CHAPTER: THREE
THE IMPACT OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

When the United States entered the war in force in 1965 (as distinct from its previous low-level intervention) it acted as if North and South Vietnam were like any two other states. Disappointment was inevitable. The complex strands of nationalism, regionalism and Communism had been twisted together in Vietnam so as to enable none of them to be treated separately; yet the United States behaved as if nationalism resided solely in the South and Communism in the North. 96

By late 1967 the 1 ATF had not achieved the level of victory over the enemy as had been initially hoped. Frank Frost is adamant that by late 1967:

...while the Task Force did have considerable success in this period combating NLF and PAVN main force units, particularly when given an opportunity to engage them in battle, it had considerable difficulty in developing relations with its RVN ally... The Task Force had also not been able to develop a program which could effectively challenge the ability of the NLF cadres to exist and operate, albeit with greater difficulty than they had before the Task Force's arrival. 97

Terry Burstall is pessimistic about the effectiveness of the Task Force in removing the enemy from Phuoc Tuy. He contends:

By the end of 1967 the strategy of the Australians in Phuoc Tuy had not resulted in any substantial changes to the balance of forces in Phuoc Tuy. Although local force units were harassed, they still maintained their unit integrity and were capable of attacking at will... main force units still moved freely through the province when required, and major operations against their base areas gained little except equipment and supplies. 98


A more positive analysis of the efforts of the 1 ATF can be found in James Warren's article, 'Down Under in Vietnam'. However, Warren has reservations about the nature of the Task Force's strategy and gives some explanation as to why the Communist forces were able to continue operating in Phuoc Tuy. As Warren explains:

...although the Aussies were superb jungle fighters, they were never able to achieve the complete dominance over Phuoc Tuy that Saigon and Washington wanted. Killing VC was one thing; eliminating the NLF domination of the province, a political infrastructure that had been developing for more than twenty years, was another. The Aussies had been trained to fight, not to win hearts and minds. Given the long-standing NLF domination of the province, the difficult terrain, the sheer size of Phuoc Tuy, and the small number of ATF troops, it seems hardly surprising that their success was limited. After each of the Aussies' successful attacks on the base camps in the Long Hai Hills, for instance, the VC slowly regrouped and rebuilt, unhindered by forces that were simply too thin to occupy the hills on a permanent basis.99

**Phuoc Tuy: Remain or Stay?**

At this time there was growing pressure from the US to move the Task Force's area of operations outside of Phuoc Tuy. In the period immediately prior to the outbreak of the Tet offensive the US had shown continual frustration at the Task Force's role in Phuoc Tuy. General Westmoreland was keen to involve the Task Forces troops more widely in South Vietnam and in areas he felt to be of greater significance than Phuoc Tuy. In early January 1968 Westmoreland is believed to have sought to incorporate two Australian battalions within the 'American Division' based at Chu Lai. The heavy casualty rate that this unit was sustaining blocked any possibility of Australian agreement to Westmoreland's proposal.100 However the Australian Government was not entirely immune to US criticism and a compromise deal appears to have been reached. Malcolm Fraser, Australian Minister for the Army, publicly stated in January 20th report:

It is quite possible we will be undertaking operations at a greater distance from Nui Dat, but we will still, under present arrangements, keep Nui Dat as Task Force Headquarters.101

As far as the US was concerned the compromise meant that the Task Force would play a more active role in the War and not limit its activities to a single, and not

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100 Frost, p.103.

101 Frost, p.104.
particularly vital province. The same deal allowed the New Zealand and Australian forces to maintain their large and well protected base. This base was an important political and military symbol of the ANZAC presence in Phuoc Tuy.

US and ANZAC Relations

There is evidence that the Americans had been feeling for some months that the New Zealand and Australian forces had not been pulling their weight. An August 1967 US military evaluation report states that the Task Force had been extremely effective in securing their TAOR. It concluded by adding:

However, the primary mission of the Australian Task Force is to carry out offensive military operations against the enemy, rather than engage in territorial pacification missions. 102

The battle statistics add weight to the American assessment of the situation. The only major action seen by the Task Force was in the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966. The Australian figures state that as a result of this battle the enemy lost 245 dead and three captured for the loss of 18 Australian dead and 24 wounded. 103 Long Tan veteran Terry Burstall pours scorn on the importance of the Battle:

After August, the Australians continued the slow movement outward from the Nui Dat base and by the end of 1966 it appeared, at least to General Westmoreland, that very little was being achieved by the Australian force, except for the VC casualties on Operation Smithfield. It is doubtful the Americans would have considered the Long Tan battle as a significant action, because they relied heavily on body count as an indication of success and the VC losses at Long Tan were minor compared with American operations. 104

Gordon L. Steinbrook has written an interesting eye-witness account of the Battle of Long Tan based on his Vietnam diaries and letters. At the time, he was working as an artillery Forward Observer for 6 RAR under the command of 161 Battalion.

Steinbrook recorded immediately after the conflict:

As for the Australians, they killed more of the enemy in the battle of Long Tan than in the entire previous year or more. Though their losses were certainly a blow to the battalion, the battle proved what

102 Frost, p.124.
104 Burstall, p.111.
they had known all along: that given the opportunity, the 'digger' was a tremendous fighter. It was immediately obvious that the battalion took great pride in its accomplishment.\textsuperscript{105}

Steinbrook's observations are interesting because he confirms the poor kill rate the Task Force had achieved up until Long Tan and the unique opportunity the encounter had presented to the Australian and New Zealand forces to engage in a full scale battle. As Steinbrook comments, 'given the opportunity, the digger was a tremendous fighter'. The Americans could therefore not understand why the ANZAC forces continued to remain in a sector which presented so few battlefield opportunities. It was this frustration that caused Westmoreland to allegedly comment to the Task Force Commanding officer "Aussie troops are so good, we really should be making better use of them".\textsuperscript{106} By the end of January 1968 Westmoreland would have his wish.

