer barracks, in close proximity to sister battalions and supporting arms.¹⁵ Task Force staff provided excellent support to the battalions in training. Good training areas were readily accessible and the tropical environment assisted with acclimatisation for Vietnam.

One drawback was the lack of tanks in 3TF and it was not feasible for northern battalions to travel to Puckapunyal to train with them.¹⁶ However, there was an exception. In late 1967, 'B' Company, 6RAR, was deployed to Puckapunyal to participate in Exercise MIGHTY MOUSE to test infantry-tank co-operation in a battlefield setting before the first tank squadron from 1 Armoured Regiment deployed to Vietnam.¹⁷ Early in 1970 that same 'B' Company was to participate in Operation MATILDA, the largest Australian armoured operation since the Second World War.¹⁸ Ironically, all of the ANZAC Battalions fought with the tanks in support during the campaign, including some very successful attacks on bunker systems. The lack of any training with Australian tanks did not deter 'V6' and 'C' Squadron tanks from successfully assaulting a major bunker system defended by 274 VC Regiment in June 1971.¹⁹ High praise too was given by the Armoured Corps to the ANZAC Battalion for the last action with 'C' Squadron, in late July 1971, on Operation IRON FOX.²⁰

It had taken just a couple of hours to drive from Enoggera Barracks to JTC prior to the battalions' first tours, for sub-units to undergo the mandatory training in tropical warfare techniques for all soldiers deploying to Vietnam. Subsequently, it took the best part of a day to fly and drive from Townsville to Canungra for the battalions' preparing for their second tour. This just added to the pressure on the battalions re-training to return to Vietnam.

Unit cadres trained companies under the close supervision of the JTC Battle Wing staff using a syllabus approved by Directorate of Military Training (DMT) in Army Headquarters. Reports on their performance were sent to both DMT and the Command Headquarters responsible for the unit.²¹ The training at JTC was really the first step in the objective development and assessment training program for Battalions. The reports were very detailed and proved to be a good foundation on which to continue training at a collective level.²² Sometimes the reports resulted in leadership appointment changes.²³ Not all battalions had the opportunity to undergo the structured training system prior to their first tour of Vietnam due to the circumstances of their raising, manning and embarkation but the ANZAC Battalions were fortunate to be able to follow the structured training path laid down by DMT prior to both deployments with relatively few variations to the norm.

Each battalion had to ensure that certain members successfully undertook designated, mandatory courses. It imposed a heavy load on already busy battalions and was subject to some debate as to whether a more flexible approach would have been more beneficial.

Sub-unit collective training was undertaken by battalions initially then at battalion level by Task Force and Command HQ-sponsored exercises and finally by an AHQ exercise, directed by HQ 1st Division, normally at Shoalwater Bay. Unfortunately, the monsoon season in northern Queensland coincided with the period in which the final exercise was conducted for the Townsville-based battalions. Despite eleven inches of rain in March 1969, 6RAR managed to complete successfully Exercise BRIGHT ARMOUR at Shoalwater Bay.²⁴ However, due to extensive flooding in north and central Queensland following 'The Wet' in March 1971, 4RAR's final test, Exercise MONARO MALL, was conducted in the Mount Stuart and High Range training areas. While this caused administrative challenges, it proved to be useful conditioning for the monsoon season in Vietnam.²⁵ The conduct of the final exercise led to a feeling within many battalions that they were being assessed as opposed to being exercised.²⁶ However, the preparation was worth the immense amount of time, effort and separation invested.²⁷

The three battalions worked closely together during their preparation; normally the battalion next due to deploy to Vietnam was supported in its training exercises by the battalion that would eventually relieve it in Vietnam. An excellent working relationship developed between 6 and 4RAR. 6RAR had already provided enemy, control and umpire staffs to support 1RAR for

their test exercise GRASS PARROT at Shoalwater Bay early in 1968. Almost without a break they provided similar support to 4RAR for its test exercise BELL BIRD in March 1968. In the words of the 6RAR second tour history: 'Thus began a mutual respect between 4RAR and 6RAR that was to see both Battalions through the difficult period of handing and taking over in Vietnam in May 1969.'²⁸ This close cooperative support continued during the build up of 4RAR for its second tour early in 1971 and the CO recalls: 'We wrote the first [battalion-level] exercise ourselves and 6RAR ran it for us.'²⁹ Indeed, each battalion had assisted one another with similar training support. In March 1969, 2RAR first supported 6RAR prior to their deployment and were in turn, assisted by 4RAR which had returned to Australia in May that year.^{30 31}

During their tours of duty in Vietnam the ANZAC Battalions took over the same lines in the Nui Dat base that they had occupied on previous tours. This familiarity of layout assisted with the planning of handover/takeovers. Battalion staff officers ensured that the Australian Battalion and New Zealand Companies succeeding them were on the distribution list for operational reports, intelligence summaries and other relevant documents.³² Commanding Officers of the relieving battalions all visited Vietnam on a reconnaissance, usually about six months before the unit was due to deploy. In some cases officers from RAR Battalions and 1RNZIR had also visited Vietnam on familiarisation visits from the mid-1960s on. Informal correspondence between opposite numbers in each unit was encouraged by commanding officers and proved to be very helpful prior to handover.³³

