



Government House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
21 March 2019

## UNIT CITATION FOR GALLANTRY

The Governor-General announces the following amended Unit Citation for Gallantry, awarded for action in Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral.

**1<sup>ST</sup> AUSTRALIAN TASK FORCE (FORWARD)**

**Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force (Forward)**

**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment**

**A Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment**

**C Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment**

**12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery**

**1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers**

**Detachments in direct support of and located with 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force (Forward)**

For extraordinary gallantry in action in the Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces of South Vietnam from 12 May 1968 to 6 June 1968, during Operation THOAN THANG.

By His Excellency's Command

**Paul Singer LVO OAM**

Acting Official Secretary to the Governor-General

## UNIT CITATION FOR GALLANTRY

On 12 May 1968, the 1st Australian Task Force (Forward) (1 ATF (Fwd)) deployed into Area of Operations (AO) SURFERS on the border of the Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces of South Vietnam. Their task was to establish two Fire Support Patrol Bases (FSPB) from which to mount patrols to interdict enemy infiltration and supply routes between War Zone D and Saigon. Intelligence had informed the Task Force that at least five enemy regiments were known to be operating in vicinity of AO SURFERS and preparing to mount attacks against Saigon and the United States military base at Bien Hoa. It was believed that the forces the Australians would operate against were disorganised and withdrawing from Saigon after protracted combat in the Saigon area.

FSPB Coral was occupied late on 12 May by the headquarters and guns from the 12th Field Regiment, mortars and anti-tank crews from the 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), and personnel deployed to set up the Task Force headquarters. Unknown to the commanders, the area chosen for the insertion was the forward staging area of two regiments from the 7th Division of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) which was preparing to advance on Saigon. The Australians had only enough time to prepare basic fighting positions when the PAVN forces launched human wave attacks against the hastily-prepared defences.

On the morning of 13 May, the enemy launched rocket propelled grenade and heavy, accurate mortar fire, followed by a ground assault against the position occupied by 1 RAR mortar line, 102 Field Battery, Detachment 1312 Division Locating Battery and elements of HQ Battery 12th Field Regiment. The North Vietnamese Army quickly overran the 1 RAR mortar line and Foxtrot gun of 102 Field Battery. The gunners and the mortar men held their ground assisted by fire support from 161 Field Battery Royal New Zealand Artillery, 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) mortars, Cobra helicopter gunships and "Spooky" C47 gunship. 102 Field Battery fired 105mm guns over open sights at the assaulting enemy and then fired Splintex over the mortar line in response to a request by the Mortar Line Officer. As dawn broke, fighting patrols from 102 Field Battery mounted counter-attacks to clear the enemy from the mortars and retook the captured gun. Although still under fire, the detachment of three guns began to provide fire support to the deployed 1 RAR Companies. Clearing patrols from 102 Field Battery and 1 RAR Anti-Tank platoon secured the battlefield and re-established the perimeter as the enemy withdrew.

The next day the defences were strengthened by troops from 1 RAR and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) of A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment. The arrival of the United States' M109 self-propelled artillery from Battery A of the 2nd/25th Artillery Regiment and the M42A1 'Duster' tracked anti-aircraft vehicles from 5th/2nd Air Defence Battery, gave the defenders much needed additional firepower. Engineers from the 1st Field Squadron worked around the clock to harden the defensive position and help establish a Task Force Maintenance Area to provide continuous logistical support to the deployed Task Force.

Over the next two weeks further attacks were mounted against the FSPB, but the arrival of Centurion tanks from C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment and direct support from helicopters from 9 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force and 161 Reconnaissance Flight, added to the defenders' ability to repulse repeated regimental size assaults.

FSPB Coogee had been initially established by 3 RAR, with APC's from A Squadron, however the greater threat identified in the north of AO SURFERS saw them redeployed to occupy FSPB Balmoral on 24 May. Two days later FSPB Balmoral was attacked by a suspected regimental sized enemy force. This attack was defeated by the combined firepower of the tanks and infantry fighting from well prepared positions. A further attack mounted on 28 May was also defeated by supporting fire from the tanks, infantry and accurate mortar fire.



For two more weeks the Australian forces, supported by United States and New Zealand artillery, continuously mounted fighting patrols against the enemy entrenched in bunker systems within AO SURFERS. Operating out of FSPBs Coral and Balmoral, the Australians aggressively sought out and defeated well prepared, highly motivated and well supplied enemy forces in fierce, close-quarter fighting. The aggression shown by the Australian forces and the combat support troops deployed forward working long hours over a long period and under arduous conditions, supported by United States' and New Zealand air assets and artillery, significantly contributed to the failure of the North Vietnamese forces to mount coordinated attacks against Saigon and Bien Hoa.

With limited experience at fighting high intensity combined armour/infantry engagements, the Australians demonstrated extraordinary gallantry in the defence of FSPBs Coral and Balmoral. The exceptional leadership and soldiering skills of all members of 1 ATF (Fwd) and their sustained outstanding performance in the face of overwhelming odds during the largest and most hazardous battle of the Vietnam War were in the finest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Forces.