The Tet Offensive
Tet is the main Buddhist festival in Vietnam, coinciding with the lunar New Year. In 1968 it began on January 30th, celebrating the arrival of the Year of the Monkey. In honour of the festival, a seven-day cease-fire was announced by the Viet Cong to commence on January 27th. The South Vietnamese government, cautious of the advantage the Viet Cong could take of a cease fire, announced a shorter 36 hour cease-fire from 6pm January 29th.\textsuperscript{107} Just one hour before its announced cease-fire was to take effect, the South Vietnamese Government cancelled the truce in the five northern provinces citing a build up of Viet Cong forces in those areas. The very next day the Communist forces launched their biggest offensive of the war and almost simultaneously launched attacks on 36 of South Vietnam's 44 provincial capitals, achieving complete surprise over the allied forces.\textsuperscript{108}

Prelude to Tet
The Tet period marked the first time the Task Force operated in strength outside of Phuoc Tuy province. In the days following Christmas there had been strong intelligence reports of a significant military build up by the enemy around the large US


\textsuperscript{106} Frost, p.104.


\textsuperscript{108} Kahin and Lewis, p.372.
military complexes of Long Binh and Bien Hoa to the North-west of Nui Dat. From the evidence available it was deduced that the enemy was moving a regiment equipped with rockets into range of both these vital US bases.\textsuperscript{109} The role given to the Task Force troops required clearing of the area of Viet Cong to deny them sites suitable for launching rocket attacks. The code name for this operation was 'Coburg' and involved the infantry battalions 2 RAR, 3 RAR, 7 RAR and various support units. The New Zealand V company was attached to the Australian 2 RAR at the time and saw major action during this operation, particularly from the 1st to the 8th of February. V Company was amongst the last to return to Nui Dat having provided cover for the rest of the returning forces and had been fortunate enough to have suffered only nine wounded.\textsuperscript{110}

**Tet and Phuoc Tuy**

The province of Phuoc Tuy was not immune from the impact of the Tet Offensive. The Viet Cong successfully occupied both the provincial capital of Baria and the district capital of Long Dien resulting in fierce attempts by the remaining Task Force troops to recapture the towns.\textsuperscript{111} During the crucial period of late January to late February 1968 all that remained to defend the Task Force base at Nui Dat were the New Zealand 161 artillery battalion and the newly arrived 3 RAR Australian infantry unit.\textsuperscript{112} On the night of January 31st the provincial Viet Cong battalion D445 launched a four company assault on Baria and almost simultaneously the Task Force base at Nui Dat came under Viet Cong mortar attack.\textsuperscript{113} By first light the Viet Cong near Nui Dat had been driven off but Baria had fallen to the enemy and the local ARVN forces had been thrown into a state of confusion. The Communist forces in Baria managed to hold out until February 2nd in the face of repeated attacks by A and B company 3 RAR and enormous allied supporting fire. During this battle 161 was called upon to provide illumination over the Baria-Long Dien area, firing a record of 572 illuminations tasks on the night of February 1st/2nd alone.\textsuperscript{114} The Viet Cong also conducted an attack on the village of Long Dien, only seven kilometres from the Nui Dat base, on February 3rd. Fighting lasted until February 6th, the two ARVN battalions in the village requiring the assistance of C and D companies 3 RAR to


\textsuperscript{110} Major K. E. Newman, p.64.

\textsuperscript{111} Frost, p.111.

\textsuperscript{112} Lt. S. D. Newman, pp.67-68.

\textsuperscript{113} Frost, p.113.

\textsuperscript{114} Lt. S. D. Newman, p.68.
defeat the Viet Cong force. What was particularly concerning to the ANZAC forces was the great number of Long Dien villagers who either overtly or covertly assisted the Viet Cong, a factor that had not been evident in the battle for Baria. 115

The attacks on Baria and Long Dien were highly embarrassing for the Task Force. The important factor in these enemy assaults was that they were carried out by local Viet Cong forces, primarily by the provincial Viet Cong battalion, D445. The success of the Viet Cong in their attacks in Phuoc Tuy aroused considerable concern among politicians and military alike. After nearly 18 months of Task Force operations in Phuoc Tuy the Viet Cong remained strong enough to launch and hold, however briefly, two major population centres in the province. Questions were raised about the decision to move a large contingent of the Task Force outside its traditional area of operations only to find attacks launched within Phuoc Tuy itself. As Frank Frost rightly concedes:

The Tet attacks also indicated clearly that the characterisation of the NLF's activities by Major-General Vincent [the Commander of I ATF] as being 'interference of a guerrilla kind of a low order' was unduly optimistic." 116

Gough Whitlam, leader of the Australian Parliamentary opposition, placed the blame for the attacks in Phuoc Tuy quite squarely on the fact that the bulk of the Task Force had been placed outside of the province. This claim was dismissed by Malcolm Fraser who judged that the Viet Cong attacks would have occurred even had the Task Force been at full strength. 117

The logic behind moving such a large part of the Task Force outside of Phuoc Tuy was the supposedly high level of security achieved by the Task Force in the province. Malcolm Fraser had been quoted in Australian papers as saying "Recent operations outside Phuoc Tuy were made possible because reasonable security had been attained in the Province." 118 Author Colin Smith is even more emphatic about the high level of security attained by the Task Force. He claims:

The campaign to secure Phuoc Tuy province militarily was so successful that troops from the Australian Task Force (including New Zealanders) were available for deployment in other provinces.