It might have been even better to have had the designated rifle company from 1RNZIR train with the RAR Battalion during its warm up and test exercises.³⁴ However, the New Zealand companies next in line for rotation became adept at using and adjusting to the RAR/ANZAC Battalion Standing Operating Procedures during their training exercises in New Zealand and Malaysia.³⁵

There were similarities in recruiting and training Australian and New Zealand infantrymen in the late 1960s. Australia and New Zealand both had National Service though it was tapering off in New Zealand. However, the Australian battalions and the New Zealand battalion did not experience any difficulties encouraging their conscripts to extend or enlist in the regulars for service in Vietnam.³⁶ With the exception of 2RAR preparing for its first tour, the battalions did not have more than 50 per cent conscripts in their manning.³⁷

Regular and Selected Servicemen had to complete recruit training followed by a further ten weeks of Corps training before being selected for possible specialist training.³⁸ Corps training was frequently conducted within the Australian battalions with the advantages outweighing the disadvantages. While it was being conducted experienced members of the unit would be undergoing promotion or specialist training courses. Development of these skills then enabled the manning of leadership appointments or specialist positions in Support or Administration Companies. Time available to complete all of the training courses was truncated due to various demands in both armies which meant long hours in the field and increased separation from family and friends in order to complete all the essential individual and collective training necessary for a unit or sub-unit about to go to war.³⁹

Australians conducted training in their homeland but the New Zealanders had to conduct their final training exercises in Malaysia. They were afforded good support by 28ANZUK Brigade but 1RNZIR had certain responsibilities in relation to their ANZUK commitment as well as providing 50 per cent of its rifle companies to the ANZAC Battalion in Vietnam.⁴⁰ This called for a fine balance in priorities and demonstrated the New Zealanders' flexibility and strong commitment to the ANZAC concept.

Typical examples of well trained Kiwis were to be found in the rifle section soldiers from 'V6'. All were regular volunteers with a minimum engagement (contract) of three years. They had completed the normal eight weeks of basic training plus RNZIR Corps training often weeks and the vast majority had a number of specialist skills, such as signaller, medic, tracker, demolition handler or Support Company specialist platoon qualifications.⁴¹ It is also interesting to note that not all Kiwis serving in Victor and Whisky companies were from the Infantry

Corps, yet they mastered infantry skills very quickly. Self preservation is a wonderful motivator! Generally Kiwi infantrymen had completed more individual training courses than the average Australian rifle section member. Up to 50 per cent of the Diggers were National Servicemen who had undergone similar periods of basic and Corps training but did not have the opportunity or time to undertake further training. It was not unusual for most specialist training to be invested in regular soldiers.⁴² However, all infantry National Servicemen were volunteers for service in Vietnam and they acquitted themselves so well that it was difficult to distinguish them from their cohort of Regular soldiers.⁴³

Although continents apart for this final training, the infantrymen of both armies were preparing for war in a familiar environment following very much the same doctrine and were building on the close-country, tropical experience of their predecessors in Papua New Guinea, Malaya and Borneo. Many of the soldiers and some officers had experienced operational service during Confrontation or during an earlier tour of Vietnam.⁴⁴ While serving in Malaysia after their tour in Borneo a number of officers and some warrant officers from 4RAR were able to put into practice during exercises with 28 ANZUK Brigade, experience picked up during familiarisation or previous operational tours of Vietnam. In addition, they provided training assistance on Australian equipment, organisation and methods to the Kiwi troops going to Vietnam.⁴⁵ This was appreciated but some of the New Zealand Companies would have preferred to have taken their British General Purpose Machine Guns that they had used successfully in Borneo to Vietnam. However, this was not to be as it would have added to the logistics burden.⁴⁶

Light-hearted Logistics

Australian soldiers have been traditionally good scroungers. Historically it seems that they have rarely been provided with sufficient resources by governments willing to commit them to conflict but reluctant to provide the necessary funds to equip them adequately for the task.⁴⁷ However, the New Zealanders suffered even more in that regard, so had become past masters at the art. Even Australians had to be vigilant!⁴⁸ More than one Australian Commanding Officer was convinced that every Kiwi relative of each soldier serving in Vietnam had somehow been provided with a pair of Australian Boots General Purpose!

On the other hand, American soldiers, by any standards, tended to be luxuriously supported by an automatic replacement and write-off logistics system for certain equipments. It worked on the basis of the type of unit, the intensity of operations it was accessed to be involved in and assumed losses. While it was true that unlike the rest of the allies in Vietnam, Australian and New Zealand forces paid their own way,⁴⁹ this cornucopia of war supplies, driven by US military motivation to ensure their fighting men lacked for nothing and backed enthusiastically by a massive American armament industry, was a godsend.

