



Australian Government

Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal

**REPORT OF THE INQUIRY INTO UNIT RECOGNITION FOR
SERVICE AT THE BATTLES OF FIRE SUPPORT BASES
CORAL AND BALMORAL**

LETTER OF TRANSMISSION

Inquiry into Unit Recognition for Service at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral

The Hon Darren Chester MP
Minister for Defence Personnel
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I am pleased to present the report of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal on the *Inquiry into Unit Recognition for Service at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral*.

The inquiry was conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference approved by the Government on 12 April 2017.

The Members of the Tribunal who conducted this inquiry arrived unanimously at the findings and recommendations set out in its report.

In accordance with the *Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal Procedural Rules 2011*, as amended, a copy of this report will be published on the Tribunal's website – www.defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au – 20 working days after the day this report is provided to you.

I would be grateful for advice on your response to this report when available.

Yours sincerely



Mark Sullivan
Chair
Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal

3 April 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On 12 April 2017, the Assistant Minister for Defence, the Hon. Dan Tehan MP, directed the Tribunal to inquire into and report on *Recognition for Australian units that served at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral in Vietnam in 1968* (the Inquiry). The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are set out in full at **Annex A** of the Report of the Inquiry.

2. The Inquiry was undertaken by the following Members of the Tribunal:

- Mr Mark Sullivan AO (Chair)
- Mr Graham Mowbray
- Mr David Ashley AM
- Air Vice-Marshal John Quafe AM (Retd)

SUBMISSIONS

3. The Inquiry received 170 written submissions. In the main, submissions recounted very powerful narratives of personal experience. Throughout the submissions the theme of teamwork and collective gallantry is readily apparent and consistently referenced. The message to the Tribunal from all of the veterans of the battles was that, regardless of corps and parent unit, they had fought as a coordinated group and that everybody who was there deserve recognition.

HEARINGS

4. Public hearings were held in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra. The Tribunal heard oral submissions from 34 submitters, including the Department of Defence. On the basis of submissions received and the public hearings, it is quite apparent that the veteran community is united in favour of recognition, by way of a Unit Citation for Gallantry, for all participants in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral.

DEFENCE POSITION

5. On 1 September 2017, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, AO, CSC, RAN, Acting Chief of the Defence Force submitted to the Tribunal that Defence does not support the retrospective awarding of unit citations such as the Meritorious Unit Citation or the Unit Citation for Gallantry for units which served prior to 1991. Vice Admiral Griggs also advised that Defence considered the application of contemporary criteria to military activities which occurred almost half a century ago to be inappropriate. He also advised that examining the activities of individual units or battles in isolation, as opposed to their role within the context of the wider conflict, may result in unequal recognition. At the Brisbane and Canberra hearings in November 2017, Brigadier Leigh Wilton, the Director-General of Personnel - Army reinforced the Defence position regarding retrospectivity, noting that for unit citations the issue was primarily based on the nature of these awards not being available prior to 1991. Hence the objection noted by Defence specifically relates to retrospective unit awards for actions prior to 1991.

FINDINGS

6. The Tribunal found that:
 - a. all the men who fought at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral displayed collective gallantry worthy of unit recognition;
 - b. the most appropriate unit recognition was the Unit Citation for Gallantry, and the most appropriate recipient unit was the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward);
 - c. although outside of the Inquiry's terms of reference, the Tribunal also concluded that those servicemen from United States and New Zealand units who participated in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral under the command of the 1 Australian Task Force (Forward) should also be considered for recognition;
 - d. to capture the legacy of the collective gallantry displayed by Australian servicemen at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, those Australian units that fought at Fire Support Bases Coral or Balmoral as essentially complete units, should also be recommended for a Unit Citation for Gallantry; and
 - e. the creation of this class of award in 1991 introduced a significant change to the means by which units could be recognised, and that the consideration of unit citations for the service of units prior to 1991 presents a challenge for the honours and awards system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: To recognise all participants in the battles, the Tribunal recommends that the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) be awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for extraordinary gallantry in action at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968.

Recommendation 2: The Tribunal recommends that no minimum period of service with the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) in AO SURFERS between the dates 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968 be imposed as eligibility criteria for individual entitlement to wear this award.

Recommendation 3: To capture the legacy of the gallantry displayed by participants in the battles, the Tribunal recommends that the following Australian units substantively deployed to AO SURFERS between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968 be awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for extraordinary gallantry in action at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral:

- 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment
- 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment
- A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
- C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment
- 12th Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery
- 1st Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers

Recommendation 4: With regard to the unique contributions of No 9 Squadron RAAF and 161 Reconnaissance Flight, the Tribunal recommends that any 9 Squadron or 161 Reconnaissance Flight members who flew missions in direct support of the Battles of Coral and Balmoral, or who were forward deployed to the Fire Support Bases and therefore attached to 1st Australian Task Force (Forward), be entitled to wear the insignia.

Recommendation 5: The Tribunal recommends that servicemen from United States and New Zealand units who participated in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral under the command of the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) should also be considered for recognition.

REPORT OF THE TRIBUNAL

BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY

1. In April 2011, a Ministerial media statement was released announcing the commencement of the Tribunal's *Inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour* (the Valour Inquiry) and calling for submissions. The Terms of Reference for the Valour Inquiry included that:

*... the Tribunal is also directed to receive submissions supporting the recognition of acts of gallantry or valour by other members of the Defence Force ... the Tribunal is to report to the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence on the detail of the additional submissions received in order for the Government to determine whether a proposal for recognition should be referred to the Tribunal for review.*¹

2. On 22 June 2011, Major Winston Grimes CSC (Retd), a veteran of the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral, provided a submission to the Valour Inquiry recommending that 102 Field Battery be awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for its role in the battle.² A further letter in support of Major Grimes' submission was received from Colonel Ian Ahearn (Retd), the Gun Position Officer of 102 Field Battery during the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral.³

3. At the conclusion of the Valour Inquiry, the Chair of the Tribunal conveyed to the Government a number of submissions seeking 'a unit citation or group award' and recommending that the matters 'be formally and separately referred to the Tribunal for Inquiry'. These included the submissions in respect of 102 Field Battery.⁴ In March 2013 the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, Senator the Hon. David Feeney, referred the group submissions to the Chief of Defence Force seeking his advice on whether respective Service Chiefs thought the Tribunal should conduct Inquiries.⁵

4. On 5 May 2015 the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison AO, wrote to Major Grimes advising him that following a 'desktop review' of the submissions in respect of 102 Field Battery referred by Government to the Chief of the Defence Force, Army noted that the Unit Citation for Gallantry was not created until 1991, and that 'as the honour did not exist at the time of the battle, it was not possible for maladministration, or a lack of due process that would warrant (any) further review'. The Chief of Army's letter went on to state that in creating the Unit Citation for Gallantry, 'Army does not believe the intent was to go back and review the actions of units in previous wars, and that the use of unit citations as a means of appeasement in the place of individual awards is inappropriate and compromises the integrity of the honours and awards system'. Finally, the Chief of Army's letter advised Major Grimes that should he wish to appeal the decision, he could do so by way of an application for review to the Tribunal.⁶ This advice was incorrect, given the Australian Unit

¹ Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, *Report of the Inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour*, 2013, p. ix-x.

² Major W.H. Grimes CSC (Retd), submission to the Tribunal dated 22 June 2011, later referred to as Submission 228 to the Valour Inquiry.

³ Colonel I. Ahearn (Retd), submission to the Tribunal dated 10 December 2012, later referred to as submission 153 to the Valour Inquiry.

⁴ DHAAT/OUT/2013/039, letter to the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence dated 6 February 2013.

⁵ Parliamentary Secretary for Defence letter to the Chief of Defence Force dated 14 March 2013.

⁶ OCA/OUT/2015/R21029943, letter to Major Grimes dated 5 May 2015.

Citations were not listed as ‘defence honours’ under the *Defence Force Regulations 1952*, which at that time listed the defence honours that could be considered under the Tribunal’s review function.

5. On 28 February 2016, Brigadier Neil Weekes AM, MC (Retd), on behalf of the Coral Balmoral Veterans Working Group, wrote directly to the Chief of Army seeking the award of the Unit Citation for Gallantry to all units and sub-units that participated in the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral.⁷ On 24 August 2016, the Chief of Army provided Brigadier Weekes with similar advice that had been given to Major Grimes, and went on to also advise Brigadier Weekes that the decision not to recommend those units and sub-units for a Unit Citation for Gallantry was reviewable in the Tribunal.⁸

6. After receiving advice from the Tribunal Secretariat that the above advice was incorrect, the Coral Balmoral Veterans Working Group made a number of submissions to Government seeking consideration of the matter, by way of an Inquiry, in the Tribunal. Major Grimes and a number of other veterans also made individual submissions and representations directly and through Members of Parliament. The Tribunal understands that Brigadier Weekes passed away in March 2017.