115 Frost, p.112.
116 Frost, p.113.
117 Frost, p.111.
118 Burstall, p.166.
during the crisis periods such as the massive ground assaults on Bien Hoa Airbase and Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive.\textsuperscript{119}

The fact that the local Viet Cong forces were able to mount large offensives against two major population centres within the Province must surely undermine the validity of such statements. The local force Viet Cong attacks were by no means minor hit-and-run skirmishes but serious and determined assaults on the towns. Lieutenant Colonel R. J. Martin was carrying out the post of Forward Observer for 161 battalion at the time of the enemy attack on Baria and was one of the first Task Force troops to arrive in the town. In his account of the battle he gives a clear indication of the serious scale and level of destructiveness of the conflict:

There can be no doubt that the Viet Cong had created a sense of total chaos and confusion and in the space of a few hours had virtually attained complete control of Baria. This was a most improbable achievement, at least to us at the time, and our lack of preparation or training for urban operations suddenly appeared quite a serious handicap... The remnants of the battle were apparent for many days afterwards and truck loads of bodies [sic] were a common sight over the following few days. Armoured vehicles were occasionally to be seen still damaged and unusable in ditches and on the side of the road, also for some days.\textsuperscript{120}

The military's immediate reaction to these politically embarrassing and violent attacks was to attempt to root out the remaining Viet Cong strongholds in Phuoc Tuy. Two 'cordon and search' operations were conducted in February, Operation Oakleigh (16th-17th February) and Operation Clayton (20th-21st February). These operations involved the thorough searching and screening of the villages of Hoa Long and Long Dien respectively. While the primary aim of these searches was to capture Viet Cong agents and sympathisers, in both cases the apprehension of draft dodgers and ARVN deserters proved to make up an equally large part of those detained.\textsuperscript{121} It was clear that despite the defeats at Baria and Long Dien, the Viet Cong were still a potent force in the Province. Intelligence gathered from captured enemy troops revealed that the Long Hai hill area was extensively used by the Viet Cong and that the hills were laced with tracks and trails, well prepared camps and numerous cave complexes.\textsuperscript{122} As a result of this intelligence Operation Pinaroo, which had begun as a simple battalion

\textsuperscript{119} Smith, p.4.
\textsuperscript{120} Lt. S. D. Newman, p.122.
\textsuperscript{121} Major K. E. Newman, pp.66-67.
\textsuperscript{122} Major K. E. Newman, p.67.
clearing operation, grew into a Task Force size 'search-and-destroy' operation into the Long Hai hills.

This rugged area in the southern part of Phuoc Tuy had been a base for guerrilla operations since the time of the Viet Minh. The American 173rd airborne Brigade had attempted a sweep of these hills in June 1966 and had suffered heavy casualties and discovered many enemy bases which they were unable to destroy.\(^{123}\) Robert O'Neill gives a good account of the hostile nature of this area and comments:

> The approaches to the hills presented several problems, the worst of which was the possibility of mines and booby traps ... Once off the roads we had to continue to take great care for the whole area of the hills was known to contain many mines and booby traps.\(^{124}\)

The operation began on March 8th with a series of extensive air and artillery strikes. Colin P. Sisson, who served with the New Zealand V Company in Operation Pinaroo, has written a vivid account of the fighting in the Long Hai hills. Beginning from his initial deployment in the hills he writes:

> For the next week, the Long Hai hills took a dreadful pounding from artillery fire and massive airstrikes from an assortment of aircraft including B52 bombers. Every day, the sounds of combat could be heard as elements of our clearing force engaged pockets of VC scattered throughout the hills... Mines were a problem but we had Australian engineers with us, acting as minefield clearing teams, using mine detectors... On the 17th, we joined up with Five Platoon and, at midday, began moving higher into the Long Hai hills. A massive B52 bombing strike was made on the top of the hill that was our objective... This was followed by American jet fighter bombers, strafing with cannon fire and dropping napalm bombs on VC positions. Their cannons sounded like heavy furniture being dragged along a wooden floor. Their napalm, when it exploded, dealt an instant and hideous death to anyone trapped by it. The horror of such an end had a profound effect on me, and caused me to start having hideous nightmares during restless sleep.\(^{125}\)

In addition to this awesome fire-power, the troops on the ground conducted a campaign of destruction, demolishing extensive and numerous Viet Cong installations requiring the use of over 30 tonnes of explosives.\(^{126}\) While it was possible to inflict

\(^{123}\) O'Neill, *Vietnam Task*, p.213.


\(^{126}\) Frost, p.115.
damage on the Viet Cong bases in the Long Hai hills, it was impossible to deny them the use of the area for any significant period and there lay the key to the problem. The Task Force Commander commented after the end of Operation Pinaroo on April 15th:

I couldn't afford to leave troops down there... One had to occupy the Long Hais to be sure the enemy didn't use them and I couldn't just have troops sitting round doing that - my troops were of better quality than pure garrison troops."127

So long as the Task Force was unable to, and the ARVN proved to lack the ability or will to deny the Viet Cong this area, Phuoc Tuy would never completely free from Viet Cong and NLF operations.