American units were both clever and generous when faced with an unending supply of new weapons etc on a regular basis. They tended to keep the new ones and give/trade their older ones to the Australians and New Zealanders. Slouch hats were popular and New Zealand Green Berets were always sought after.

Hence with both nationalities seeking to outdo one another on bartering, the ANZAC Battalions ended up with a lot more than their entitlement of weapons as well as a water truck, and a forklift. Even the ANZAC Battalion Commanding Officer's personal weapon was not on the Battalion's entitlement!⁵⁰ The additional weapons such as .50 caliber and general purpose machine guns enabled fixed field defences at Nui Dat and the Horse Shoe FSB to be left in place while the normal issue weapons could be used on patrol out from the bases.⁵¹ These were kindly handed over to successive Battalions. The early war Q accounting system was not too strict and there appeared no real need to take such temporary surpluses on charge. ANZAC excellence at scrounging did become a little embarrassing towards the end of 1971 when 1ATF withdrew from Nui Dat and bequeathed the remaining ANZAC Battalion Group with yet more surplus equipment. By this stage of the campaign Q accounting had become stricter and the poor QM staff had to take on charge a considerable amount of equipment for which the Battalion had no entitlement but in true ANZAC spirit the Kiwis helped relieve the Australians of some of this burden!

Operational Matters

ANZAC Battalions operated across the same geographic areas as the other RAR Battalions in 1ATF from 1967 to 1971. Operating in Bien Hoa Province, they provided protection in the 'Rocket Belt' out from the US logistics bases at Bien Hoa and Long Binh and screened the eastern approaches to Saigon. In Long Khanh Province they operated adjacent to Thai Forces working out of their FSB at Bearcat and on operations with the US 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment out of their FSB at Blackhorse just north of Phuoc Tuy Province. From their Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) around 1ATF FSBs at Nui Dat and the Horseshoe feature in the centre of the province, they ranged from the east in Bin Tuy Province and in the Mao Tao Mountains, west across Phuoc Tuy through Xuyen Moc, the Hac Dich to the Thi Vai/ Nui Dinh Hills and into the marsh lands of the Rung Sat. East from Long Son Island, through the central population belt of Baria, Long Dien and Dat Do. South to the Long Hai Hills and into the Long and the Light Green areas to the east, and to the edge of the Vung Tau Special Zone to the south west.

It is worth noting that these areas were those administered by the Republic of Vietnam. The enemy, however, had divided the area up differently and referred to the western area as Chau Duc and the eastern part as Xuyen Moc. Long Dat with the Minh Dam Secret Zone nestled in the Long Hai Hills, Ba Ria and Vung Tau comprised the southwestern sectors. This kept the intelligence sections busy interpreting precisely where a particular place referred to in enemy documents was actually located on allied maps.⁵²

The nature and type of operations undertaken were also the same as those of sister battalions in 1ATF. Search and destroy and reconnaissance in force operations usually meant extensive patrolling and ambushing in an area of operations in up to company strength depending on the assessed enemy strength. Cordon and search, route and harvest protection around populated areas brought the battalions in from the bush and closer to the village people. Protecting the sappers engaged on land and mine clearing tasks was a lot more demanding than ever appreciated. The anguish, futility and frustration experienced by all infantrymen and sappers who suffered a disproportionate number of casualties having to clear mines lifted from our own minefield by a resourceful enemy is best summed up by Major Peter Belt, an ANZAC Battalion company commander: 'After the initial shock I think it was the anger and frustration that was worst. If it had been a contact we could've fought the enemy on equal terms. Now we'd taken casualties without being able to retaliate.'⁵³ However, the Commander 1ATF during 1969 recalls that an Australian Defence scientist, Mr George Cawsey, sent to Vietnam to study the mine problem, thought that 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion and the sappers had won the 'Mine Battle'. Their thoroughness, and their development of skills to search, detect, isolate, identify and lift was only gained through patience and intelligence but had come at a high price in terms of casualties.⁵⁴

A new task for any infantry battalion was to undertake a stay-behind ambush; normally an activity reserved exclusively for the SAS Squadron. It was an ANZAC tracker platoon that first conducted a successful stay-behind ambush party in the abandoned FSB Dyke in April 1969; and in November that year a subsequent ANZAC tracker platoon conducted profitable small group patrols with the SAS in the area near Binh Gia.⁵⁵