7. On 12 April 2017, the Minister for Defence Personnel, the Hon. Dan Tehan MP, wrote to the Tribunal directing it to undertake an Inquiry into the matter of recognition for service at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, in accordance with Terms of Reference approved by Government on the same date.⁹ The Terms of Reference are set out in full at **Annex A**.

8. In accepting an earlier recommendation from the Tribunal to amend the regulations to restrict the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation and the Unit Citation for Gallantry to units that served after 1991, the Government has effectively drawn a conclusion to the examination of further retrospective unit recognition following this Inquiry and the Inquiry into recognition for the Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam.^{10 11}

Constitution of the Inquiry panel

9. The Inquiry was undertaken by the following members of the Tribunal:

- Mr Mark Sullivan AO (Chair)
- Mr Graham Mowbray
- Mr David Ashley AM
- Air Vice-Marshal John Quaipe AM (Retd)

10. No conflicts of interest were declared.

⁷ Letter, 28 February 2016, Brigadier Neil Weekes AM, MC, on behalf of the Coral Balmoral Veterans Group Working Committee to the Chief of Army.

⁸ OCA/OUT/2016/R27004049, letter to Brigadier Weekes dated 24 August 2016.

⁹ MA17-001337, letter to Mr Mark Sullivan, dated 12 April 2014.

¹⁰ Inquiry into *Recognition for Service with 547 Signal Troop in Vietnam from 1966 to 1971* dated 7 May 2015 – Recommendation 3 – ‘That the Minister consider an amendment to the regulations to restrict the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation and the Unit Citation for Gallantry to units that served after 1991...’

¹¹ Minister for Defence Personnel MA16-002605 received by the Tribunal on 22 November 2016 ‘I am pleased to inform you that the second and third recommendations were also accepted by Government to ... develop amendments to the regulations to restrict the award of the MUC and UCG to units that served after 1991’.

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

The Inquiry Terms of Reference

11. The Terms of Reference informed the methodology adopted by the Tribunal, although the Terms of Reference specified that the Tribunal was to determine its own procedures, in accordance with the general principles of procedural fairness.

12. The Tribunal was directed to examine relevant evidence and consider whether it is appropriate that any Australian military units who participated in the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral be awarded an Australian unit decoration or another further form of recognition for service in those battles between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968.

Submissions

13. The Tribunal received 170 written submissions. Details of the submissions are set out at **Annex B**.

Public hearings

14. The Tribunal decided that it would hear from a broad range of submitters as witnesses and would give them an opportunity to elaborate upon their written submissions, where a written submission had been made. Public hearings were conducted over five separate days in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra. The Tribunal heard 33 oral submissions as well as submissions from Defence. Details of the public hearings are set out at **Annex C**.

15. Submitters who attended were invited to speak to their written submissions, and the Tribunal asked questions.

16. Defence was invited to attend each hearing day.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

17. The Tribunal was guided in its understanding of the battles by the available histories, the many personal accounts provided in the 170 submissions received, oral presentations, a dedicated briefing provided by Mr Ashley Ekins, Head of the Military History Section of the Australian War Memorial, and its own research material. This report makes no attempt to capture the detail of the battles other than to provide a brief summary of the historical background as context.

18. The Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral occurred to the north-east of Saigon in an area important to those North Vietnamese Army offensive operations being conducted, and planned, against Saigon in 1968. As part of a larger allied operation *Toan Thang*, elements of the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) were deployed as 1ATF (Forward)[Fwd] to an Area of Operations (AO) in the Bien Hoa province north of Tan Uyen and the Dong Nar River defined as 'AO SURFERS'. This deployment was an 'all consuming' operation for 1ATF conducted some 120 kilometres from their base in Nui Dat and well outside of their normal operating area in the Phuoc Tuy province.

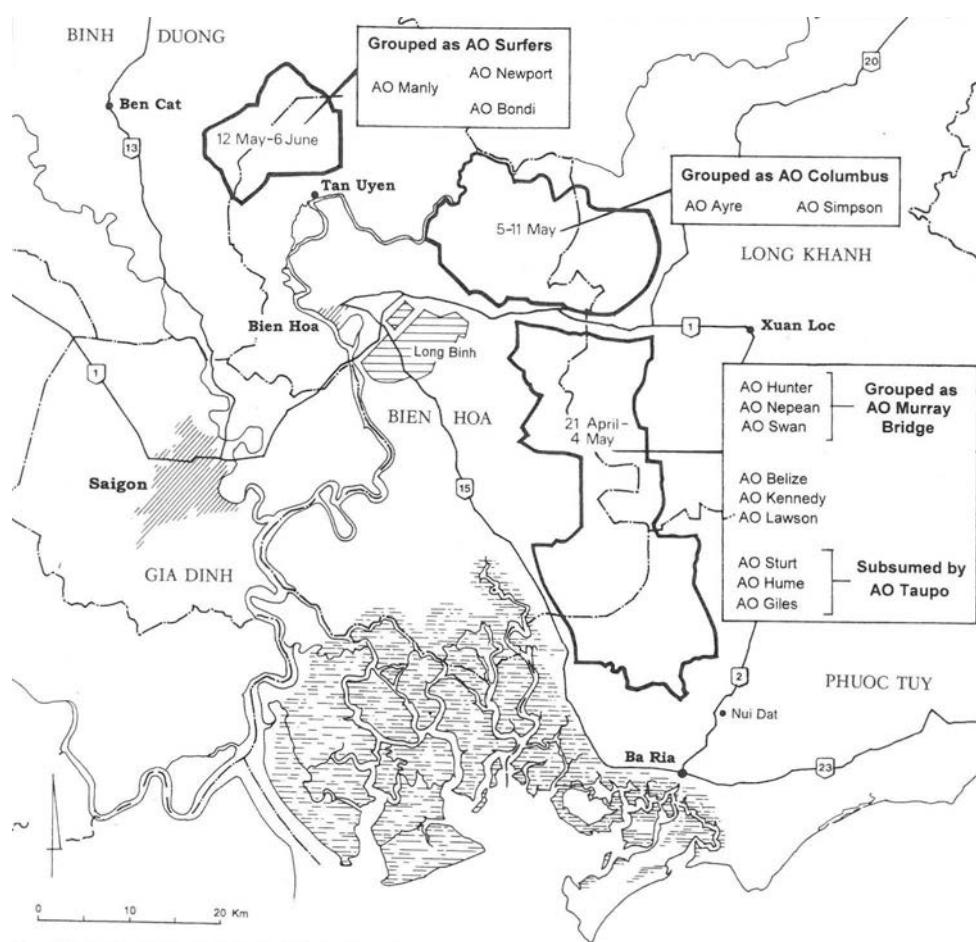


Figure 1. Extract from *On the Offensive* detailing the Areas of operation in Bien Ho province.¹²

¹² McNeill & Ekins, *On the Offensive – the Australian Army in the Vietnam War 1967-1968*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p351

19. Planning for Operation *Toan Thang* included the establishment of battalion patrol bases 'Coral, Coogee and Balmoral'. Deployment to AO SURFERS commenced on 12 May 1968. Early in the morning of 13 May 1968, Fire Support Base Coral came under heavy and accurate mortar, rocket-propelled grenade and recoilless-rifle fire, followed by a determined infantry attack in estimated battalion strength. This attack was followed by a regimental strength attack on the night of 15/16 May. In the next phase of the battle, the task force deployed tanks in close support of infantry to conduct company-sized reconnaissance-in-force operations, locating and destroying enemy installations. Fire Support Base Balmoral was attacked with coordinated mortar and ground attacks on the nights of 25/26 May and 27/28 May 1968.¹³

20. Throughout the twenty-six day duration of the deployment, elements of the entire 1ATF (Fwd) were involved in defending regimental and battalion attacks, endured mortar, rocket-propelled grenade and recoilless-rifle fire, and conducted offensive action against well prepared and defended enemy bunker systems. A force comprising no more than 3000 Australians prevailed against a well prepared and numerically superior enemy. The fighting within AO SURFERS commenced with a desperate defensive action, where Australian positions and the defensive perimeter were overrun by a determined enemy and then re-taken by the Australian defenders. Over the period of the deployment, 1ATF (Fwd) turned a desperate defensive battle into a battle of Australian domination.

21. The official history describes the Battles of Coral and Balmoral in the following terms;

*During Operation Toan Thang the Australians met the North Vietnamese Army for the first time in regimental strength. Operating in depth against enemy main forces in what were almost conventional warfare engagements, the Australians fought their largest, most hazardous and most sustained battles of the war...The Australians withstood massed enemy attacks in which two of their positions were partly overrun, and, in turn, patrolling companies assaulted well-defended enemy bunker systems in fierce close-quarter actions. These battles also provided the first major test for Australian tanks in Vietnam.*¹⁴

22. Author Lex McAulay in his history of the battles, introduces his work by describing as noteworthy the '*duration, the numbers of Australians involved, and (the) enemy reaction*'. He goes on to state that '*(t)wo battalions of Australian infantry, with artillery and armoured support, helped break up North Vietnamese attacks of the capital city of Saigon, at a time when losses of men meant nothing to Hanoi in its attempt to dominate the "peace talks" in Paris*'.¹⁵

23. A total of 26 Australian soldiers died during the battles and over 100 were wounded. The following individual awards were made for action in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral.¹⁶

¹³ McNeill & Ekins, *On the Offensive*, p 349

¹⁴ McNeill & Ekins, *On the Offensive*, p 349.