The Aftermath of Tet

The shock of the Tet offensive resulted in rapid political developments. The negative impact on the American, Australian and New Zealand public was immense. Despite the presence of large numbers of US troops and the existence of the 1 ATF in Phuoc Tuy, the enemy was still able to launch extensive attacks over the vast range of South Vietnam. Perhaps of greater concern was the fact that despite the horrendous casualties suffered by the Communist forces, the extent of these losses did not seem to fundamentally impair the fighting capacity or morale of the enemy.128 For the Allies in Vietnam the Tet offensive spelt the end of American attempts to win an outright military victory in Vietnam and heralded a shift towards seeking a negotiated settlement. In a rapid series of moves that were taken with little or no consultation with the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, the US government undertook a significant realignment of its Vietnam policy. On March 31st 1968 President Johnson gave a television address that shocked the world. Johnson announced:

We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations. So tonight, in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing - substantially reducing - the present level of hostilities. And we are doing so unilaterally and at once. Tonight I have ordered our aircraft and naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the demilitarised zone where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatens Allied forward positions... Even this limited bombing of the North could come to an early end if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi.129

127 Frost, p.115.
128 Kahin and Lewis, p.375.
129 Kahin and Lewis, p.379.
He concluded his speech by dropping a bombshell: he would not seek nomination for another term as President. Further political turmoil was created by the announcement that General Westmoreland was to be relieved from his Vietnam posting and given a new assignment as the Army's Chief of Staff. The Australian and New Zealand Governments greeted such developments with dismay. There was particular concern that such abrupt US policy changes had occurred without the US Government even bothering to inform, let alone consult their officials.\(^{130}\) The New Zealand Government had always been cautious about the US policy in Vietnam but had nevertheless shown public support on major Vietnam issues. The public unity of the ANZUS allies was undermined by the rapid realignment of US policy and the insignificant nature of New Zealand's influence was highlighted.

**Mini-Tet**

The Allies suffered further military embarrassment when the Communist forces launched a fresh offensive in May 1968 imaginatively dubbed the 'Mini-Tet' offensive. This new enemy assault lasted until the end of the month and illustrated yet again the ability of the Viet Cong to penetrate and hold parts of Saigon. It was only through the use of massive and destructive US firepower that the enemy forces were expelled from the city.\(^{131}\) Once more the Task Force was called upon to defend the US military bases at Bien Hoa and Long Binh from rocket attack, while elsewhere the Communist forces attacked over twenty provincial and district capitals of South Vietnam.\(^{132}\) The military situation was developing a dangerous pattern of enemy offensives followed by Allied counter-offensives. It became evident to the New Zealand military and Government officials that they would have to undertake a serious re-examination of New Zealand's role in Vietnam. The Tet offensive and its aftermath had ushered in a new phase in the conduct of the War for both New Zealand and its ANZUS allies.

\(^{130}\) Burstall, p.168.
\(^{131}\) Kahin and Lewis, p.381.
CHAPTER: FOUR
VIETNAMISATION AND THE ROAD TO WITHDRAWAL

Predictions of progress and of military success, made so often by so many, have proved to be illusory as the fighting and the dying continue at a tragic rate. Within our country, the dialogue quickens and the debate sharpens. There is a growing impatience among our people, and questions regarding the war and our participation in it are being asked with increasing vehemence.\(^\text{133}\)

So wrote Clark Clifford in July 1969 after he had left the Pentagon as Secretary of Defence in January the same year. Clark Clifford had replaced Robert McNamara in mid-January 1968 and became intimately involved in the political fallout surrounding the Tet Offensive and the reassessment of US Vietnam policy that followed. Clifford's first assignment was to chair a Presidential Vietnam task force created in the wake of the Tet Offensive. The information Clifford gleaned from this Task Force shocked and distressed him. Upon asking for a presentation of the military plan for attaining victory in Vietnam he was told there was none. He asked whether anyone could see a diminution in the will of the enemy after four years of US presence and enormous casualties and destruction. He was told there appeared to be none.\(^\text{134}\) The implications of the increasing domestic unrest and economic cost of the war intensified this depressing military analysis. All these factors led Clifford to conclude:

And so, after these exhausting days, I was convinced that the military course we were pursuing was not only endless, but hopeless... Henceforth, I was also convinced, our primary goal should be to level off our involvement, and to work toward gradual disengagement.\(^\text{135}\)

President Johnson concurred with Clifford's view and it was this assessment which he presented to the world in the famous March 31st speech.


\(^{134}\) Clifford, pp.611-612.

\(^{135}\) Clifford, p.613.
US reassessment of its Vietnam Policy

The change in the US Vietnam philosophy was one that the New Zealand Government had to become rapidly acquainted with. The Government concluded:

Within the United States, opposition to the Vietnam War had built up to the point where any policy not aimed at the termination of the war, and certainly of United States involvement on the ground, became politically untenable. But more than opposition to the war was involved: a fundamental shift in the national mood was evident, towards a greater concentration on domestic problems and interests, together with a change in the American public's view of the United States' role in the world. 136

While the US was undergoing a re-examination of its global role, New Zealand was itself faced with significant international challenges. In January 1968, Britain announced its complete withdrawal from East of Suez and, with the departure of de Gaulle in 1969, British entry into the EEC became a political reality. In February 1969 both Australia and New Zealand announced their readiness to maintain forces in Malaysia and Singapore as an expression of their commitment to regional co-operation and security development. 137 According to Mullins New Zealand aimed:

...to emphasise the primary responsibility of the local governments; to demonstrate readiness to assist, especially in improving local capacity; and to develop a broader pattern of consultation on defence problems. 138

This policy found common ground with the new US emphasis on the training and defence development of the South Vietnamese.

