

# WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

Commemorating Australian Forces  
in the Vietnam War 1962-1975

The Vietnam War was the longest twentieth century conflict in which Australians participated. It involved some 60,000 Australian service men and women, and more than 1600 Australian civilian personnel. Australian involvement in the war began in 1962 with the arrival of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATV) in July and August. Personnel from all three services contributed to the war. After the end of combat operations in 1972, a small number of Australian personnel remained in Vietnam, and parts of the RAAF returned in 1975, carrying out evacuations and assisting refugees almost until the moment of South Vietnam's surrender. More than 500 Australians died as a result of the war and over 3000 were wounded.



## Background – Operation Massey Harris

The image on the poster shows the evacuation of casualties injured in Operation Massey Harris. Conducted in August and September 1970, the operation aimed to 'find and destroy enemy crop gardens in a large area east of Xuyen Moc in the south-east corner of Phuoc Tuy and neighbouring Binh Tuy province'.

On 29 August – the first day of the operation – an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) loaded with soldiers reversed over an anti-tank mine. The explosion threw the vehicle into the air and dropped it onto the rear of a Centurion tank. A South Vietnamese bushman scout was killed instantly and fourteen Australian soldiers and one New Zealander were wounded. Improvements which had recently been made to the APC prevented more severe casualties.

The photograph shows the casualties being evacuated onto a No. 9 Squadron RAAF medical evacuation helicopter. A United States Army dust-off chopper waits in the background to pick up more casualties.

No. 9 Squadron supported every major Australian operation in Vietnam. The squadron undertook more than 200,000 missions: evacuating casualties, inserting and extracting Special Air Service patrols, spraying herbicides and pesticides, dropping leaflets and gathering information.

Operation Massey Harris was part of a strategy to block the enemy's food supply. 'Massey Force' included troops of B Squadron, 3 Cavalry Regiment, supported by a mortar section from 2RAR and infantry of the task force headquarters Defence and Employment Platoon. Men from 8RAR temporarily replaced those injured in the accident on 29 August. Naval gunfire support was provided by a Royal Australian Navy destroyer and two US Navy warships offshore in the South China Sea.

When the operation ended on 20 September, 'over 34 hectares of rice, maize and vegetable garden had been destroyed'. While it succeeded in destroying crops and temporarily driving 'production cell' farmers from the area, the inability to maintain a permanent presence in the area meant that farms could be re-established once the operation had ceased.

## References

The image used to create the Remembrance Day poster was photographed by Denis Stanley Gibbons in August 1970. (Australian War Memorial P04666.023)

- Australian War Memorial, No. 9 Squadron RAAF, viewed 5 July 2016, [www.awm.gov.au/unit/U53557](http://www.awm.gov.au/unit/U53557)
- Australian War Memorial, Vietnam War 1962-75, viewed 5 July 2016, [www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam](http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam)
- Department of Veterans' Affairs, Vietnam Nominal Roll, viewed 5 July 2016, [www.vietnamroll.gov.au/home.aspx](http://www.vietnamroll.gov.au/home.aspx)
- Ekins, Ashley with Ian McNeill, *Fighting to the Finish: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1968-1975*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, in association with the Australian War Memorial, 2012.



# Teaching Activities

## Department of Veterans' Affairs: Australia's involvement in the Korean War

- Q1: Look at the image. Describe the actions, people and objects. What can you conclude about the geography and climate in Vietnam?
- Q2: Describe the uniform the soldiers are wearing (shape, design, fabric). How does it differ from what Australian servicemen wore in earlier conflicts?
- Q3: Look at the images in the poster and on this page (P00592.007 & P04666.023 in the AWM collection). Discuss the risks that the people in the images were facing.
- Q4: What was Operation Massey Harris trying to achieve? What was the rationale behind this strategy? What was the cost and to whom?
- Q5: Watch the interviews and story of Alastair Bridges on the Anzac Portal.
- The helicopter has become an icon of the Vietnam War. It was the first conflict in which helicopters were used extensively, providing support in a variety of roles. What were some of the tasks that helicopters and their crews performed? What difficulties and dangers would the crews have faced in Vietnam?
- Q6: Iroquois (UH-1 Huey) became known as the 'workhorse of the Vietnam War'. What does this mean?
- Q7: Watch the film 'To Save a Soldier: Medical Air Evacuation' (AWM F02716). What does the expression 'dust-off' mean?
- Q8: How did medical teams evacuate casualties in earlier conflicts?
- Q9: During the Vietnam War casualty survival was significantly improved in comparison with previous conflicts. What reasons might there be for this?



Australian War Memorial P00592.007



Australian War Memorial P04666.023

## Websites

Use the links provided to answer the teaching activities above.

**Department of Veterans' Affairs** <http://vietnam-war.commemoration.gov.au/>

Q.5 [anzacportal.dva.gov.au/veterans/stories/alastair-al-gordon-bridges](http://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/veterans/stories/alastair-al-gordon-bridges)

**Australian War Memorial**

Q.3 & 4 [www.awm.gov.au/collection/P00592.007](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P00592.007), [www.awm.gov.au/collection/P04666.023](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P04666.023)

Q.7 [www.awm.gov.au/collection/F02716/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F02716/)

**Australians at War Film Archive** [www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au](http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au)