¹⁵ L McAulay, *The Battle of Coral – Vietnam Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, May 1968*, Century Hutchinson Australia, Milsons Point, 1988, p 2

¹⁶ In some cases, awards recognised participation in other operations.

Military Cross

Major I.L.G. Campbell, OC C Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR)

Lieutenant M.R. John, OC 11 Platoon, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR)

Major P.R. Phillips, OC D Company, 3RAR

2nd Lieutenant J.P. Salter, OC 10 Platoon, 1RAR

2nd Lieutenant N.H. Weekes, OC 3 Platoon, 1RAR

Distinguished Conduct Medal

Corporal B. Flematti, Acting Platoon Sergeant, 3 Platoon, 1RAR

Lance Corporal D.J. Griffiths, Section 2IC, 7 Platoon, 1RAR

Private R.L. Norden, 5 Platoon, 1RAR

Military Medal

Corporal D.J. Mancer, Acting Platoon Sergeant, 11 Platoon, 3RAR

Sergeant L.J. Stephens, Gun Sergeant, 102 Field Battery

Mentioned in Despatches

Private G.S. Barrett, 5 Platoon, 1RAR

2nd Lieutenant G.W. Bowcock, OC 12 Platoon, 1RAR

Sergeant L.A. Elgar, Gun Sergeant, 102 Field Battery

Major A.W. Hammett, OC D Company, 1RAR

2nd Lieutenant A. Molnar, OC 7 Platoon, 1RAR

Sergeant A.J. Penn, 12 Field Regiment

Captain M.J. Steeds, RNZAC, Forward Observer, D Company, 1RAR

2nd Lieutenant R.J. Sutton, OC 2 Platoon, 1RAR

Corporal G. Terronova, Medic, A Company, 1RAR

Lance Corporal J.E. Smith, Section 2IC, 7 Platoon, 1RAR

DEFENCE POSITION

24. On 1 September 2017, Vice Admiral Griggs, Acting Chief of the Defence Force submitted to the Tribunal that Defence does not support the retrospective awarding of unit citations such as the Meritorious Unit Citation or the Unit Citation for Gallantry for units which served prior to 1991. Vice Admiral Griggs also advised that Defence considered the application of contemporary criteria to military activities which occurred almost half a century ago to be inappropriate. He also advised that examining the activities of individual units or battles in isolation, as opposed to their role within the context of the wider conflict, may result in unequal recognition.¹⁷ At the Brisbane and Canberra hearings, Brigadier Leigh Wilton, the Director-General of Personnel – Army, reinforced the Defence position regarding retrospectivity, noting that for unit citations the issue was primarily based on the nature of these awards not being available prior to 1991. Hence the objection noted by Defence specifically relates to retrospective unit awards for actions prior to 1991.

25. Brigadier Wilton confirmed the contemporary Defence view in recognising combined Task Groups or Units as being units for the purposes of unit recognition.

¹⁷ CDF/OUT/2017/734, dated 1 September 2017.

26. Brigadier Wilton noted that Defence had made no formal assessment of gallantry in relation to the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral. However, she also noted the Defence position that the battles had been adequately recognised and that any further recognition would be inappropriate.

EXCERPTS OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

26. The Inquiry received 170 written submissions. In the main, submissions recounted very powerful narratives of personal experience. While each man's recollection differed according to his perspective and role played in the battles, consistent themes were evident to the Tribunal. Rather than provide a synopsis of so many stories, the Tribunal has selected the following excerpts to illustrate those themes. These accounts are typical of many of the submissions received.

Duration of the Battle

In the occupation of Bn Posn Balmoral sleep and rest were luxuries enjoyed by the few. We experienced 50% stand-to each night except the nights of the attacks when we were at action stations from 0345hrs and 0230hrs to dawn respectively. The impact to the individual was an average of 3-4 hours sleep per night. This combined with the physical effort in wiring, digging and patrolling over a protracted period added to the fatigue experienced by the soldiers. The fatigue was compounded by the anticipation which is companion of every man faced with heavy sustained mortaring, RPG and small arms fire.¹⁸

Every time you wake up you expect something to happen – sustained expected combat. You cannot wind down because there's nowhere that feels safe.¹⁹

Size and Nature of the Enemy Force

... two reinforced Australian Battalions engaged the majority of the 7th North Vietnamese Army Division, which itself was reinforced by Main Force Viet Cong units in a number of pitched battles and defeated them in May 1968 ...²⁰

On the 16th May FSBC was again attacked by an almost overwhelming number of NVA soldiers fought off only with the aid of American guns and air power. For troops trained for and expecting to be fighting rag tag Viet Cong part time soldiers it was learning on the job.²¹

After about 1 hour or so I awoke from a half daze to the sound of a lot of small arms fire, the 'whoosh' of rockets, loud explosions and flashes of bright light. I instinctively rolled straight into my pit pointing my weapon out. I could see a line 3 & 4 deep of what I assumed were the enemy N.V.A. as far as I could see in both directions. ... You couldn't shoot quick enough, they just kept coming, and coming, wave after wave!²²

¹⁸ Second Lieutenant Peter Fraser, 2Pl ACoy, 3RAR, Submission 93.

¹⁹ Colonel Gerry McCormack (Retd), oral submission, Canberra, 13 December 2017.

²⁰ Major General B.W. Howard AO, MC, ESM (Retd), (Major and OC A Company 3 RAR), Submission 20.

²¹ Mr Michael Hainsworth, Private, D Company, 1 RAR, Submission 13.

²² Mr Harold Northwood, Private, 1RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 90.

*I looked over to where all the noise was coming from and then I saw a line of them silhouetted in the half-light of the flashes from the exploding mortars. There must have been a hundred of them, shoulder to shoulder and they're coming our way.*²³

*Along the perimeter through the rubber trees to the north and west, waves of enemy troops began their assaults. The volume of firing along those perimeters increased rapidly until individual shots became a continuous roar.*²⁴

*The enemy tactic was to move in close to avoid the artillery and airstrikes. Wave after wave of enemy troops displaying remarkable courage were being repulsed time and time again. It was bloody infantry fighting at its worst.*²⁵

*... by all standard military parameters, FSB Coral should have been overrun in the first attack. The position was far from being developed due to the late arrival, and despite being much larger than a normal fire base, there was no rifle company tasked with remaining as the major protective element. This was normal practice and I can find no other example from Vietnam of an Australian battalion fire base being left without a rifle company as the major part of the defence.*²⁶

Unexpected Nature of the Conflict

*On 12 May the IATF advance parties flew in and our detachment followed the next day. Before the advance party departed SIGINT information arrived from 303rd RR Battalion and it revealed a very different story to the one Cameron gave. According to US SIGINT sources there were many fresh NVA troops waiting in the very area of our insertion and they were spoiling for a fight. This was in complete contradiction to the first scenario but matched the description later given by Australian airborne recce parties whose US pilots refused to take them to the insertion area due to enemy fire.*²⁷

*I was a member of 2TP, 1st Sqn RAE in 1967 to 1968. My last job in Vietnam was FSB Coral in 1968. Coral was the first time I as a member of an Engineer Squadron fought as infantry. Our situation at FSB Coral was so dire that I had resigned myself to the fact that this was where I was going to die. Every day since then has been a bonus.*²⁸

*In all it is estimated that over about four hours of the battle the 1RAR mortar platoon fired around 2400 rounds from its four mortars. (That was more than a year's normal allocation of mortar rounds for the platoon).*²⁹

Perseverance under Attack

Our fears were quickly realised in the early hours after midnight of Sunday 13 May – when the ferocity of a deadly saturation barrage of hundreds of mortars and rocket propelled grenades suddenly impacted accurately on our small area – crunching explosions that rattled

²³ Mr Alan Parr, Lance Corporal, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 94.

²⁴ Mr John Eaton, Private, 1 RAR, Submission 62.

²⁵ Mr John Eaton, Private, 1 RAR, Submission 62.

²⁶ Major General B.W. Howard AO, MC, ESM (Retd), Submission 20.

²⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray, Submission 29.

²⁸ Mr William Josephs, Sapper, 2 Troop, 1 Field Squadron, RAE, Submission 11.

²⁹ Mr Alan Parr, Lance Corporal, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 94.