Johnson's March 31st speech had a significant political impact and set the Vietnam peace process in motion. Hanoi responded to Johnson's call for discussion, and negotiations finally began in May. Progress was agonisingly slow and the talks almost immediately broke down over Hanoi's insistence that the Saigon Government should not be a participant in the talks. It was not until October 31st that all sides finally agreed to the conditions of the discussions: Saigon was allowed to have a seat at the negotiating table and President Johnson announced that all bombing of North Vietnam would cease. 139

While President Johnson was enduring painfully slow negotiations with Hanoi, discussions between the ANZUS allies had taken place. On October 9th and 10th

136 Mullins, p.20.
137 Mullins, p.20.
138 Mullins, p.22.
139 Clifford, p.616.
Holyoake had paid an official visit to Washington prior to the 18th ANZUS Council meeting held the following day. The official communiqué issued by the ANZUS council meeting states:

The ministers again noted that the importance of the outcome of the conflict in Vietnam to the future of all South-east Asia. They reaffirmed the full support of the ANZUS powers for the struggle of the Vietnamese people. Gratified that President Johnson's initiative of 31 March had led to conversations with North Vietnamese representatives, they reviewed the progress of the talks so far. They agreed that a strong Allied military posture was vital to the success of diplomatic efforts to arrive at an honourable and lasting settlement. 140

The most significant part of this otherwise banal statement is the reference to 'strong Allied military posture'. The US government had consistently lamented the lack of international support it had received in Vietnam particularly in military matters. Even those nations that had responded to the call for arms had done so, in US eyes, in a half-hearted and inadequate manner. This was bad enough, but had become unbearable as the military situation deteriorated. Clark Clifford had accompanied General Maxwell Taylor at the request of Johnson on a tour of the US Pacific allies in August 1967. Disappointed by their lack of success in obtaining significant military commitment from the Southeast Asian nations Clifford admits:

Disappointing though these visits were, I had high hopes for the success of our mission in Australia and New Zealand. In New Zealand we spent the better part of a day conferring with the Prime Minister and his cabinet, while hundreds of students picketed the Parliament Building carrying signs bearing peace slogans. These officials were courteous and sympathetic, as all the others had been, but they made it clear that any appreciable increase was out of the question. New Zealand at one time had 70,000 troops overseas in the various theaters of World War II. They had 500 men in Vietnam. I naturally wondered if this was their evaluation of the respective dangers of the two conflicts. 141

US-New Zealand Relations
If the Americans were of the opinion that the attitude and efforts of their Allies were seriously lacking in regard to Vietnam, it was an opinion that was not shared by New Zealand. The New Zealand government resented the idea that it was shirking its international responsibilities. On his October 1968 visit to Washington Holyoake led a

140 EAR, 10 October 1968, p.42.
141 Clifford, p.607.
New Zealand delegation to the United Nations. In his address to the United Nations on October 14th he stated:

New Zealand is more than 5,000 miles away from Vietnam. We were further still from Korea, but we recognised in 1950 - as did the great majority of the membership of this Organisation - that an armed attack, even across the demarcation line of a politically divided country, was nonetheless aggression. We were still further from Ethiopia, from Czechoslovakia, and from Poland: but we found in the 1930s that attacks on those countries had implications for the security of the world and for our own security... That is why this Organisation exists. That is why New Zealand has responded to the request for military assistance from the victim of aggression, the Republic of Vietnam.  

One can only speculate just how much should be read into Holyoake's use of examples of the security issues of the late 1930s, a period when the US was deep into its 'isolationist' mode. However, as Holyoake illustrates, New Zealand had always shown its commitment to international security and it can be argued with some conviction that New Zealand did not need a lesson in collective security from the United States.

Many within the New Zealand Government shared the feeling that the US was not treating New Zealand as a loyal ally and was ignoring New Zealand's political and military efforts. This criticism appears in a speech given to the fifth Foreign Policy School in Dunedin by W. B. Harland in May 1970. His speech examines New Zealand's relationship with the US in light of the implementation of the 'Nixon Doctrine' and the policy of 'Vietnamisation'. Harland comments:

President Nixon's policy also gives us an opportunity to get closer to the Americans in the political field. If I have understood his statements correctly, what he is saying is that those allies which are willing to assume greater responsibility for the defence of their own areas will be taken more fully into partnership with the United States and consulted more systematically on matters of common concern... There is ground for hope that President Nixon will make the effort required to keep in touch with those who are willing to help themselves, and him... America has come to feel the need for friends, friends who can be relied on to stick to it even when the going gets rough. And it may perhaps be getting to the stage where it is prepared to discriminate more between these friends and those who are merely allies.  

142 EAR, October 1968, p.20.
President Nixon and the Vietnamisation of the War

Under President Nixon, the concept of gradual withdrawal in conjunction with an emphasis on developing South Vietnamese military capability which had begun under Johnson, was emphasised. As Kahin and Lewis explain:

His [Nixon's] Administration came into office appreciating what the Johnson Administration had only come to perceive in its final months, that a military victory was not feasible. However, the new Administration was politically and psychologically limited in selecting alternative policies by its acceptance of past U.S. assumptions and policy premises. 144

Combat forces were to be initially frozen and then gradually run down as the capacity of the South Vietnamese forces increased. In the face of this policy New Zealand forces gained a boost in November 1968 with the deployment to South Vietnam of the 4th Troop NZ SAS (4 Tp NZSAS) comprising an officer and 25 other ranks. This unit was immediately attached to an existing Australian SAS unit at Nui Dat. 145 While the addition of extra combat forces by New Zealand at a time when all its major Allies were disposed to withdrawal may seem contradictory, the 'in theatre' use of the SAS was in keeping with the overall Vietnamisation policy. The primary use of the SAS was in the gathering of intelligence which would then be passed on to South Vietnamese and other allied authorities. However the full capabilities of the New Zealand SAS seem to have been wasted. Often, vital intelligence collected by the SAS was ignored or not acted upon soon enough. Surprisingly, the skill of the SAS in training local forces was never utilised. 146

