

NATIONAL SERVICE FOR THE **50TH ANNIVERSARY OF**
OPERATION OVERLORD,
INCLUDING THE BATTLE OF LONG KHANH

The Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial
ANZAC PARADE CANBERRA, MONDAY 7 JUNE 2021



Map indicates where Operation Overlord took place. This was based on signals intelligence that the 3rd Battalion 33rd NVA Regiment and D445 VC Battalion were based in the area, frequently moving from camp to camp.

Late in the day on 6 June 1971, 3 RAR discovered a suspect bunker system. 3 RAR withdrew into a night defensive position to allow for a plan to be developed for a follow-up first light action with 3rd Battalion 33rd NVA Regiment which commenced at 6:00 am on 7 June, known as the Battle of Long Khanh.

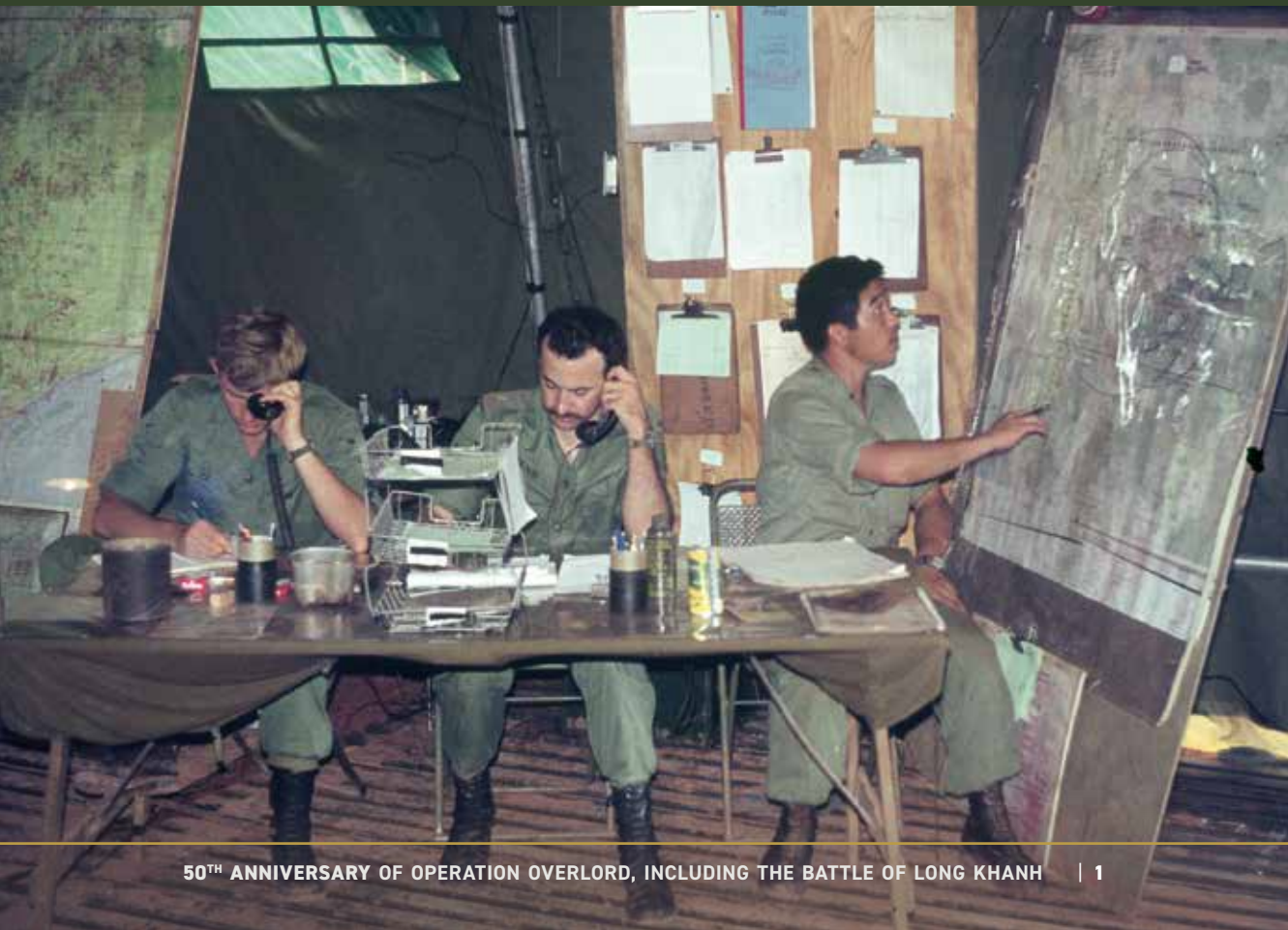
Cover image: Members of 1 Platoon, A Company, 3 RAR, wait for word to move out. From Right to Left A. (Anthony) Callus; P. (Paul) Brudell; C. (Cleve) Thomas; K. (Keith) Harwood; P. McFadyen (Ian Harris Collection)