Over time, Australian and New Zealand infantrymen had grown accustomed to living and operating in the physically and mentally demanding labyrinth of close tropical foliage, interspersed with rice paddies, dense secondary growth, rocky hills and mangrove swamp. In Phuoc Tuy Province there were less dangerous animals than in the jungles of Malaysia and Borneo but a few more enemy than previously experienced. Illness, disease and infection were likely to take a severe toll if hygiene was not practised carefully and malarial suppressives taken religiously by all members of the force. During decades of participating in counter-revolutionary warfare in Southeast Asia, Australians and New Zealanders had learnt much about the area and its inhabitants and were not entirely uncomfortable adjusting to the environment. They knew from the experience of the Malaya and Borneo campaigns that by working closely with a host government dedicated to halting the spread of communist revolutionary warfare, employing the right strategics at national level and using the appropriate tactics at operational level they could win. Their job was to concentrate on the operational side and do it well. And they did!⁵⁶

Without a firm foundation on which to build, all the preparation, training and integrated structures were not necessarily going to produce an effective fighting unit. Fortunately Australian and New Zealand infantrymen share certain characteristics, such as initiative, self confidence, endurance, tenacity, courage, aggressiveness, and reliability. Perhaps it is something to do with the fact that both are from relatively young nations where the respective environments can be harsh and unforgiving and people depended on one another to survive in the early days. Both armies are relatively small; there is no one else to blame—you cannot hide, and mateship breeds its own loyalty.

Much has been written over centuries about loyalty to sovereign, country and regiment, but Jerry Taylor, who served in both 2 and 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions, best sums it up when referring to fear, something that all infantrymen experience in battle (some are just reluctant to admit it): 'It's loyalty to the group, comradeship, what we in Australia call 'mateship', that really causes men to overcome fear. So the stronger that loyalty is, in my view, the better men fight. In the end, it's mainly a function of morale.'⁵⁷

In the ANZAC Battalions this mateship extended between Diggers and Kiwis. Each was aware that we were from separate nations but the 'Antipodeans' shared an inherited loyalty over many decades that encompassed one another and neither an Australian nor Kiwi individual, section, platoon or company would be prepared to let the other down in battle. They were united on this aspect of dependability—after all, it was their own unit.

This did not mean that there was not a strong competitiveness between the two in or out of the bush, particularly when it came to singing and drinking, as an Australian section commander recalls:

Kiwis—they could play harder in town than we could, but having said that, when we got into trouble with the 3rd of the 33rd (3 Battalion, 33 NVA Regiment on 21 September 1971) they were the company reacted to come and assist us ... When they arrived, they really looked the part. They looked like they meant business, and the thing I liked about them was even though they were made up of Maoris and Pakehas—they were us New Zealand/Australians, Australians/New Zealanders. They were trained under the same system as we were and I had nothing but confidence in their ability.⁵⁸

This respect was mutual, for when the bodies of the Diggers killed during the battle were carried past the Kiwis securing the track from the bunker system to the extraction point they faced inwards and shouldered arms. It was, in the words of Jerry Taylor, 'an eloquent and moving gesture: the tribute of warriors to fallen comrades'.⁵⁹

No Kiwis or Diggers were ever taken as Prisoners of War during the campaign, though in at least one fight this was pretty close!⁶⁰ However, the ANZAC Battalions took more than their share of enemy POWs. During numerous encounters the ANZAC Battalions over successive tours directly accounted for over 800 enemy killed and took in excess of 100 POWs while suffering a loss of 68 Australians and 27 Kiwis killed in battle, a ratio that was better than most.⁶¹

As a Counter Revolutionary Warfare campaign, most of the battles fought were at section, or platoon level, sometimes company and occasionally at battalion level. There were instances with our allies and in 1ATF where more senior commanders were tempted to become directly involved with the sub-unit in contact.⁶² This had to be finely balanced and not impose on a junior commander fully occupied fighting the battle at hand.⁶³

Just as there is usually some difference that characterises each rifle company in the manner in which they operate within their own battalion, so too are there differences between battalions and armies of other nations. These differences may be brought about by a numbers of factors, morale, leadership, experience, cohesiveness, training, fitness, the will to win—the list is long.

The Tracker Platoon of 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion operated closely with Americans, New Zealanders and Australians during the intense period of operations during 1968-69. In various terrain from thick bamboo-clumped jungle, rice paddies and relatively open savannah bush. In the dry and the monsoon wet. On foot, by boat, with armoured cavalry and inserted by Hughes 500 and UH 1H Huey helicopters.⁶⁴ It was a broadening experience that qualified them to make a fairly balanced assessment after fighting alongside many different sub-units from different armies.

The Trackers were impressed by the firepower and logistic support provided to the US Army forces but unimpressed by the noise and general disorganisation exhibited at squad, platoon and company level. Not surprisingly, they were much more comfortable operating with their own ANZAC companies.

Australian rifle companies were steady, stealthy and determined; some more conservative than others and some moved as fast as was tactically feasible. Their field hygiene was good and they were encouraged to exercise good fire discipline. The Diggers demonstrated great endurance during sustained operations and were tenacious in battle.