Withdrawal

Meanwhile the New Zealand authorities were considering the timing and nature of the withdrawal of New Zealand's forces in Vietnam. The official line first touted in July 1969 stated that naturally New Zealand would want all of its forces out of Vietnam before the last US ground troops leave. An early withdrawal was ruled out, and it was decided that New Zealand would not start withdrawing its forces until the US had reduced its existing strength by about a third. 147 The most logical way to reduce the level of combat forces with the minimum of fuss was to not replace those units which

144 Kahin and Lewis, p.390-91.
146 MacGibbon, p.82.
147 MacGibbon, p.29.
had finished their tours of duty with a comparable unit, as had been common practice.
As such, Whiskey Three Company was withdrawn without replacement in November
1970 and Victor Six Company was withdrawn in December 1971 without
replacement. These withdrawals coincided with the Australian decision to withdraw
the 8th Battalion from the 1 ATF by November 1970.149
Gary R. Brooker served as a private in Whiskey Three Company and recorded his
experiences of what turned out to be the last Whiskey Company to serve in Vietnam.
In his personal account written during his tour of Vietnam he expresses a paternalistic
approach to the people of Vietnam and a supreme confidence in the success of the
allied actions in South Vietnam. Towards the end of his tour he wrote:

The enemy is beaten as well as being broken in both mind and
spirit... The people of South Vietnam are suffering a low spirit,
perhaps not as bad as the 'hoods' we chase day after day in the
jungle, but these people certainly face a future of uncertainty. Yes,
they have had war in their country for the last twenty or thirty years
and an occupying force controlling their country for centuries and if
we pull out now and leave them, they would soon revert to an
almost primitive state. What they need is a guiding force to advise
and help them, coupled with a strong and honest government that
will give them some hope... 150

This belief that the people of South Vietnam needed a 'guiding force to advise and
help them' was one that was officially shared by the New Zealand government. This
guidance was not to come in the form of combat assistance as previously, but in the
form of training and education teams. In August 1970 Holyoake stated:

The success of the Vietnamisation programme has enabled
continuing withdrawals of United States troops, and I have on
several occasions expressed the hope that the situation in South
Vietnam would improve to the extent that New Zealand would also
be able to withdraw some of our own forces. This point has now
been reached.151

148 Major A. R. Roberts, The ANZAC Battalion 1970-71 (Brookvale, NSW:

149 EAR, August 1970, p.45.
150 Gary R. Brooker, Two Lanyards in Vietnam (Hawarden, Canterbury, New

151 EAR, August 1970, p.46.
Faced with withdrawals of large numbers of troops by the US and Australia, it is not surprising that the situation in South Vietnam should 'improve' enough for New Zealand to remain in step with its allies and likewise withdraw its troops. New Zealand had little control over the pace of withdrawal or the American strategy in Vietnam. While it was clear that the South Vietnamese military capacity was well below that needed to hold off the Communist forces, it was also clear that the US Government was determined to deliver the promised troop withdrawals to the American public. The US fighting capacity was by necessity transferred to the air and naval forces which did not come under the troop ceiling constraints. 152 The air war was one which New Zealand, with its limited resources, could take little part (a few forward air controllers did work for the Americans). While it was impossible both politically and logistically for New Zealand to have troops remaining in Vietnam whilst its two major Allies the US and Australia had withdrawn, it was also vital that New Zealand maintained a visible force in Vietnam in order to win political favour and influence the US Administration. The solution to this problem was to deploy army training teams which would not only be politically acceptable under the Vietnamisation policy but would also keep the New Zealand flag flying alongside America's in Vietnam.

**Army Training Teams**

The training teams were actually of greater political value than combat units in enhancing New Zealand's national identity in Vietnam. These teams were able to operate as virtually independent units and were therefore not so overshadowed by the Australians as the New Zealand forces in the 1 ATF had been. 153 It was because of the experiences of 1 ATF that the New Zealand training team did not join a similar Australian training team in Phuoc Tuy and instead co-operated with the South Vietnamese National Training centre in Chau Doc Province. 154 They also had the advantage of requiring more limited investments in financial expenditure and manpower than infantry units had required. Thus while the New Zealand presence in Vietnam was reduced by combat troop withdrawals, the New Zealand Government was able to deploy training teams to Vietnam to ensure New Zealand still maintained access to US officials and a place at the meeting table. The replacement of combat units by training teams had the added advantage that New Zealand was able to stay out of the risky operations into Cambodia and Laos. The improvement in the situation in South Vietnam as Holyoake stated, was in actuality an improvement in the political

152 Burstall, p.192.
153 MacGibbon, p.35.
and military well being of New Zealand, and had little to do with the state of affairs on
the ground in South Vietnam.