*your very being and frightened you beyond belief to the point that you knew that your own death was inevitable.*³⁰

*Its difficult to explain to the uninitiated what it's like to be exposed to a continuous bombardment of high explosive projectiles. The RPGs can be heard coming in. It was most unnerving. Then comes the impact of the arrival. The noise is beyond belief. It is nothing like in the movies. It is palpable. It has physical as well as an aural dimension. The earth shudders and pulsates. It is terrifying. There's nothing you can do about it. You just huddle in the bottom of your pit and pray for it to end. The expression 'foxhole religion' takes on a whole new meaning.*³¹

*They fired these (Splintex) across the front of our position initially but later in the battle when things got really bad they fired five of these rounds from No 5 gun directly into our position. (Mortars). We had warning of this so we made sure we were down in our shell scrapes. It made a loud 'rushing' sound over our heads but had the desired effect of 'clearing' enemy from our position.*³²

Teamwork

*The Fire Support Bases - for another first since World War Two - was now operating as a Brigade – a Task Force and every contingent corps of the Australian Military at War engaged together – Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, Armour with Centurion Tanks & Personnel Carriers, Signals and Air Force.*³³

*Daylight came and the enemy disappeared taking many of their dead and wounded with them. The helicopter gunships engaged the escaping enemy especially a sniper still firing at us from the rubber tress to our left front. It wasn't long before the clearing patrols from the guns and our Anti-tank platoon came through our position. Medics and the RMO arrived to give assistance. Dustoffs were called and our Assault Pioneer platoon commenced the battlefield clearance.*³⁴

*A platoon of C Company got pinned down and was unable to move so some Centurion tanks and APC's were brought up to assist. They also came under heavy fire and were having some difficulty reaching the isolated platoon who by then were surrounded by enemy. It was only a couple of km outside the FSPB and well within mortar range so fire tasks were given to the mortars and artillery. Because the mortars could be brought in close they were very effective in helping get the tanks in and providing fire support to cover the extraction of the platoon with the tanks and APCs.*³⁵

... I received a direct hit on my pit, blowing me some distance in the air and destroying my rations and medical supplies. I was deafened for about four weeks as a result of the explosions. After that incident I spent the days patrolling with C Coy and tending the

³⁰ Mr Graham Christie, Lance Corporal, 104 Signal Squadron, Vice President/Secretary RSL Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale Sub-Branch, Submission 2.

³¹ Mr John Eaton, Private, 1 RAR, Submission 62.

³² Mr Alan Parr, Lance Corporal, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 94.

³³ Mr Graham Christie, Lance Corporal, 104 Signal Squadron, Vice President/Secretary RSL Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale Sub-Branch, Submission 2.

³⁴ Mr Alan Parr, Lance Corporal, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 94.

³⁵ Mr Alan Parr, Lance Corporal, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, Submission 94.

wounded as a result of the many contacts we were involved in. When C Coy was stood down I went on patrol with both A and B Coys when their medics were unavailable for various reasons.³⁶

Most of us were physically worn out but this did not stop us from stepping up to the plate when the chips were down. When the first shots rang out everyone reacted positively and this is another reason why we were able to limit our casualties. Mates were helping mates with everything from pulling the wounded out of harms' way to resupplying people with ammunition and backing each other up.³⁷

On a daily basis I was always impressed with the attitudes of not only my soldiers but of all those in other units that I had the opportunity to speak to and observe. Overwhelmingly the attitude was one of getting on with the job, regardless of the events of the night before or of the day, or of the problems that occur in a complex fire support base due to shortages, difficulties in communication, or changes that created a need for adaptation, such as in the weather.³⁸

Despite how severely outnumbered the Australians were in comparison to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, they still managed to win it. These troops fought so hard and were willing to do anything for their fellow soldiers and it's their sense of mateship and comradery that got them through.³⁹

I remember after breakfast a Church Parade with Father John Tinkle (Roman Catholic) was conducted amidst the haze, rubble and the rattle of gun shells being removed, and thinking of the night I had just survived and of the sights, the visions, the noise and the smell of death and carnage, we had all just experienced.⁴⁰

Gallantry

The extraction of the wounded was one of the bravest things I have seen – both by the American chopper crew and by the Company 2IC, Brian Altham and the Platoon Sergeants and NCOs. We all knew how dangerous it was. When the medevac was complete, we breathed a huge sigh of relief and the Company reorganised the harbour position – now much more a defence position rather than an ambush.⁴¹

Our small detachment was sighted very near the aerial masts erected by RASigs – making us an obvious target for both enemy mortar and rocket attack. To a man, these soldiers neither complained or shirked their tasks under fire. Their admirable maintenance of morale had a positive effect on each other and on the crews of the RAAF 9SQN helo crews on the adjacent LP.⁴²

In my professional opinion the simple fact that two reinforced Australian Battalions engaged the majority of the 7th North Vietnamese Army Division, which itself was reinforced by Main

³⁶ Mr Lorne Clarke, Medic C Company, 1 RAR, Submission 103.

³⁷ Mr Daryl Christie, C Company, 1 RAR, Submission 108.

³⁸ Colonel Max Ball (Retd), Captain and OC Det 8 Petroleum Platoon, Submission 82.

³⁹ Miss Mackenzie Johnston, Year 10, St Paul's High School Booragul, Submission 129.

⁴⁰ Mr Lionel Plunkett, Corporal, A Squadron, 3 Cav Regt, DHAAT Submission 38.

⁴¹ Mr Gordon Alexander, Second Lieutenant, 102 Field Bty, 12 Field Regt, Submission 4.

⁴² Mr Monty Brown, Captain, HQ TFMA Fwd, Submission 18.

*Force Viet Cong units in a number of pitched battles and defeated them in May 1968, should on its own be sufficient to merit the award of the Unit Commendation for Gallantry ...*⁴³

*I would say without a doubt the Tanks and APC crews conducted themselves with courage and determination to conclude the contact successfully, and to save the day for all involved. Individual acts of heroism and valour were overlooked.*⁴⁴

*Despite having been under significant mortar, rocket fire and heavy machine gun fire, the soldiers of both battalions and the artillery battery held their ground and fired their weapons effectively throughout despite being in a completely unknown environment in terms of the intensity and scale of the battles. Only those who have experienced sustained and accurate mortar, rocket and heavy machine gun fire will appreciate how much courage it takes to even put one's head up and return aimed fire. This the soldiers did during these battles.*⁴⁵

Significance of the Battle

*These battles throughout South Vietnam during the Tet Offensives were at the time when the Paris Peace Talks were also being held between the US and the North Vietnamese – in reality – a murderous ruse – wherein the leaders of North Vietnam – Ho Chi Minh & his General Giap – conspired to use the moment as a ploy to execute a huge – whole of country annihilation strategy – to exterminate every American, every Australian and New Zealander and every base in which they were stationed in South Vietnam – a frenetic all-out order to kill or be killed.*⁴⁶

27. The official history of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975 summarises the outcome of the battle as follows:

*For the Australians, Operation Toan Thang I had begun quietly and ended spectacularly. In the opinion of the task force commander the battles at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral 'were some of the heaviest fighting that the Task Force ever undertook'. Sited squarely on the enemy's line of approach, Australian forces had induced NVA commanders to launch against the defended bases repeated attacks, which were repelled with heavy enemy losses. Combined Australian infantry/tank reconnaissance-in-force operations resulted in further enemy casualties and the destruction of many enemy bases. Australian units lost a total of 25 dead and almost 100 wounded; in return the task force claimed a total of over 300 enemy killed and probably killed. .. Despite the high numbers of Australian soldiers killed and wounded, Operation Toan Thang I was rated a success for the task force.*⁴⁷

UNIT CITATIONS UNDER THE AUSTRALIAN HONOURS SYSTEM

Regulations for Australian Unit Citations.

28. Australian Unit Citations were created for the purpose of 'officially recognising occasions when a unit as a whole and each member individually performs to an outstanding

⁴³ Major General B.W. Howard AO, MC, ESM (Retd), Submission 20.

⁴⁴ Mr Lionel Plunkett, Corporal, A Squadron, 3 Cav Regt, DHAAT Submission 38.

⁴⁵ Major General B.W. Howard AO, MC, ESM (Retd), Submission 20.

⁴⁶ Mr Graham Christie, Vice President/Secretary RSL Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale Sub-Branch, Submission 2.

⁴⁷ Ekins and McNeill, *On the Offensive*, p.401

degree either in a single action or operation or over time'.⁴⁸ The Unit Citation for Gallantry (UCG) and the Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC) were introduced into the Australian honours system in 1991. Unlike awards for individuals, recognition of group endeavour has little history in honours systems around the world. The relatively recent tradition of unit citations introduced by the United States in 1942 has prompted broader recognition of collective endeavour. The UCG and MUC were established by Letters Patent on 15 January 1991 for the purpose of:

*recognising gallantry in action or outstanding service in warlike operations by units of the Defence Force and by units of defence forces of other countries.*⁴⁹

29. The honours are governed by Regulations set out in the Schedule which provides the conditions for the award of a citation:

3. (1) *The **Unit Citation for Gallantry** shall be awarded to a unit only for acts of extraordinary gallantry in action.*

(2) *The **Meritorious Unit Citation** shall be awarded to a unit only for sustained outstanding service in warlike operations.*

Guidance for Australian Unit Citations.