On the other hand, the New Zealand rifle companies were relatively fast, a little noisier but the Kiwis tended to assimilate more with their surroundings. They were comfortable with the notion of being warriors. The New Zealand platoons could keep up with a tracker dog on a hot trail and with one memorable exception, provided immediate support from their MG in a contact.⁶⁵ More often than not MG fire in support was provided from both flanks. Such aggressive action chewed up ammunition and after one contact when the RAAF were unable to re-supply them, the Kiwis resolved to carry more, up to 1200 rounds of linked ammunition per GPMG was not unusual. This probably explained why they had such good appetites, to keep the energy levels up!

Both Australian and New Zealand platoons and companies quickly perfected the use of claymore mines in ambush. It was one of the ANZAC Battalions that first successfully used the multiple firing device for claymores developed by an RAE officer regularly attached to the companies. They were not reluctant to employ fire support, particularly from 101, 104, 107 and 108 Field Batteries, RAA, who provided direct support to the ANZAC Battalions. Indeed, successive ANZAC Battalions relished using additional fire support, employed it effectively and established excellent working relations with all of the supporting arms.⁶⁶

Effectiveness

Why did the ANZAC Battalions work so effectively together in battle?

They were of similar background, training, and experience. Australian Forward Observers (FO and FO Ack), New Zealand Mortar Fire Controllers (MFC), Mortar Numbers, Assault Pioneers, drivers and occasionally Signallers, were integrated in supporting Australian and New Zealand companies. They were proud and were not going to let each other down when the going got tough.

As the campaign progressed it was arranged for the New Zealand Army Major who was selected to be the Second in Command (2ic) of the next ANZAC Battalion to join the RAR Battalion in Australia during the last two or three months of the work up prior to deployment to Vietnam. This was a good arrangement and it helped him to settle into the unit, become familiar with the procedures and get to know members of the battalion and be recognised for the important role he was to play for not only was he the 2ic but the New Zealand Component Commander. It was no token appointment. On two occasions in 1969 and 1970 when the Commanding Officers of 6 and 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions were wounded in action, their New Zealand 2ics took over and commanded the Battalions on operations until they returned to duty. There were some administrative restrictions regarding Australian administrative correspondence but this was sorted out by having the documents approved by the Commanding Officers from their sickbeds-duty first!^{67 68}

One critical observation from an experienced Australian Regimental Sergeant Major noted: 'The New Zealand companies integrated reasonably well, with the exception of disciplinary control. We had the ludicrous situation where the CO could make decisions affecting the lives of New Zealanders but could not discipline them. That duty fell to the 2ic.⁶⁹ However, given the Australian Army's own experience in the Boer War with disciplinary powers conferred to commanders from another ally, this situation was undoubtedly recognised but understood and accepted in the interests of overall unity and cooperation between the two armies.⁷⁰

A number of the command appointments in an ANZAC Battalion were more challenging than the equivalent appointments in an RAR Battalion. At the top, the Australian Commanding Officer had the support and counsel of a carefully selected New Zealand 2ic. The 2ic of both Support and Administration Companies were New Zealanders and on one occasion, the Intelligence Officer and Sergeant were New Zealanders too. In the Mortar and Assault Pioneer Platoons there was always at least one or more New Zealand Section and Signals and Transport Platoons harboured some New Zealand soldiers from time to time. Not surprisingly, a firm, fair and tactful approach seemed to be the most effective way of leading such a group. The ground rules were laid down and any deviations by Diggers or Kiwis dealt with exercising common sense backed up by the military disciplinary systems in place for both Armies.⁷¹

Most of the officers had trained together at RMC Duntroon or OCS Portsea and got on well together. However, to be selected to command a New Zealand rifle company, the officer had to have attended Staff College. This usually meant that the Kiwi OCs tended to be more senior and experienced than their Australian counterparts who had often been granted temporary major rank on assuming command of their company, just one consequence of a rapidly expanding Army. To balance this, it was not uncommon for the Australian to be serving his second tour of the campaign, so he was not lacking when it came to operational experience. It is interesting to note that when researching official documents for his book *In The ANZAC Spirit*, the author observed that operational reports written by New Zealanders contained more descriptive detail and tended to refer more to individuals than similar Australian reports.⁷² Perhaps this was due to their additional staff training and the more personal nature afforded a smaller army.

In the 22 years of active service from the start of the Korean War to the end of the campaign in Vietnam, no member serving in a battalion of the RAR had been awarded a Victoria Cross despite the fact that infantrymen had carried the brunt of fighting in many fierce actions during a number of campaigns.⁷³ Outstanding feats of bravery and leadership were recognised by awards and in this campaign 'V3' was the most highly decorated NZ sub-unit since the Second World War.⁷⁴ And while no Kiwis or Diggers were awarded the Victoria Cross while serving in an ANZAC Battalion they certainly lived up to their twin regimental mottos of 'Onward' (1RNZIR) and 'Duty First' (RAR) throughout the nearly five years they fought side by side against a common foe. One ANZAC Battalion Commanding Officer recalled with justifiable pride that 'V4' 'was the top scoring New Zealand company of the war'.⁷⁵ And on another occasion when one of his Australian Company Headquarters of five men engaged 100 approaching enemy, he noted that 'The whole Battalion gave and expected that sort of commitment'.⁷⁶