Opposite: Members of the 12th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, work in the artillery tactical command post tent on top of Courtenay Hill, in support of Operation Overlord, June 1971. (AWM P05188.010)

OPERATION OVERLORD, INCLUDING THE BATTLE OF LONG KHANH 5-14 JUNE 1971

In mid-June 1971 newspapers reported that the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) in South Vietnam had suffered casualties during a major operation against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong (VC). After almost a decade, Australia's commitment to the war in Vietnam was entering its final months, but still the fighting continued.

Since 1966 Australia's operations in South Vietnam had been concentrated in Phuoc Tuy Province, the Australian area of operations and the site of the Task Force base at Nui Dat and the logistics base at Vung Tau. As the Task Force was winding down and preparing to hand responsibility for Phuoc Tuy to local South Vietnamese troops, it seemed that NVA and VC forces were planning an offensive in the province. Intelligence reports and Special Air Service (SAS) patrols found that the enemy, described by one SAS veteran of a 1971 tour as 'very good soldiers, very good fighters', were concentrating in the area where Phuoc Tuy borders Long Khanh. They were also believed to have moved into Phuoc Tuy and established a base near the Courtenay rubber plantation.







The Australian Task Force commander, Brigadier Bruce McDonald, initiated Operation Overlord to prevent the enemy from gaining a foothold in Phuoc Tuy. Named for the Second World War Allied invasion of Normandy with whose anniversary it coincided, Overlord encompassed a large area of territory reaching north from the Courtenay rubber plantation into Long Khanh.

Overlord would involve two infantry battalions – the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR); and the 4th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment/New Zealand (4RAR/NZ – the ANZAC Battalion) – along with a battalion of the United States 1st Air Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade, and Australian tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs), artillery, mortars, engineers, No. 9 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and 161 (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight. While 3 RAR and tanks from C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment searched the operational area, 4 RAR/NZ along with the United States troops and A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment would act as a blocking force to prevent the enemy escaping.

4 RAR/NZ moved into its blocking positions early on the morning of 5 June 1971. On the following day, the anniversary of the original Operation Overlord, the Australians established their main operational headquarters atop the 210 metre high Courtenay Hill.

RAAF Iroquois helicopters carrying troops prepare to take off during an air-mobile operation, Vietnam, 1971. (AWM P02866.030)

Two of 3 RAR's rifle companies, mounted in APCs, were sent to secure the site of the battalion headquarters about four kilometres north of the hill. Another, with two troops of tanks, deployed to a blocking and reserve position in Long Khanh.

Helicopters flew 3 RAR's B Company to the landing zone from which it would begin patrolling the search area. The officers and soldiers were shot at as they came in, while helicopter gunships flew overhead directing suppressing fire onto the perimeter – 'making sure', said one gunner, 'that if there were any heads down there, they were ducking for cover'. As they moved through dense undergrowth, hidden from above by thick jungle canopy, the Australians saw signs of the enemy's recent presence and sometimes small groups of enemy troops. 'Everyone,' said one officer, 'was quite tense as contact was expected at any time'.



The Australians had been dropped about 500 metres from a large enemy bunker system and though evidence of enemy activity was clear, the bunkers' existence only became apparent late in the afternoon – too late to launch an assault. As they moved towards their night defensive positions the infantry had some contacts, further evidence of the enemy's presence in the area. During the night, mortars and artillery fired on the area in which the bunkers had been located in an attempt to prevent the garrison slipping away. B Company's commander recalled later that he expected the enemy to escape: 'it was clear that he had been found; he had been targeted by directed artillery and mortar fire with more to come; and other sub-units were being used against him. I believed he would use the night to move away'.