30. Neither the UCG nor the MUC are listed or defined in the *Defence Act 1903*. Defence provides guidance on the nomination process and eligibility for citations in the Honours and Awards Manual. Neither 'extraordinary gallantry' nor 'sustained outstanding service' is defined. The guidance defines 'in action' as the engagement between opposing forces involving direct conflict and 'warlike and non-warlike operations' being those declared by the Governor-General. The guidance states that:

the UCG may be awarded for a single action or for multiple acts over time;

the individual eligibility criteria for award of the UCG will be determined on occurrence, according to the merits and circumstances of each particular action; and

the MUC may be awarded for sustained outstanding service.

31. The Tribunal considered the Defence guidance to be largely unhelpful and in previous Inquiries, has commented on the lack of policy guidance and the potential damage this may have upon consistency and the integrity of the assessment process.⁵⁰ The Tribunal noted that despite Defence being directed to introduce more guidance 'for implementation in 2017', this has not been completed.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Department of Defence submission DM 87/38684 to PM&C Honours and Awards Interdepartmental Committee dated 13 October 1987.

⁴⁹ *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. S25 – Unit Citation Regulations* - dated 4 February 1991.

⁵⁰ *Report of the Inquiry into Recognition for Service with 547 Signal Troop in Vietnam*, p.61.

⁵¹ Minister for Defence Personnel MA16-002605 received by the Tribunal on 22 November 2016.

The Unit Citation for Gallantry - How Does a Unit Achieve ‘Acts of Extraordinary Gallantry in Action’?

32. Since 1991 four UCGs have been awarded, two of these retrospectively as a result of Inquiries – D Company 6th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment for the Battle of Long Tan in 1966 and HMAS *Yarra* for actions in 1942. Neither Inquiry analysed the actions against the criteria. In the case of Long Tan, the panel preferred to conclude that D Company’s performance ‘fully satisfies the requirements and conditions for the award of the UCG’. The Tribunal notes that a considerable number of individual gallantry awards were made to members of D Company.

33. 1 Squadron of the Special Air Service Regiment received the UCG in 2004 for its collective gallantry during the war in Iraq in 2003. The Regiment and 4th Battalion (Commando) received the award for unit gallantry in Afghanistan in 2005-2006 when they undertook 100 missions in 309 days in the field including 139 combat engagements. In this latter case, it appears that the benchmark used was the number of missions and engagements, noting that no high level individual gallantry awards were made during the tour although a number of Medals and Commendations for Gallantry were awarded.

34. The Tribunal considered that for a unit to be recognised for collective gallantry it was likely, but not essential, that some individuals in the unit may have been recognised for their gallantry. The Tribunal further considered that where there was individual gallantry, performed on multiple occasions, when combined with unit determination to achieve its mission and delivered to a standard which would set the unit apart from other units, a case could be made for collective recognition for gallantry.

35. The Tribunal further considered that in the context of unit gallantry, the majority of the unit should be shown to have been exposed to a similar level of threat and demonstrated bravery in the face of that threat. For example, an infantry battalion’s support, administrative and headquarter sub-units all exposed to the enemy or contributing directly to the denial of the enemy’s intentions. Thus, it would be expected that administrative staff also shared the threat for example by patrolling, providing security and/or performing additional duties beyond their training.

36. The Tribunal noted that the 1987 guidance in relation to the creation of unit citations stated that they should only be awarded rarely and for the ‘most outstanding acts or series of acts of gallantry’. The Tribunal considered that in establishing conditions for award of the UCG, this guidance and use of the term ‘extraordinary gallantry’ should be examined in conjunction with the criteria for the highest of the Australian individual gallantry awards which are also only awarded rarely. Significantly these criteria require ‘the most conspicuous gallantry’⁵², and ‘acts of great heroism in action in circumstances of great peril’.⁵³ The Tribunal therefore concluded that the award of the UCG should correlate with these eminent standards and that in making the decision to recommend a UCG, the nomination should be considered to be at a level commensurate with the highest individual Australian awards for gallantry. By taking this approach, the Tribunal was of the view that this would maintain the extremely high standard and status of the award of the UCG as envisaged by the Government in 1987.

⁵² Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. S25 – *Victoria Cross Regulations*– dated 4 February 1991

⁵³ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. S25 – *Gallantry Decorations Regulations* (eligibility criteria for the Star of Gallantry) - dated 4 February 1991

37. The Tribunal decided that to be eligible for the award of the UCG a unit should normally have met all of the following conditions:

- a. The unit's operations were conducted in dangerous and hazardous circumstances.
- b. Most members of the unit were exposed to or threatened by the enemy.
- c. The unit was in action for the duration of the campaign, operation or battle.
- d. Individuals from the unit are likely to have been recognised for their gallantry during the campaign, operation or battle.
- e. The unit's performance was extraordinary, where ordinary constitutes doing what the unit was trained, tasked and expected to do as part of its role and responsibility.
- f. The unit's collective gallantry and overall performance noticeably set it apart from other units.

TRIBUNAL CONSIDERATION

Collective Gallantry

38. The Terms of Reference directed the Tribunal to consider whether Australian military units who participated in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral should receive further recognition or be awarded an Australian unit decoration or another form of recognition. In considering what award would be applicable, the Tribunal dismissed the Meritorious Unit Citation as the nature of the battles clearly suggested the consideration of recognition for gallantry in action rather than outstanding service. No submissions received by the Tribunal sought recognition for service. No other form of recognition was considered to be applicable.

39. In its most simple form, the proposition considered by the Tribunal was that the Australian men who fought at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral displayed collective gallantry worthy of unit recognition. No submitter, including the Department of Defence,⁵⁴ challenged the merits of this proposition. Throughout the hearing phase of the inquiry, the Tribunal challenged the notion of collective gallantry and the degree to which it was displayed during the battles. The Tribunal invited those appearing as witnesses to consider and reflect on this question. Most respondents noted efficient and almost automatic teamwork - things just happened. And the 'things that happened' involved incredible individual bravery where exposure to enemy fire to get the job done was accepted seemingly without any second thought. Awareness of the teamwork on display, and the individual courage evident in many small acts of getting the job done, lifted the group's performance to an extraordinary level.

40. At the hearings in Sydney, Mr Ken Foster OAM, National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, said that like previous iconic battles of significance, the battles of Coral and Balmoral were characterised by *'units and formations that were working together as teams, as units of individuals but forming into one body. Every part of that body was contributing towards the end result (of the battle) ...'* and these battles *'... stood out as iconic examples in that period of what a unit could do under extreme pressure.'*

⁵⁴ At the hearing, Defence told the Tribunal that no formal assessment had been made of unit gallantry.

41. Mr Gordon Alexander who served as an artillery forward observer attached to D Company, 1RAR, gave the Tribunal specific examples that defined the concept of collective gallantry for him. The first of these came as a consequence of D Company's first contact with the enemy on the night of 12/13 May 1968. D Company was located in an ambush position, two kilometres to the north of Fire Support Base Coral and came under attack as the North Vietnamese Army positioned for their assault on the Fire Support Base. He described a situation, where 11 men of the company were wounded and evacuated by casualty evacuation helicopters. He described the efficiency of that dangerous night evacuation under fire, the integration of that evacuation with friendly artillery support fire, and the manner in which subordinate commanders 'stepped up' to take responsibility and provided inspiring leadership in exposing themselves to the enemy in order to effect the evacuation.

42. Mr Alexander's second example was a successful company attack, with fixed bayonets, conducted the next morning against a defended location as the company made its way back to the Fire Support Base. While a remarkable feat in itself, Mr Alexander cited this example as an extraordinary action where the company had reacted with discipline and in accordance with their training even after the terrible night and loss of life they had just experienced. His third example was receiving support from 102 Field Battery in laying a walking barrage, 150 metres to the front of the company as it advanced towards the enemy. This '*very tricky and dangerous*' fire support mission was fired by the battery on the morning following their desperate defence where a gun had been first overrun by the enemy and then re-taken. Mr Alexander said; '*This was a case where they came together and lifted themselves after extreme circumstances and carried out their task brilliantly - absolutely brilliantly.*'

43. On the morning after the night attack on 12 May 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Bennett, the Commanding Officer of 1RAR, sent the following message to all units at Coral:

*Today this callsign with G10 (102 Battery) and G98 (12 Field Regiment) ably upheld the honour and traditions of those before us. I now believe that an enemy battalion has been severely mauled and our own losses more than accounted for. I congratulate you all on a job well done with steadiness and bravery second to none. We will all remember this day with pride in our achievements. Let us all thank God for the courage which has added to the honour of our country.*⁵⁵

44. Amongst other examples provided by Mr Alexander, he also described his participation in a tank-infantry assault conducted on 26 May 1968 – the first such assault conducted by the Australian Army since World War Two. Mr Alexander described four hours of battling through a huge North Vietnamese Army bunker complex with magnificent artillery support protecting their flanks. Teams of sections and platoons, who had never worked with tanks before, fought for four hours in very close cooperation with tanks and their support vehicles to destroy at least 50 bunkers without a casualty. Mr Alexander stated that wherever possible, tank-infantry tactics were used as a standard operating procedure in Vietnam from that point on.