In a different ANZAC Battalion, a New Zealand platoon from 'V3' with an Australian Tracker team attached, was ambushed as they came across a bunker system. The lead section commander was killed, the rest of the section wounded or pinned down and the New Zealand Platoon commander wounded. There was no FO or MFC so the Australian Tracker Platoon commander called on the New Zealand Platoon Sergeant to do a left flanking assault while he went forward to where the Australian Gunner signaller was located to call in fire support. The artillery fire was accurate and the assault by the remaining malaria-depleted sections under the platoon sergeant was successful in routing the enemy from the bunkers. Swift, cooperative and aggressive action regained the initiative. Everyone just did their job. These few examples of many ANZAC actions were the personification of 'Onward' and 'Duty First' in ANZAC Battalions. They sought no accolades but fought fiercely to live up to the reputations established by their grandfathers at Gallipoli and their fathers in Greece and Crete.

Was the integration of Australian and New Zealand infantrymen into ANZAC Battalions really effective or was it just diplomatic utterances when senior commanders referred to them? For a start the comments came from both nationalities and were given freely. It may have been even more enlightening to have the benefit of what the 'The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975' might note in this regard. It is disappointing that the volumes intended to cover the period of the most intensive ground combat fighting of the campaign during the ANZAC Battalions' service in Vietnam are yet to be published more than 30 years after the withdrawal. No official history of New Zealand's participation in the campaign in Vietnam has been completed, although the Department of Internal Affairs War Histories Section has commissioned Dr Ian McGibbon and a number of professional writers to rectify this. Some reference to the companies that went to Vietnam from 1RNZIR when based in Singapore is made in the 1RNZIR 25th *Anniversary Journal*, under 'Vietnam Years'.⁷⁷ Fortunately a number of books have been written about the ANZAC Battalions by Australians, and *Mission in Vietnam* was edited by a New Zealand platoon commander from 'V3'.

In the foreword of the first pictorial history of an ANZAC Battalion, the Commanding Officer, then Lieutenant Colonel N R Charlesworth, wrote: 'The integration was and will continue to be a great success and to me, it has been a great honour to command the first ANZAC Battalion'.⁷⁸ Again when commenting on the experience of its second tour, the editor of the pictorial history noted that 'the ANZAC integration has been a great success, 2RAR is proud to have been part of it, and particularly proud to have formed the nucleus of the first Battalion'.⁷⁹ In the foreword to John Church's account of 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's second tour, General Sir Phillip Bennett, who had himself been CO of 1RAR on their second tour operating alongside an ANZAC Battalion, wrote in broader terms: 'Personal accounts such as this do much to provide a more accurate understanding of what active service meant for some 50,000 young Australians and New Zealanders who proved conclusively that they were second to none and worthy to be honoured with the name ANZAC'.⁸⁰

In 1969, the Commander of 1ATF, then Brigadier C M I Pearson, wrote: 'In the latter period [of 4RAR history] the major change has been the absorption of the New Zealand element into the Battalion I believe such a close integration of soldiers of two nations into one unit has never been as successful as in 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Bn'.⁸¹ More recently, he recalled that on 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's introductory operation their performance had been outstanding. He believed that the integration of the two New Zealand rifle companies had been successful, particularly in the field.⁸²

Brigadier B A McDonald, Commander of 1ATF during 4RAR/NZ(ANZAC) Battalion's second tour in 1971, wrote prophetically in the foreword to the pictorial history of the Battalion's second tour: 'This book ... gives a valuable insight into the close integration of the Australian and New Zealand elements of the Battalion which, in my opinion, was most successful and which augurs well for the future military associations of our two nations'.⁸³ The then CO, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Hughes, believed that 'The special ANZAC relationship was an added spur to our Battalion'.⁸⁴

Early in December 1971, as the last ANZAC Battalion departed Vietnam, the CO 4RAR sent the following signal to CO 1RNZIR: 'Today I reluctantly lose 'V' Coy and return them to your command. The ANZAC tradition has been well maintained and added to by 'V' Coy. All ranks 4RAR send greetings to 1RNZIR with special reference to their many friends in 'V' Coy'.⁸⁵

In the history of the RAR summarising the demanding contribution New Zealand and Australian Infantrymen made to the Vietnamese campaign, David Horner wrote: 'The part played by the infantrymen of the RNZIR as members of the ANZAC Battalions, and the RNZ Artillery, was a significant one, and highlighted once more the sharp fighting edge of the New Zealand soldier. But most of all, the war demonstrated yet again that Australian infantrymen, properly led, are among the best in the world'.⁸⁶

Perhaps the last accolade should come from the letter written by Major General L A Pearce, the Chief of the New Zealand General Staff, to Lieutenant General M F Brogan, the Australian Chief of the General Staff, as the ANZAC Battalion was departing Vietnam:

Since this will mark the end of approximately six years of close association of Australians and New Zealanders ... I would not wish the event to pass unrecorded. In looking back over the statistics I find that we have had some 3000 soldiers serving in the Republic of Vietnam over the period. However, statistics mean little. What has meant a great deal is that once again our soldiers have served alongside Australians. Again they learned to appreciate the staunch qualities of the Australian soldier and, in operating towards common goals in an exacting environment, gained much from this mutual experience. While it is of some regret that we were not able to contribute a New Zealand Battalion, I know our Infantry took great pride in and shared the achievements of the ANZAC Battalions in which they served ... This withdrawal from the Republic of Vietnam sees the closing of yet another chapter in the history of our combined military endeavour which began on the Gallipoli Peninsula. We are proud that we have been associated with you in Vietnam.⁸⁷

All of the foregoing comments were written by experienced senior commanders with first-hand experience of the ANZAC infantrymen. No strangers to battle themselves, they were not prone to bestowing praise lightly. However, integration of two proud fighting units is like a marriage. For it to be successful both sides have to work at it. There were difficult and delicate situations which had to be worked through. And they were—with the minimum of disruption and a fair amount of goodwill.⁸⁸

The ANZAC Spirit Lives On

The integration of Australian and New Zealander infantrymen into the ANZAC Battalion provided the New Zealand Government with a vehicle to increase its commitment to the war in Vietnam without the enormous drain on their limited Defence resources that fielding their own Battalion in addition to the Field Battery would have imposed.

Provision of trained, regular New Zealand Rifle Companies eased the manpower and training burden on the Australian Army at a time when it was stretched to meet all of its commitments. It allowed the Australian Government to maintain a three Battalion Task Force in Vietnam throughout the most intense ground combat period of the campaign. The effectiveness of the successive ANZAC Battalion operations proved that even though training separately, Australians and New Zealanders operating with an integrated chain of command could combine together to once more be a formidable fighting force—'Second to None'. This was attested to by successive Commanders of 1ATF and more recently by Lieutenant General D S McIver, a former 2ic of an ANZAC Battalion, who recalled:

The second tour of 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion was operationally successful. The command relationships which had been established previously and were employed successfully on this tour of duty have provided the basis for more recent deployments of military forces from our two nations on a range of international commitments. I believe that the association worked well and the Battalion as a whole has every right to be proud of what it achieved and the way it set about those achievements.⁸⁹

Much was made by politicians and a great deal written and filmed by the media earlier this year when Alec Campbell passed away. He was reported to be the last ANZAC and the last known veteran of the Gallipoli campaign. More accurately, the Veterans' Affairs Minister Danna Vale said that with his death Australia had lost its last living link to the birthplace of the ANZAC spirit.⁹⁰ General Sir Ian Hamilton, the Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force at the Dardanelles in 1915 said: 'Before the war, who had ever heard of ANZAC? Hereafter, who will ever forget it?'⁹¹

As Major General Pearce wrote in 1971, the campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula was just the start of the ANZAC military endeavour. Australians and New Zealanders continued to serve along side one another on active service through the Western Front in the First World War, the Middle East, Greece, Crete and the South West Pacific in the Second World War and thereafter in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. In all respects, throughout the decades, successive generations of Diggers and Kiwis have upheld the reputation of the soldiers who first created the ANZAC spirit with their audacious tactics, swift aggressive action and a laconic approach which belies their grim professional determination not to be beaten by the enemy, nor the task at hand.

Indeed Field Marshal Sir William Slim described the ANZACs best when he wrote: 'In my life I have fought with and against many kinds of soldiers, but I have never seen any who carried themselves more nobly in battle, more daringly or more stout-heartedly, than those men of ANZAC.'⁹²

The last ANZAC is far from dead. By my reckoning, some 7000 Australian and New Zealand veterans served in 2, 4 and 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalions during the period of the campaign in Vietnam. Precise numbers are difficult to ascertain as some soldiers from both armies served more than one tour. While it is true that many have passed away due to various causes since the end of 1971 and those that remain may not be as fit or agile as they were 30 years ago, there are plenty of genuine ANZACS alive now. And just to reinforce that fact, 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion will be holding its next reunion in February 2005, in New Zealand.