Members of 17 Construction Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers (RAE), at Night Defence Base 'Garth' near Route 2 in Phuoc Tuy Province, Vietnam. (AWM P05242.027; photographer David John Mumford)



Early the next morning, after a half-hour mortar and artillery barrage on the enemy's position, B Company's 5 Platoon moved forward. As they approached the bunkers shortly before 7:00 am, the lead section came under a fusillade of fire. Two Australian soldiers were seriously wounded; two more as the fire intensified. The platoon was pinned down just 15 metres from the enemy. One soldier recalled, 'It was clear we were heavily outnumbered and trapped by the NVA on three sides'. They returned fire and were ordered to remain where they were until the rest of the company could get to them.

As one section moved forward, keeping the enemy's heads down while the wounded were rescued, their leader was also hit. Soon afterwards the forward artillery observer was killed. When dust-off helicopters reached the scene, they came under heavy fire which prevented the last of the five wounded from being winched out. At the same time tanks were moving to attack the bunkers from the rear, while No. 9 Squadron, RAAF and United States Army helicopter gunships joined the fighting, firing their rockets into enemy positions just a few dozen metres from the beleaguered infantry.

After two hours of intense fighting, two more platoons came up to provide support, but the tanks were still engaged in the bunker system a few hundred metres away.

Infantry from 3 RAR being dismounted from APCs from A Squadron 3rd Cavalry Regiment preparing to move out on patrol in Vietnam in 1971. (Anthony Cox Collection)









They fought their way into the complex as fire from United States gunships burst ahead of them. One troop commander recalled that the air strike improved visibility; but, he said, 'There were so many bunkers ... we didn't have enough ammunition to engage them all'. Early in the afternoon the tanks were joined by infantry. The sweep continued, but as the soldiers moved over ground already cleared by the tanks they found only empty bunkers.

Less than 400 metres away the battle continued around the B Company position. One resupply helicopter had managed to get some ammunition to the infantry, but a second attempt ended in disaster when the helicopter was hit by enemy fire, turned on its side and crashed in flames. The pilot and door gunner were killed and the two other crewmen wounded.

By the time the tanks and infantry resumed their advance later in the afternoon the enemy had escaped. About 300 metres south of the scene of the armoured assault, infantry found more empty bunkers. Warm cooking fires, uneaten meals and tracks leading away from the complex told of their very recent occupation. The enemy were making a successful withdrawal and it seemed that after eight hours' fighting those who had inflicted so much damage on the Australians had been carrying out a holding action as the main body slipped away.

Members of 3 RAR ride on top of an armoured recovery vehicle and a Centurion tank of C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment, as they drive through thick vegetation in the border area between Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh provinces during June 1971. These men, along with members of 4 RAR and supporting elements, were engaged on Operation Overlord. (AWM FOD/71/0304/VN)

The following day a search revealed an extensive bunker system that included training areas, lecture rooms, dressing stations, sleeping bays for more than 120 people, and a couple of assault courses. It took engineers the best part of four days to destroy the complex. The Australians found just three enemy bodies, along with evidence that others had been wounded in the fighting. As was so often the case no one could be certain how many NVA or VC had become casualties. The fighting in the bunkers had killed three Australians and left ten others wounded. The officer commanding 5 Platoon, which had borne the worst of the battle that day, recognised that the survivors had been 'lucky to get out of that with our lives'. Over the following days, as they searched likely enemy escape routes, rifle companies had some fleeting contacts but there was little sign of the enemy.



The fighting around the bunkers was over, but Overlord continued. On the morning of 12 June three APCs carrying a twelve-man infantry section were patrolling along the western edge of the Courtenay rubber plantation. When the lead carrier slowed to avoid an artillery illumination canister lying on the track, the column came under small arms and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire. Then the rear vehicle exploded, showering those in front with shards of metal and shattered pieces of equipment. Thick black smoke billowed from the stricken vehicle. Inside, the driver and crew commander were dead. Five of the men riding on top were killed; the other three were severely wounded.

Centurion Tank, Charlie Bravo of C Squadron 1st Armoured Regiment during Operation Overlord in Phuoc Tuy Province, June 1971. (Charlie Dearing Collection)



Five hundred metres away other APC crews heard the explosion and were ordered to the scene. They arrived to find what remained of the stricken vehicle still burning and the distressing sight of body parts on the ground. Helicopter gunships were called in and dust-offs carried the wounded and dead away.

It seemed at first that an enemy soldier had got close enough to throw a satchel bomb into the carrier, but it turned out that an RPG round had hit a claymore mine fastened to the APC's turret, detonating about a dozen others.

Five hours later and some 400 metres away other APCs also came under attack. One was penetrated by an RPG round which wounded the crew commander and driver. Another crew commander was wounded when his APC was also hit. The Australians returned fire as helicopter gunships flew in support. The enemy withdrew before a napalm strike incinerated the area. An APC driver remembered it as 'the day we got our arse kicked'.