45. Throughout the 170 written submissions and 33 oral submissions the theme of exceptional teamwork and collective gallantry is readily apparent and consistently referenced. The message to the Tribunal from all of the veterans of the battle was that, regardless of

⁵⁵ L McAulay, *The Battle of Coral*, p 105

corps, they had fought as a coordinated group and that everybody who was there deserves recognition. While the nature of the battle changed over the period between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968, the Tribunal was satisfied that acts of extraordinary unit gallantry were displayed throughout.

Who Should be Recognised?

46. Satisfied that the collective gallantry condition for the award of a Unit Citation for Gallantry had been met by the extraordinary gallantry displayed by the Australians in action at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968, the Tribunal then considered who had contributed, and the most appropriate recognition.

47. The schedule of Unit Citations Regulations gives the meaning of ‘unit’ with respect to unit citations as ‘a unit or sub-unit of the Defence Force’. In his evidence to the Tribunal, Lieutenant General John Caligari, AO, DSC (Retd), the Patron of the 1RAR Association, described the emergence during the Vietnam War of the battle group as a concept for warfighting. It was apparent to the Tribunal that the deployment of units and individuals to Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral required the assembly of a Task Force or Task Unit in order to conduct the planned operation. While the actions at FSB Coral and Balmoral was ‘all consuming’ for 1ATF, not all elements of 1ATF were deployed for the battle. To manage this forward deployment of the Task Force a forward headquarters was established at Coral as HQ1ATF (Fwd). Elements and units from 1ATF were then assigned to this formation. This structure is not dissimilar to the deployment of Task Groups and Units currently utilised by the ADF to conduct operations.

48. The Tribunal notes and accepts the concept of collective gallantry as previously described and for the purposes of this Inquiry considers 1ATF (Fwd) as the most accurate description of the unit that displayed outstanding gallantry in action at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral. The Tribunal acknowledges that 1ATF (Fwd) comprised subordinate units, unit detachments and individual attachments. A listing of those units and elements that comprised 1ATF (Fwd) between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968 was compiled by Defence and is provided at Annex D. The award of a citation to 1ATF (Fwd) would recognise the unit that fought the battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral in its entirety – in other words, ‘everyone who was there’ – as well as conforming to the current understanding of *ad hoc* combined arms teams and joint warfighting units.

49. The Tribunal considered 1ATF (Fwd) adequately met the eligibility conditions that would normally be met for the award of the UCG, described at paragraph 37. In addition to accepting that extraordinary unit gallantry was displayed throughout the battles, the Tribunal is also satisfied from the evidence presented that the operations of 1ATF (Fwd) conducted at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral were done so in dangerous and hazardous circumstances and that all members present at the Fire Support Bases were exposed to or threatened by the enemy. As the entity mounting the operation, 1ATF (Fwd) was in action for the duration of the Battles of Coral and Balmoral and 20 individuals from that Task Force have been recognised for their gallantry. The collective gallantry and overall performance of the Australian’s who fought the Battles of Coral and Balmoral noticeably set these battles apart from other actions in Vietnam. The battles have been accurately described by the Task Force Commander as ‘*some of the heaviest fighting that the Task Force ever undertook*’⁵⁶

⁵⁶ McNeill and Ekins, *On the Offensive*, p 401.

and by the official historian as the ‘... *largest, most hazardous and most sustained battles of the war*’.⁵⁷

50. Having found that 1ATF (Fwd) met the conditions for the UCG, the Tribunal also considered individual entitlement to wear the insignia of the citation by virtue of the duration of their service. The Tribunal noted that as a consequence of the significant actions that occurred from the first night of the deployment, there were wounded soldiers who were evacuated from FSBs Coral and Balmoral and whose service with 1ATF (Fwd) could be measured in days if not hours. Similarly, the Tribunal noted that the contribution of No 9 Squadron and 161 Reconnaissance Flight aviators to the battle was significant, but typically limited to the time their aircraft was within the Area of Operations. The Tribunal recommends that no minimum period of service with 1ATF (Fwd) in AO SURFERS be imposed as eligibility criteria for individual entitlement to wear this award.

Precedents

51. Since unit citations were introduced to the Australian system of Honours and Awards, four Unit Citations for Gallantry and 26 Meritorious Unit Citations have been awarded. The Unit Citations Regulations have a common interpretation for the meaning of ‘unit’. Of the 26 Meritorious Unit Citations awarded, six have been awarded to *ad hoc* units. These include:

- Task Group 645.1.1 – a Royal Australian Navy Landing Craft Task Group consisting of HMA Ships *Balikpapan*, *Brunei*, *Labuan* and *Tarakan* who were recognised on 25 March 2000 for sustained outstanding service in warlike operations in support of the International Force for East Timor during Operation Stabilise
- Task Group 633.4.2 – a Royal Australian Air Force Task Group of air traffic controllers and airfield defence guards who were recognised on 14 September 2004 for sustained outstanding service in warlike operations in providing air traffic control at Baghdad International Airport during Operation Falconer and Operation Catalyst.
- Australian Medical Detachment (Balad) – a joint service detachment of medical staff and specialists who were recognised on 26 January 2007 for sustained outstanding service and professional competency in the provision of health care in support of the United States Air Force Theatre Hospital, Balad, Iraq during Operation Catalyst from 1 September 2004 to 3 May 2005 inclusive and from 29 September 2005 to 31 December 2005 inclusive.
- Mentoring Task Force 1 – a combined arms task force formed by the Australian Army for deployment in Afghanistan. Formed in 2009 from the 7th Brigade, the task force consisted of infantry, engineers, cavalry, artillery and logistic elements from 55 different units, but was predominantly based on 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. It was recognised on 13 June 2011 for sustained outstanding service in warlike operations on Operation Slipper in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, between 20 January and 30 October 2010.

⁵⁷ McNeill and Ekins, *On the Offensive*, p 349.

- Force Communications Unit, Cambodia – an Australian and New Zealand joint unit assembled to provide communications support to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia from 15 March 1992 to 7 October 1993. It was recognised retrospectively on 26 January 2014 for sustained outstanding service in warlike operations.
- Task Force 66 (Special Operations Task Groups IV – XX) – an Australian task force drawn from units of Special Operations Command which was recognised on 26 January 2015 for sustained and outstanding warlike operational service in Afghanistan from 30 April 2007 to 31 December 2013, through the conduct of counter insurgency operations in support of the International Security Assistance Force.

Legacy

52. Lieutenant General Caligari, amongst others, spoke of the importance of the legacy of unit awards to today's Force. The Tribunal considered this to be an important, but secondary, consideration in recognising extraordinary gallantry. The Unit Citation for Gallantry delivers an important legacy to the receiving unit in that all members of a unit to which a citation has been awarded will wear the insignia whilst they remain members of that unit. A recommendation that a citation be awarded to a unit that is no longer on the order of battle (such as 1ATF [Fwd]) carries no such legacy. To address this consideration, the Tribunal considered that those elements of 1ATF (Fwd) that fought as essentially complete units, should also be recommended for citation. In this manner, a 'Coral and Balmoral' legacy will be established for those subordinate units that fought in the battles as essentially complete entities.

Retrospectivity and the Integrity of the Australian Honours System.

53. The Tribunal noted the Acting Chief of Defence Force's view that Defence did not support retrospective recognition but considered that this view had been examined and refuted in previous Inquiries. The Tribunal decided that there was little utility in repeating the arguments of those previous Inquiries. The Tribunal noted that in relation to maintenance of the integrity of the Australian honours system, previous Inquiries had extensively examined retrospectivity and concluded that the honours system would not be threatened by the award of a unit citation for an action before 1991, where the start point for an inquiry is to consider a unit citation without reference to performance by individuals.⁵⁸

54. Although Defence provided a formal response to the Tribunal's request for reasons why Defence hold the view that retrospective honours diminish the integrity of the honours and awards system, no evidence was presented to the Tribunal that suggests any negative impact has been created by previous retrospective awards.⁵⁹ Rather, the Defence response reflects a concern regarding Section 110VB of the Defence Act which requires the Tribunal to undertake a merits review of all reviewable decisions relating to defence honours and awards to individuals, where an application for review has been properly made. This concern suggests a preference within Defence for held principles and traditions over the

⁵⁸ *Report of the Inquiry into Recognition for Service with 547 Signal Troop in Vietnam*, p.19-20.

⁵⁹ Defence response to Question on Notice from inquiry hearing on the integrity of the Defence honours system dated 6 March 2018

legislated position of the Defence Act. The Defence response made no reference to retrospectivity with respect to unit citations.