Endnotes

1. Major A R Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion, 1970-71* (Sydney: Printcraft Press, 1972), 13.
2. Major K E Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion in South Vietnam, 1967-68* (Sydney Printcraft Press, 1968), 7.
3. Captain R L Sayce and Lieutenant M D O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth* (Sydney, Printcraft Press, 1972), frontispiece. (Bill Crooks researched this information during the preparation of the book. There is a memorial statue in the garden between Savoy Place and Victoria Embankment in London).
4. David Horner, *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 276.
5. Jerry Taylor, *Last Out: 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion's Second Tour in Vietnam* (Sydney-Allen & Unwin, 2001), 249.
6. *The Division in Battle*, Pamphlet No 8, *Infantry* (Canberra: Army Headquarters, 1969), 1.
7. Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 12.
8. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 92.
11. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.
12. Frank Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 145-6.
13. D M Horner, *SAS: Phantoms of the Jungle* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1989), 70-2.
14. Horner, *Duty First*, 187.
15. Taylor, *Last Out*, x.
16. *Ibid*; Major General R N L Hopkins, *Australian Armour* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1978), 276, 290.
17. Major L D Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion History 1967-1970* (Singapore: Times Printers, 1972). 6.
18. *Ibid* ,116; Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 277.
19. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 43.
20. Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, 296.
21. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam* (Singleton: Directorate of Infantry, 1973), 17.
22. Taylor, *Last Out*, 113.
23. J M Church, *Second to None* (Sydney: Army Doctrine Centre, 1995). 39; Taylor, *Last Out*, xi, Gary McKay, *Delta Four: The Australian Riflemen in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 8.
24. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 25.
25. Taylor, *Last Out*, 118.
26. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam*, 17.
27. Horner, *Duty First*, 279.
28. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 6.
29. Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.
30. Church, *Second to None*, 36-9.
31. Taylor, *Last Out*, x.
32. *Ibid*, xi.
33. *Ibid*, x.
34. Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.
35. *Ibid*, viii; Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 95.
36. Taylor, *Last Out*, 67; Lieutenant Colonel Brian Avery, *Our Secret War* (Rosebud, Vic: Slouch Hat Publications, 2001), 193-3.
37. Horner, *Duty First*, 189; Jerry Taylor, *Last Out*, xi.
38. *Infantry Battalion Lessons from Vietnam*, 17.
39. Taylor, *Last Out*, 66-7; Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 30; Church, *Second to None*, 41.
40. Taylor, *Last Out*, 66-7.
41. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 94-5.
42. Taylor, *Last Out*, 10.
43. *Ibid*, 15.
44. *Ibid*, xii 251; Church, *Second to None*, 31.
45. Avery, *Our Secret War*, 182.
46. Ross Miller, Platoon commander, 'V3', 1968, notes to the author, August, 2002; Taylor, *Last Out*, 75.
47. Gavin Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 1 (Army), Vol I, To Benghazi* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952), 39-12; S J Butlin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 4 (Civil), War Economy, 1939-42* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1955), 256-8.
48. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 132.
49. Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam*, vii.
50. The weapon, a short barreled armalite, is on display in the Vietnam Campaign Section of the Australian War Memorial.
51. Taylor, *Last Out*, 24.

52. John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', vol VII (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), maps 138 and 141.
53. Horner, *Duty First*, 267-8.
54. Discussion, Major General C M I Pearson and the author, 12 September 2002.
55. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 91.
56. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 165-7.
57. McKay, *Delta Four*, 118.
58. Ibid, 222.
59. Taylor, *Last Out*, 232.
60. Lieutenant J R Webb, *Mission in Vietnam* (Singapore: Times Printers, 1969), 122-3.
61. Author's calculations from records available. 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion first tour statistics include the period before they became the first ANZAC Battalion in the campaign.
62. Church, *Second to None*, 5, 159.
63. Ibid, 159-60.
64. Webb, *Mission in Vietnam*, 93.
65. The Machine Gunner was charged by his platoon commander for failing to provide immediate covering fire when the tracker platoon commander and a 'V3' Kiwi section commander were fired upon when examining a fresh track during Operation CAPITAL, November, 1968.
66. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 146.
67. Johnson, *6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion*, 67.
68. Church, *Second to None*, 161.
69. Horner, *Duty First*, 365-6.
70. A K MacDougall, *ANZACS: Australians at War* (Sydney: Reed Books Pty Ltd, 1991), 12-13.
71. Taylor, *Last Out*, 77-8.
72. Discussion between Brian Avery and the author, August, 2002.
73. Horner, *Duty First*, 349.
74. Ross Miller, platoon commander, 'V3', 1968, notes to the author, August, 2002.
75. David Butler, 'Reflective Thoughts and Proud Moments', 6RAR Newsletter [late 1990s].
76. Horner, *Duty First*, 347-8.
77. Ibid.
78. Newman, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 7.
79. Roberts, *The ANZAC Battalion*, 15.
80. Church, *Second to None*, ii.
81. Webb, *Mission in Vietnam*, vi.
82. Discussion, Major General C M I Pearson and the author, 12 September 2002.
83. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, Foreword.
84. Taylor, *Last Out*, xiii.
85. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 201.
86. Horner, *Duty First*, 279-80.
87. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, 201.
88. Horner, *Duty First*, 366.
89. Taylor, *Last Out*, 77-8.
90. Don Woolford, article in the *Canberra Times*, 17 May 2002.
91. Doug Conway, article in the *Canberra Times*, 17 May 2002.
92. Sayce and O'Neill, *The Fighting Fourth*, frontispiece.