Operation Overlord ended on 14 June 1971. The enemy had been driven from base areas in Phuoc Tuy and could no longer consider the border between Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh a sanctuary. The Task Force's combat elements had been engaged for ten days and confirmed the deaths of six enemy. Twenty-two Australian soldiers were wounded and eight had been killed, while the No. 9 Squadron, RAAF had suffered two deaths and had two more airmen wounded.

Overlord was 3 RAR's most significant contact during its 1971 tour. At least six Australians received decorations for their part in the Operation and battle, with one Mentioned in Despatches.

A crew of 104 Battery, Royal Australian Artillery, fires a 105 mm howitzer gun at Nui Dat, June 1971. (AWM FOD/71/0316/VN)





Members of A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, aboard a fire support vehicle during Operation Overlord, prepare to drive through a heavily foliated area in Phuoc Tuy Province, June 1971. (AWM P05330.004)

ORDER OF SERVICE

The music for the commemorative service is provided by the Royal Military College Band.

Major Darren Cole
Director of Music

Commemorative Service commences at 10:30 am

PLAYING OF THE DIDGERIDOO

Sergeant Norman Daymirringu of the North West Mobile Force on behalf of the Australian Defence Force.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Master of Ceremonies
Captain Martin Harper

CATAFALQUE PARTY AND COLOUR PARTY ARE MOUNTED

Members of Australia's Federation Guard and the Standard, Guidon, Regimental Colours and Corps Banners of the units involved in Operation Overlord.

CALL TO REMEMBRANCE

Colonel Peter Scott DSO (Ret'd)
Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion,
The Royal Australian Regiment

COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd)
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

MUSICAL PIECE

He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother

READING

Mr Robert Prideaux
Section Commander, 6 Platoon, Bravo Company
3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment

PRAYER OF COMMEMORATION

Chaplain Kerry Larwill CSC
Joint Operations Command

As I pray, if you are of a different faith or belief, please use my words as an opportunity for your own reflection and remembrance.

Eternal God, today we remember those who served in Operation Overlord, gathered here today and across our land, and those who gave their lives in battle, among them young Australians who willingly laid down their lives on the battlefields of war.

We honour those who paid the supreme sacrifice, and all who suffered in the defence of freedom and the pursuit of peace. We pray for all who still suffer the effects of war. Grant them your peace and healing strength. Have mercy on our divided world. Give your Spirit of peace to all people and remove from us the spirit that makes for war, that all may live in peace.

As we reflect upon our world, we acknowledge the hurt caused to some, and so we strive for peace. Help us to overcome the barriers that divide people and nations. Bless every effort being made to bring peace and understanding to the world.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

OFFICIAL WREATH LAYING

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr Eddie S. M. Tricker
D & E Platoon
Headquarters 1st Australian Task Force

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

Response:

We will remember them.

All:

Lest we forget.

LAST POST

ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE

ROUSE

NATIONAL ANTHEM OF AUSTRALIA

*Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are one and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.*

FINAL BLESSING

Chaplain Kerry Larwill CSC
Joint Operations Command

Go from this special time and place in peace.
Be of good courage; keep hold of that which is good.
Never pay back evil for evil; strengthen the faint hearted.
Support the weak and distressed; honour every person.
Love and serve the Lord.
May the blessing of God Almighty; Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen

CATAFALQUE PARTY AND COLOUR PARTY ARE DISMOUNTED

PUBLIC WREATH LAYING

Members of the public are invited to lay floral tributes.

CONCLUSION OF SERVICE

OFFICIAL PARTY DEPARTS





*Ground crew of 161 Independent
Reconnaissance Flight loading flares.
(Australian Army Flying Museum collection)*





Group portrait of 5 Platoon, B Company, 3 RAR, at Nui Dat a fortnight after the fierce action in Long Khanh province on 7 June 1971, during Operation Overlord. After the action, the depleted platoon was brought up to strength with reinforcements, and in this photograph numbered 24 men. Those wounded on 7 June were still convalescing or had been medically evacuated to Australia. (AWM P05146.001)

ROLL OF HONOUR

**SECOND LIEUTENANT
IAN GEORGE MATHERS**

12th Field Regiment
Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery
7 June 1971
Aged 22 years