55. The Tribunal also noted that, in Government's acceptance of an earlier recommendation from the Tribunal to amend the regulations to restrict the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation and the Unit Citation for Gallantry to units that served after 1991, it had effectively drawn a conclusion to the examination of further retrospective unit recognition following this Inquiry and the Inquiry into recognition for the Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam.^{60 61}

56. Accordingly, the Tribunal, whilst acknowledging the Defence position regarding retrospectivity, was of the view that there was no impediment to making a recommendation which may include retrospective recognition and that the integrity of the Australian honours system would not be impacted by a retrospective recommendation for recognition.

57. That said, the Tribunal notes that the creation of Unit Citations in 1991 significantly changed the options for unit recognition from what previously had been limited to the award of Battle Honours and that the system of Battle Honours and Unit Citations are not equivalent. The resultant change to the awards 'landscape' means that any consideration of using a Unit Citation to recognise the service of a unit prior to 1991 does present a new challenge for the honours and awards system. In its earlier inquiry into recognition for service for 547 Signal Troop in Vietnam, the Tribunal recommended amendment to the Unit Citation Regulations to restrict the award to units that served after 1991. This Inquiry reached a similar conclusion noting that the Government agreed amendment is not yet finalised and that the challenge remains for any further 'pre-1991' applications.

58. The Tribunal was aware of the accord that exists in the veteran community that all those Australians who served at FSB Coral and Balmoral deserve recognition for their collective gallantry. The concept that everybody who was there should be recognised is not in question. Questions of system integrity only emerge when considering which unit(s) should receive the citation. The Tribunal heard concern about large numbers of veterans who might claim an award but were not actually present at the battles. The Tribunal also heard concerns about units claiming a 'Coral/Balmoral' legacy when their representation at the battles was a small minority of the unit strength.

59. By acknowledging current combined arms and joint war fighting concepts, and the emergence of these concepts in the Vietnam era, the Tribunal has been able to identify the unit that fought the battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral as 1ATF (Fwd). Defence told the Tribunal that the unit structure of 1ATF (Fwd) allowed reasonable confidence that all individuals attached to that unit, and therefore all those who fought at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, could be identified and their participation confirmed. In this manner the integrity of the honours and awards system is upheld and allows all those who have contributed to the unit's gallantry to be recognised. The Tribunal regarded this

⁶⁰ 547 Troop – Recommendation 3 – 'That the Minister consider an amendment to the regulations to restrict the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation and the Unit Citation for Gallantry to units that served after 1991...'

⁶¹ Minister for Defence Personnel MA16-002605 received by the Tribunal on 22 November 2016 'I am pleased to inform you that the second and third recommendations were also accepted by Government to ... develop amendments to the regulations to restrict the award of the MUC and UCG to units that served after 1991'.

outcome as being highly desirable but notes the complexity that may arise when considering detachments of personnel that occasionally were as small as individual persons.⁶²

60. Recommending all those who served as 1ATF (Fwd) achieves the correct unit recognition for everyone who participated in the battles or was within the Area of Operations. There is no requirement to recognise every unit that was represented at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral to achieve this outcome. The follow-on recommendation that those units that were present as essentially complete units also ensures the integrity of the honours and awards system. A 'Coral/Balmoral' legacy is achieved but is limited to those units that were present and fought as essentially complete units.

Foreign Units

61. The terms of reference for the inquiry specifically direct the Tribunal to consider Australian units only. In recommending the citation of 1ATF (Fwd) the Tribunal notes that personnel of both the New Zealand and United States Armies were present at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral and attached to 1ATF (Fwd) and are therefore eligible to wear the insignia under the Unit Citations Regulations. The Tribunal also notes that two foreign units fought at Coral and Balmoral as essentially complete units and under the operational command of 1ATF (Fwd). 161 Field Battery (Royal New Zealand Artillery) was established at Fire Support Base Coogee and fired in support of the battles. 'A' Battery of the 2/35th Field Regiment, United States Army was established at Fire Support Base Coral in support of 12 Field Regiment. Each of these units made a significant contribution to the outcome of the battles. Also present at Fire Support Base Coral was an element of 5/2nd Artillery (Air Defence), United States Army. The Tribunal recommends that these foreign units and associated individuals that fought in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral under the operational command of 1ATF (Fwd) be considered for recognition.

⁶² For example, the Tribunal notes the contribution of Flying Officer Roger Wilson DFC. Wilson was awarded the DFC for his actions as a Forward Air Controller during the attacks on FSB Coral on 16 May 1968. Wilson was an Australian airman embedded with a USAF unit. He was later present *on the ground* at FSB Coral providing coordination of air support operations.

FINDINGS

62. The Tribunal found that:

- a. all the men who fought at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral displayed collective gallantry worthy of unit recognition;
- b. the most appropriate unit recognition was the Unit Citation for Gallantry, and the most appropriate recipient unit was the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward);
- c. although outside of the Inquiry's terms of reference, the Tribunal also concluded that those servicemen from United States and New Zealand units who participated in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral under the command of the 1 Australian Task Force (Forward) should also be considered for recognition;
- d. to capture the legacy of the collective gallantry displayed by Australian servicemen at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, those Australian units that fought at Fire Support Bases Coral or Balmoral as essentially complete units, should also be recommended for a Unit Citation for Gallantry; and
- e. the creation of this class of award in 1991 introduced a significant change to the means by which units could be recognised, and that the consideration of unit citations for the service of units prior to 1991 presents a challenge for the honours and awards system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: To recognise all participants in the battles, the Tribunal recommends that the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) be awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for extraordinary gallantry in action at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968.

Recommendation 2: The Tribunal recommends that no minimum period of service with the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) in AO SURFERS between the dates 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968 be imposed as eligibility criteria for individual entitlement to wear this award.

Recommendation 3: To capture the legacy of the gallantry displayed by participants in the battles, the Tribunal recommends that the following Australian units substantively deployed to AO SURFERS between 12 May 1968 and 6 June 1968 be awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for extraordinary gallantry in action at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral:

- 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment
- 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment
- A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
- C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment
- 12th Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery
- 1st Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers

Recommendation 4: With regard to the unique contributions of No 9 Squadron RAAF and 161 Reconnaissance Flight, the Tribunal recommends that any 9 Squadron or 161 Reconnaissance Flight members who flew missions in direct support of the Battles of Coral and Balmoral, or who were forward deployed to the Fire Support Bases and therefore attached to 1st Australian Task Force (Forward), be entitled to wear the insignia.

Recommendation 5: The Tribunal recommends that servicemen from United States and New Zealand units who participated in the Battles of Coral and Balmoral under the command of the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) should also be considered for recognition.

ANNEX A

INQUIRY INTO RECOGNITION FOR SERVICE AT THE BATTLES OF FIRE SUPPORT BASES CORAL AND BALMORAL

Terms of Reference

The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (the Tribunal) is directed to inquire into and report on recognition for Australian units who served at the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral in Vietnam in 1968.

In particular, the Tribunal is to examine relevant evidence and consider whether it is appropriate that any Australian military units who participated in those battles receive further recognition or be awarded an Australian unit decoration or another form of recognition for service in those battles between 12 May and 6 June 1968.

The Tribunal is to determine its own procedures, in accordance with the general principles of procedural fairness, when conducting its inquiry as set out in these Terms of Reference. In this regard the Tribunal may interview such persons as it considers appropriate and consider material provided to it that is relevant to these Terms of Reference.

The Tribunal is to report, in writing, to the Minister for Defence Personnel on the findings and recommendations that arise from the inquiry.

In making its findings and formulating its recommendations the Tribunal is to maintain the integrity of the Australian honours system and identify any consequential impact any finding or recommendation may have on that system.

Submissions to the Tribunal close on 16 June 2017.

ANNEX B

SUBMISSIONS - Individuals and organisations who provided submissions to the Inquiry

In response to a Ministerial media release in 12 April 2017 and information provided on the Tribunal's website, both giving notice of the Inquiry and calling for submissions, the Tribunal received 170 submissions from the following individuals and organisations. Some individuals and organisations provided more than one submission.