The flow of New Zealand troops out of Vietnam soon began to gain momentum
under the influence of US enthusiasm to remove its own ground troops and the
political climate at home. In New Zealand the opposition Labour party, invigorated
under leader Norman Kirk, had campaigned hard for the return of New Zealand troops
and by 1969 was calling for the immediate withdrawal of all New Zealand troops. 155

The growing opposition to the war within New Zealand was powerfully illustrated by
the January 1970 visit of Vice President Spiro Agnew. His arrival in Auckland resulted
in brutal clashes between protesters and police and led to a Public Enquiry into police
actions. 156 At the meeting of representatives of troop contributing countries in
Washington in April 1971, Holyoake announced:

The withdrawal of New Zealand forces from South Vietnam began
last December with the departure of one of the two infantry
companies serving with the ANZAC task force in Phuoc Tuy
province. The SAS unit was withdrawn in February and the artillery
battery will return to New Zealand in the first week of May. This
will leave 264 New Zealand service men in South Vietnam including
the personnel of the remaining infantry company, an Army training
team, a Services medical team and a small RNZAF detachment. We
shall review the timing of the withdrawal of our remaining combat
forces later this year. 157

The Homecoming

By December, all remaining New Zealand combat troops had been withdrawn but a
second army training team was deployed in February 1972 in compensation. This was
attached to a US training unit stationed in Dong Ba Thin charged with the task of
training Cambodian infantry battalions. 158

The final remnants of the New Zealand
presence in South Vietnam, the two training teams and the Head Quarters section in
Saigon, were finally withdrawn in December 1972 by the newly elected Labour
Government under Norman Kirk. 159

The home-coming for those who served in Vietnam was far from a pleasant
experience. Vietnam veteran George Babbington has related his experiences of his
return to New Zealand. He recounts:

156 Nelson, p.43.
157 EAR, April 1971, p.53.
158 Wicksteed, p.81.
159 Wicksteed, p.81.
In 1972 I was part of a welcome home parade hosted by the city of Auckland to veterans of all services. The parade consisted of 161 Artillery Battery and a SAS troop. We were humiliated by a minority lobby group namely the PYM an anti-Vietnam organisation, who continually harassed and shouted verbal abuse at us.\(^\text{160}\)

Indeed, Major John Masters, who had led 161 in the same Queen Street parade, found himself charged with offensive behaviour by a protester who took him to court claiming to be angered and offended by the parade.\(^\text{161}\) Although the case was dismissed, it was hardly the affable welcome a veteran of previous wars would have expected.

The end of service in Vietnam meant for most a return to base in either Malaya or Singapore. Even within the ranks of the Army this was not a smooth transition. Lieutenant Colonel J. A. Mace took over command of 1 RNZIR, the main source of all Victor and Whiskey Companies, in 1972. He comments that on taking over command:

A lasting initial memory is the frustration of the soldiers, largely of A company, who had enlisted with the expectation of Service in South Vietnam. Failure to experience active service had its impact on morale and there was a sense of mutual satisfaction on their departure for New Zealand... The retention of the titles Victor and Whiskey Company, used in South Vietnam, was not considered conducive to Battalion spirit and the companies reverted to their previous titles of 'B' and 'C' Company in December 1972.\(^\text{162}\)

George Babbington remembers:

We were brought down to earth first thing by training depots in NZ where instructors would say - forget about that bullshit in Vietnam. It made me feel at the time that we went there for nothing when we should have imparted the knowledge gained on younger soldiers.\(^\text{163}\)

The immediate reaction faced by the returning troops was of public indifference and in some cases hostility, jealousy amongst their fellow soldiers who did not serve and

\(^{160}\) Smith, p.58.
\(^{161}\) Nelson, p.48.

\(^{163}\) Smith, p.59.
finally a feeling that there was a general lack of recognition for their efforts in Vietnam.

The Military Lessons

Once the fighting had ended (as far as New Zealand was concerned), analysis began on the success or otherwise of the New Zealand military effort in Vietnam. One of the most interesting studies on the New Zealand military commitment in Vietnam was carried out in 1978 by Harry Pappafloratos. Borrowing heavily from the model of Douglas Kinnard's 1974 statistical study of US Generals in Vietnam The War Managers, Pappafloratos attempts to create a similar model based on questionnaires of New Zealand Officers. Pappafloratos claims in his introduction:

The purpose of this study is to assess the Vietnam War from the perspective of the New Zealand officer. To record and analyse their experiences before the memories of the war fade 164

However, his study was undertaken in 1978, six years since New Zealand forces were pulled out from South Vietnam and after the surrender of South Vietnam to the Communists. The influence of the fall of Saigon and the mere passage of time on the respondents answers is perhaps impossible to gauge but is certainly a factor to take into careful consideration. In defence of his study, Pappafloratos is able to point out:

The New Zealand officers represent a unique force, a small force of professionals, who by this very fact can provide a professional view of the war. The size of the force meant that many New Zealand officers participated in activities normally prohibited to their rank when part of a large force. They are in a position, therefore, to provide a realistic opinion on a wide range of military aspects of the war.165

Indeed, his study covers an array of military aspects from the entry into the war, command and control, military intelligence, the capability of the enemy etcetera. However, the main thrust of these sections is a comparative exercise between the US responses in Kinnard's study and the New Zealand responses to similar questions. The section which is worth particular study is that which considers the co-operation between the ANZUS partners. In general, the New Zealand officers had a positive attitude towards relations between New Zealand and US troops, especially that


165 Pappafloratos, p.4.
between 161 battalion and the US 173rd Airborne brigade which were initially stationed in Nui Dat. The New Zealanders enjoyed the social company of the US troops, had easy access to US officials and would have preferred more joint operations with the Americans. It was only as the war progressed and more conscript troops were drafted into the US military that the New Zealand officers claim their regard for the Americans dropped. 166

What is the most surprising result of the survey was that while the Americans received positive comments from the New Zealand officers, Australia, New Zealand's closest and most historically significant ally, rated poorly. The New Zealand officers found the ANZAC concept frustrating and limiting and blamed the lack of the desired joint operations with US forces on the reluctance of the Australians, the New Zealand forces being under I ATF operational control. 167 There was also criticism about the racist attitude of the Australian troops, particularly the conscripts, towards the Vietnamese and it was felt this was counter-productive to the formation of friendly relations with the native population. 168