**CORPORAL
DAVID JOHN DUBBER**

No. 9 Squadron
Royal Australian Air Force
7 June 1971
Aged 28 years

**FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
EVERITT MURRAY LANCE**

No. 9 Squadron
Royal Australian Air Force
7 June 1971
Aged 43 years

**CORPORAL
KENNETH JAMES BOARDMAN**

A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
Royal Australian Armoured Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 22 years

**LANCE CORPORAL
JOHN NOEL MCCARTHY**

A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
Royal Australian Armoured Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 26 years

**PRIVATE
DONALD CAMERON HILL**

1st Australian Task Force
Royal Australian Infantry Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 22 years

**PRIVATE
MICHAEL TOWLER**

1st Australian Task Force
Royal Australian Infantry Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 22 years

*161 Independent Reconnaissance Flight
Sioux helicopter in flight, 1971. (Australian
Army Flying Museum collection)*

**PRIVATE
TREVOR JAMES ATTWOOD**

1st Australian Task Force
Royal Australian Infantry Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 23 years

**PRIVATE
PETER TEBB**

1st Australian Task Force
Royal Australian Infantry Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 20 years

**PRIVATE
ROGER WILLIAM DRISCOLL**

1st Australian Task Force
Royal Australian Infantry Corps
12 June 1971
Aged 22 years



CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS AND PROTOCOLS

PLAYING OF THE DIDGERIDOO

The didgeridoo (or as it is known by the Traditional Custodians of the Yolngu clans of north-east Arnhem Land, the 'yidaki'), is not traditionally played in Ngunnawal or Wiradjuri country, however it is played here today with the permission of the Ngunnawal people to acknowledge and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

AUSTRALIAN ARMY UNIT COLOURS

The practice of carrying symbols into battle has existed for centuries, with the Eagle Standards of the Roman legions being perhaps the best known. In the 13th century, the nobility went into battle with their entire body and most of their horse hidden by defensive armour, and displayed distinctive badges or crests on their equipment and banners to aid identification. It is from these banners carrying ensigns of heraldry that Regimental Colours are directly derived. Colours are no longer carried in battle, but they remain a strong focal point for a regiment and are treated with great respect.

CATAFALQUE PARTY

Historically, a catafalque was a support for a coffin, but it has come to represent a remembrance stone or a tomb. A Catafalque Party was originally appointed to guard a coffin from theft or desecration. Now it performs a ceremonial role, honouring the dead.

COMPLIMENTS TO COLOURS

Compliments are to be accorded to the uncased Colours when carried by a Colour Party, when on parade. When Colours are to be received on parade, spectators are to stand on the Senior Ensign's order: 'Colour Party' ... 'quick march'; and they should remain standing until the Colour Party is in position on parade, with the completion of the musical salute *Point of War*. Service personnel in uniform are to salute only for the playing of *Point of War*.

When Colours are marched-off parade, spectators are to stand on the order: 'march-off the Colours'; and those service personnel in uniform are to salute only while the band plays the musical salute *Point of War*. At the completion of the musical salute, service personnel complete the salute; however, they remain standing until the Colours have cleared the parade ground and the Catafalque Party returns to the attention position. The Colours are not saluted as they pass by service personnel during the march-on and march-off procedure.

Compliments are not accorded to cased Colours.

FLAG PROTOCOLS

Flags are an important symbol of nations, and should be treated with respect at all times. They symbolise the people of their nation, and at commemorations they represent those who have fought and died for the nation. Flags should always be flown aloft and free, and should not be allowed to fall or lie upon the ground. 'Flag draping' (wearing the flag as a cape or cloak), or defacing a flag by writing on it, are disrespectful acts which are discouraged at this commemoration.

When a flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried past in a parade or review, all present should face the flag, remove their headwear and refrain from talking. Service personnel in uniform should salute.

LAST POST

The *Last Post* is a bugle call which signals the end of the day. It became incorporated into funeral and memorial services as a final farewell and symbolises that the duty of the dead is over and they can rest in peace.

Visitors should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the playing of the *Last Post*. Service personnel in uniform are to salute.

NATIONAL ANTHEMS

Visitors should stand facing the flags, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the playing of *all* national anthems. Service personnel in uniform are to salute.

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

Many ceremonies of remembrance include a recitation of the Ode. It is the fourth stanza of 'For the Fallen', a poem written by Laurence Binyon (1869–1943) in 1914. It can also include the third stanza. The Ode has been recited in ceremonies since 1919.

Visitors should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the reciting of the Ode.

ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE

The practice of observing one minute of silence originated soon after the First World War and provides an opportunity for quiet reflection on the sacrifice of those who served and lost their lives.