Name and organisation (as applicable)

Abetz, Senator the HON Eric, Senator for Tasmania

Alderman, Mr Frederick

Alexander, Mr Gordon

Allen, Mr Norman

Anthes, Mr Graeme

Austen, Mr Robert

Aylett, Mr Peter

Ayliffe, Mr Keith, BEM

Ball, Colonel Maxwell (Retd)

Barron, Mr Richard

Bate, Mr Kevin

Billiards, Mr Robert

Blatch, Staff Sergeant Douglas (Retd)

Boneham, Mr Leigh

Brack, Mr Anthony

Bray, Mr Leslie

Brown, Major John (Retd)

Brown, Mr Mervyn

Buckley, Mr Adrian

Burt, Mr Arthur

Burton, Major William, OAM (Retd)

Butler, Major Michael (Retd)

Butler, Mr Donald

Buzzard, Mr Brian

Caligari, Lieutenant General John AO DSC (Retd)

Cameron, Mr Bruce

Christie, Mr Daryl

Christie, Mr Graham, Vice President /Secretary RSL Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale Sub Branch

Clark, Mr Geoffrey J

Clark, Mr Geoffrey

Clarke, Mr Lorne

Cleaver, Mr Brian

Cooper, Mr Neville

Cother, Mr Hilton

Crane, Dr Dick

Craven, Mr Bruce

Cross, Mr, Colin

Dalton, Mr John

Davies, Ms Carolyn

Davis, Mr John

Drazek, Mr Henry

Dunn, Mr Vincent

Dunstan, Mr Kim

Dupille, Mr Douglas

Duthie, Mr Kenneth JP

Dyson, Mr John

Eaton, Mr Geoffrey

Eaton, Mr John

Edelman, Mr Robert

Edwards, Mr Rodney

Eren, The Hon John MP, Minister for Veterans Affairs, Victoria

Evans, Hon. Chaplain Carla, Vietnam Veterans and the Australian
PeaceKeepers/PeaceMakers Association Victoria

Flood, Mr John

Flood, Ms Belinda, HSIE Leader of Pedagogy and Year 10 Students of St Paul's High School, Booragul

Forsdike, Mr Andrew, OAM

Foster, Mr Kenneth, OAM, National President Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Inc

Fraser, Mr Peter

Gardiner, Mr Brian

Gibson, Mr Robert

Gill, Mr Winton

Goldsmith, Mr Neville

Green, Mr Allen

Griffiths, Mr David

Grimes, Major Winston CSC (Retd), on Behalf of members of the 102 Field Battery

Hainsworth, Mr Michael

Hare, Mr Denis, on behalf of Signals Coral Balmoral Veterans

Hippisley, Mr Terrence

Hobley, Mr Graeme

Holloway, Mr Guy

Holt, Mr David

Hooper, Mr John

Howard, Major General B.W, AO MC ESM (Retd), on behalf of the Royal Australian Regiment Association

Hoy, Mr Ian

Hulse, Lieutenant Colonel George (Retd), President 1 Field Squadron Group RAE Association

Hulse, Lieutenant Colonel George (Retd) – individual submission

Irvine, Mr Lachlan

Iwankiw, Mr John

Jarvis, Mr Michael

John, Mr Marcus

Johnson, Mr John

Johnston, Mr Robert

Johnston, Mr Luke
Jones, Dr Leonie
Josephs, Mr William
Kaineder, Mr Peter
Keldie, Mr David
Kelly, Mr Paul
Kretschmann, Mr Tony
Landgraf, Mrs Barbara
Loughridge, Mr Thomas
Luff, Mr Noel
MacGregor, Colonel Sandy, MC RFD (Retd)
Mackenzie, Mr Donald
Mansford, Brigadier George, AO AM (Retd)
Mapstone, Mr Gerard, OAM
Masters, Major James, OAM (Retd) President 1 RAR Association
Matthews, Mr Francis
McCormack, Colonel Gerry (Retd)
McCallum, Mr David
McCrohan, Mr Paul
McDowall, Ms Donna
McGee, Colonel Anthony, AM (Retd)
McGrath, Senator The HON James, Senator for Queensland
McGrath, Mr Kim, President Australian Artillery Association
McInerney, Mr Terrance
McKie, Mr Peter
McLaughlin, Mr Noel, OAM, Chairman RAAC Corporation
McLellan, Mr William
McMaster, Mr Kevin
McQuilkin, Mr Neville

Meehan, Mr Bryan
Mulquiney, Mr Anthony
Munro, Mr Peter
Murray, Lieutenant Colonel Peter (Retd)
Neil, Mr Perry
Northwood, Mr Harold
O'Connor, Mr Robert T
O'Connor, Mr Robert
O'Reilly, Mr William
Parr, Mr Alan
Partridge, Mr Alan
Pascoe, Mr Allan
Patzel, Mr Graham
Peatling, Mr Norman
Perren, Mr Terrence
Place, Mr Edward
Plunkett, Mr Lionel
Pope, Mr Gary
Pryde, Mr Howard
Quane, Mr John
Rantall, Mr Allan
Richards, Mr Bruce
Rickaby, Mr Brian
Roberts-Smith, Mr Benjamin, VC MG
Roche, Mr Neil
Roe, Mr Richard
Roe, Mrs June, OAM, Director Australian Families of the Military Research and Support Foundation Ltd
Roese, Mr Gregory
Rowe, Mr Ian

Russell, Mr Geoff
Scott, Mr Anthony
Shepherd, Mr Robert
Smith, Mr Bryan
Smith, Mr Derek
Smith, Mr Leslie
Smythe, Mr Patrick
Stanford, Mr Tim
Stevens, Mr Graham
Studley, Lieutenant Colonel Leonard (Retd)
Sutton, Mr Robert
Swift, Ms Norma
Thomas, Mr Peter
Thomson, Mr Ronald
Towns, Mr Robert
Vadeikis, Mr Ray
Van Harskamp, Mr Robert
Walker, Mr Denis
Ward, Mr David
Watson, Mr Roderick
Wells, Mr Paul
Wilkinson, Mr Leslie, Representative of the Seven Hills/Toongabbie/Wentworthville RSL
Sub-Branch
Wrobel, Mr Lawrence
Yates, Mr Reginald
Yates, Mr Thomas

ANNEX C

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Tuesday 31 October 2017, Brisbane

Department of Defence

Brigadier Leigh Wilton

Ms Margot Kropinski-Myers

Lieutenant General John Caligari AO, DSC (Retd)

Major James Masters OAM (Retd)

Major Winston Grimes CSC (Retd)

Major John Brown (Retd)

Dr Leonie Jones

Wednesday 1 November 2017, Brisbane

Mr Guy Holloway

Mr Norman Peatling

Lieutenant Colonel Leonard Studley (Retd)

Mr Denis Hare

Major Michael Butler (Retd)

Mr Geoffrey John Clark

Wednesday 8 November 2017, Sydney

Major General B.W. Howard AO, MC, ESM (Retd)

Mr Ken Foster OAM

Mr Lionel Plunkett

Mr Kim McGrath

Mr Andrew Forsdike OAM

Mr Gordon Alexander

St Paul's High School, Booragul

Ms Belinda Flood

Ms Carly Morrer

Ms Charlie Lawler-O'Neill

Mr John Flood OAM

Mr David Keldie

Mr Adrian Buckley

Mr Larry Darcy

Thursday 9 November 2017, Canberra

Department of Defence – Colonel Griff Thomas, Major Phil Rutherford

Mr Francis Matthews

Colonel Max Ball (Retd)

Mr Bruce Cameron

Wednesday 13 December 2017, Canberra

Colonel Ian Ahearn (Retd)

Colonel Mick Bindley AM (Retd)

Mr Tony Jensen

Colonel Gerry McCormack (Retd)

Mr Lachlan Irvine

Department of Defence - Brigadier Leigh Wilton, Colonel Griff Thomas, Major Phil Rutherford, Ms Margot Kropinski-Myers.

ANNEX D

A listing of those units and elements that comprised 1ATF (Fwd) between 12 May and 6 June 1968 compiled by Defence: ⁶³

Unit / Sub-Unit / Troop / Platoon

- Headquarters 1 Australian Task Force
- Headquarters Company
- 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment
- 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment
- 12 Field Regiment (-)
- A Squadron 3 Cavalry Regiment (-)
- C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment
- 1 Field Squadron Royal Australian Engineers (-)
- Task Force Maintenance Area Headquarters

Detachments

- 1 Australian Reinforcement Unit
- Headquarters Platoon
- Detachment 198 Works Section
- 1st Australian Light Aid Detachment
- 1st Australian Provost Detachment
- Detachment 1 Division Intelligence Section
- Detachment 1 Topographical Survey Troop
- 1 Division Cash Office
- Detachment COMMZ Postal
- Elm 2 Australian Force Canteen Unit
- 8 Field Ambulance
- Defence & Employment Platoon
- 104 Signal Squadron
- 547 Signal Troop
- Detachment 131 Division Location Battery
- 21 Engineering Support Troop
- 1 Field Squadron Workshops
- 85 Transport Platoon
- Detachment 52 Supply Platoon
- Detachment 25 Supply Platoon
- Detachment 8 Petroleum Platoon
- Detachment 2 Advanced Ordnance Depot
- 176 Air Dispatch Company, Royal Australian Army Service Corps
- Detachment 1 Division Supply & Transport Workshop
- 1 Ordnance Field Park, Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps
- Detachment 11 Movement Control Group, Royal Australian Engineers
- Detachment 1 Forward Delivery Troop
- 26 Company, Royal Australian Army Service Corps

⁶³ Email, Major Phil Rutherford, 12 December 2017.

Allied Forces

161 Field Battery (New Zealand)

A2/35 Battery (United States of America)

5/2 Air Defence Battery (United States of America)