



## 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment

### Vietnam

Two tours of Vietnam were completed by 2 RAR during the Vietnam War, the first one between May 1967 and June 1968 and the second between May 1970 and May 1971. An advanced party from 2 RAR arrived in Vietnam for their first tour in April 1967, although the main force did not deploy until the following month, embarking upon HMAS *Sydney* which had been converted to a troop carrier. Stationed at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy province as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force (1 ATF), they took over from the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

As many of the Battalion's members had already served eighteen months overseas in Malaysia and Borneo and as such would only be able to serve a six month tour, 2 RAR was brought up to strength by accepting a draft of national servicemen from Australia. They were joined by a company from the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, which was placed under 2 RAR's command and later in the deployment, when a second company of New Zealanders was used to replace those 2 RAR members that were being rotated home having completed two years overseas service, the Battalion would be given the formal title of **2 RAR/NZ (ANZAC)**. This was the first official integration of Australian and New Zealand infantry at unit or battalion level.

During 2 RAR's thirteen month tour they undertook a total of 23 operations in Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa provinces, and undertook constant schedule of patrols and ambushes in its area of operations in order to keep the Viet Cong (VC) off balance. Many of these operations were conducted as an independent unit, whilst others were conducted with the support of other 1 ATF units. The most significant of these operations was Operation Coburg, which was mounted between 24 January and 1 March 1968 in the border area between Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh provinces. This operation was the first operation conducted by 1 ATF outside of Phuoc Tuy and was aimed at denying the VC the ability to attack the large American bases at Long Binh and Bien Hoa. Whilst this operation was underway, the Tet Offensive was launched, the result of which was that as well as contacting local force VC units, 2 RAR also came up against the main force units as well. 91 VC or North Vietnamese were killed in this operation.

2 RAR's involvement in Coburg ended on 14 February, although the New Zealand Company, by this time W Company, 1 RNZIR, remained with 3 RAR until the end of the operation in March.

A second New Zealand company was taken on strength at this time and operations in Phuoc Tuy continued until 25 April 1968 when the Battalion was deployed to the Bien Hoa–Long Khanh border to undertake Operation Toan Tang. This was to be 2 RAR's last major operation of its first tour and in June 1968 they were relieved by 4 RAR and returned to Australia, arriving there on 13 June.<sup>1</sup>

2 RAR's second tour came almost two years later, when it returned to Vietnam in May 1970, relieving 6 RAR at Nui Dat comprising of three rifle companies and a support company, 2 RAR was once again joined by two companies from the RNZIR and on 15 May the Anzac title was adopted again. The second tour was focused mainly upon 'pacification', which sought to provide security of the struggling South Vietnamese state by seeking out and destroying the VC in their bases areas and isolating them from the ordinary civilian population. This was essentially very monotonous work for the infantrymen. The VC had been greatly weakened by the failure of the Tet Offensive, and as a result over the twelve months that 2 RAR was deployed contact was significantly less than had been experienced during the first tour, sustaining half the number of casualties. Nevertheless, the presence of two strong provincial VC regiments in the area meant that security in Phuoc Tuy remained problematic until the end and in May 1971, 4 RAR/NZ took over from 2 RAR and the battalion returned to Australia.

Total 2 RAR casualties for both tours were 32 killed and 182 wounded. Balanced against this, the Battalion was credited with having killed 297 VC and captured a further 23.

As part of the post-Vietnam War reduction of the Australian Army 2 RAR was combined with 4 RAR between 15 August 1973 and 1 February 1995 as the 2<sup>ND</sup>/4<sup>TH</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