Visitors should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the period of silence.

ROUSE

After the minute of silence, flags are raised from half-mast to the masthead as the *Rouse* is sounded. Traditionally the *Rouse* called soldiers' spirits to arise, ready to fight for another day.

Today it is associated with the *Last Post* at all military funerals, and at services of dedication and remembrance.

Headquarters (1ATF) (forward) on Courtenay Hill, Operation Overlord, June 1971. (Pete Bird collection 101-8)

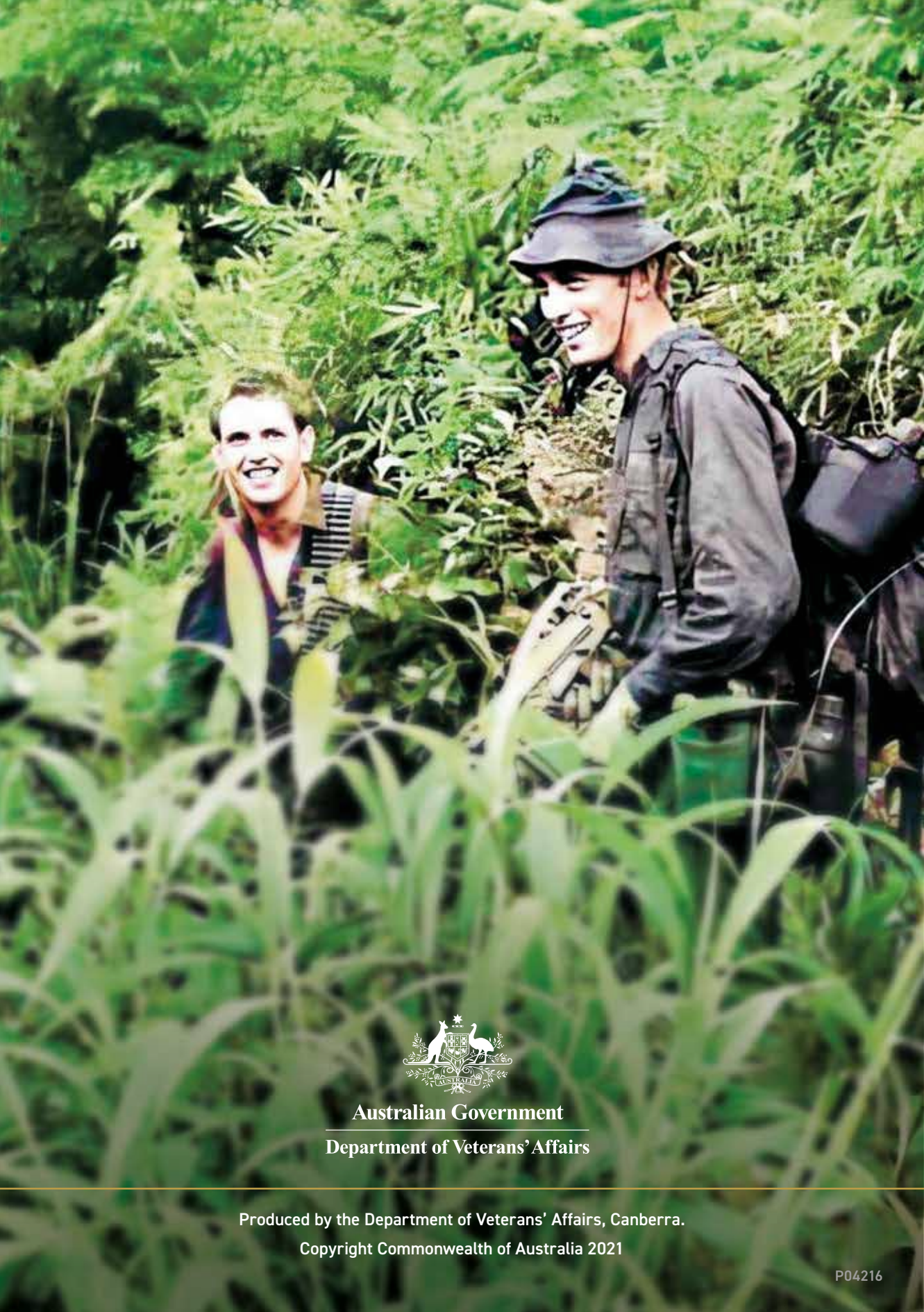








A member of 4th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (4 RAR/NZ) looks out from Courtenay Hill. (Nick Mazzaro collection)



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

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