In terms of the concept of ANZAC military co-operation the results are even more negative. At the officer level there appeared to exist, according to the New Zealanders, a 'big-brother' complex with one officer commenting "New Zealand officers had to compromise for the benefit of all." 169 As if to further shatter the concept of the 'ANZAC spirit', over 90 percent of the respondents claimed a distinct New Zealand national unit would have been better for morale and have been more militarily effective. 170 Most realised that the manpower and financial constrictions placed on the Defence Department precluded such an option. One of the important lessons of Vietnam was that decisions made by politicians for reasons of political expediency led directly to a reduction in the abilities of the troops on the ground.

166 Pappafloratos, p.46.
167 Pappafloratos, p.47.
168 Pappafloratos, p.48.
169 Pappafloratos, p.49.
170 Pappafloratos, p.50.
CONCLUSION

New Zealand troops were sent to Vietnam for reasons of diplomatic expediency. As soon as they had served their political purpose - in fact had become an embarrassment - they were summarily withdrawn. The military aims of the New Zealand forces were always subject to domestic political constraints. Their military achievements were given a strictly secondary place to their political symbolism. Many of New Zealand's Vietnam veterans feel they have never been given the public recognition they deserve. They share an enduring sense of bitterness that they were used as political pawns by the New Zealand Government. Once they had served their political purpose they were forgotten about.

For those who went to Vietnam the experiences are not so easily forgotten. The time in Vietnam left many with mental and physical scars. One of the most infamous legacies of the War was the Allied use of defoliants, most notably the herbicide Agent Orange. The New Zealand forces were based in Phuoc Tuy, one of the most severely defoliated provinces within South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{171} The New Zealand government denied any culpability for illnesses developed by the veterans as a result of exposure to chemical sprays forcing New Zealand veterans to seek compensation from the US Administration, resulting in only a minor payout.\textsuperscript{172}

Less tangible is the mental trauma suffered by many veterans even years after their return home. The results of a recent study of New Zealand Vietnam veterans concluded that ten percent of veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. A quarter of the respondents felt that their time in Vietnam had a strong effect on their family life: personality problems and communication disorders being the major effects identified.\textsuperscript{173} In addition, almost a quarter of the respondents rated their own health as either poor, very poor, or terrible.\textsuperscript{174}

Some steps are at last being taken to give due recognition to the efforts and sacrifices of those New Zealanders that served their country in Vietnam. Official credit, if belated, was finally bestowed when the Battle Honour 'South Vietnam 1967-70' was presented to 1 Royal New Zealand Infantry Battalion by Lieutenant General Sir John

\textsuperscript{171} Warren, p.96.
\textsuperscript{172} Smith, p.55.
\textsuperscript{174} Vincent et. al., p.23.
Mace, the original Victor 1 company commander in May 1992. As veteran Ron Lichtwark comments, "Finally it is pleasing to note that although a little late, those who served in Vietnam have now been given the official recognition they deserve." 176

175 Smith, p.59.
176 Smith, p.60.
NOTES ON THE SOURCES

The sources used in the writing of this dissertation vary from books, official battalion histories, published memoirs, parliamentary records and declassified documents. Some sources are worthy of particular note and are recommended reading to anyone interested in the subject.

Terry Burstall's book *Vietnam: The Australian Dilemma* paints a clear and thoughtful picture of the entire period of Australian (and New Zealand) involvement in Vietnam. Burstall, a Vietnam veteran, lends a military slant to his work and leaves his readers with an understanding of the main military controversies of the war. His book is also notable for the considerable use of official documents and military records, many of them only recently declassified.

For a close examination of the political and diplomatic intrigue that endured throughout the Vietnam period one should read *A Very Small Insurance Policy* by Glen St. J. Barclay. A succinct volume, this book gives a wonderfully clear analysis of the political climate of the period and the reasoning behind the decision by Australia and New Zealand to commit troops to Vietnam. While Barclay's main focus is on Australia, he devotes ample material to the stance of the New Zealand Government and the relationship between Australia and New Zealand.

A vital source of information on New Zealand's military role in Vietnam can be found in *The New Zealand Army in Vietnam 1964-1972: A Report on the Chief of General Staff's Exercise 1972* published by the Ministry of Defence. This document, accompanied by another Ministry of Defence publication *Brief History of the New Zealand Army in South Vietnam, 1964-1972*, provides a detailed list of data on the numbers and types of units sent to Vietnam as well as supplying a useful chronological table of events. Interesting supplementary reading is Harry Pappafioratos' research paper *Military Lessons of the Vietnam War: A New Zealand Officers' Perspective* which gives an insight into the unofficial views of the officers which served in Vietnam.

Claire Loftus Nelson creates a vivid portrayal of the New Zealand domestic climate in her work *Long Time Passing: New Zealand Memories of the Vietnam War*. It contains a large collection of anecdotes accompanied by an explanatory narration. Published in conjunction with Pat Craddock's radio documentary 'Boxing a Wind Named Charlie', it is based on numerous interviews covering many aspects of New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam including political, military, aid and protest activities. The radio documentary and twelve full length interviews are available from Radio New Zealand but at $120 is prohibitively expensive for an individual to purchase.
Finally one should not forget the vast amounts of information contained in the
External Affairs Review. Published monthly by the now defunct Department of
External Affairs, it gives ample coverage to both international and national political
events.
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