NUI DAT, VIETNAM:

Australian Task Force troops on Sunday clashed with Viet Cong about six miles north east of here in a two hour battle killing at least five enemy and wounding many others.

Troops of the 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, found numerous enemy blood trails which suggested a much higher Viet Cong casualty rate.

Additionally, many enemy were believed to have been killed or wounded by artillery of the 4th Field Regiment, together with American Artillery, helicopter fire and airstrikes.

Australian casualties are described as moderate and were lifted out of the battle area under enemy fire by RAAF helicopters from No. 9 Squadron.

After two hours of intense fighting the Viet Cong were forced to break off the battle and run as Task Force Artillery and American airstrikes pounded their fighting positions.

Fleeing north and north east the enemy were harassed along escape routes by accurate artillery fire.

The full extent of enemy casualties may not be known.

Additional information from enemy graves and defector reports could provide future details.

Troops of the 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, supported by 4th Field Regiment, engineers from 1st Field Squadron and Armoured Personnel Carriers of "A" Squadron 3rd Cavalry Regiment are taking part in search and destroy Operation "Ballarat" which is continuing.

The operation is taking place in a known Viet Cong supply area and movement route.

At 10.15 am "A" Company 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, Commanded by Major Jake O'Donnell of Woolgoolga, N.S.W., discovered a fresh track.
An ambush was set and two Viet Cong killed soon after. A platoon made a sweep search of the area around the ambush position and at 11.00 am came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire. The platoon attacked, killing three Viet Cong. The enemy replied with rifle fire and grenades causing some Australian casualties.

Artillery fire was called in but the Viet Cong remained locked in battle to minimise their own casualties.

Other elements of 7 RAR moved up under fire to assist in the fight and evacuate casualties.

RAAF helicopters flew in to lift out the wounded and came under fire. First helicopter on the scene was flown by the Flight Commander, Squadron Leader James Cox of Canberra.

It ran into heavy enemy automatic weapons fire.

The winch was shot away before any wounded could be lifted out and Army Medical Orderly in the aircraft, Corporal R.J. Atkin, of Wodonga, Victoria, was wounded.

Part of Squadron Leader Cox's boot was shot away and his radio communications cable was cut.

He flew his aircraft back for repairs while six other Australian "Choppers" sped to the scene.

American Army gunship helicopters fired on the enemy with machine gun and rockets, providing cover as the RAAF helicopters moved in.

They found a hole in the jungle big enough for one helicopter to operate its winch to the jungle floor.

Aircraft went in one at a time and lifted out casualties. They were taken back to Australian and American Hospitals at Vung Tau. Concentrated and accurate artillery and intense infantry small arms fire finally forced the Viet Cong to break off contact and flee.

A search of the battle area revealed five Viet Cong killed. A further 10 were estimated to have been taken from the battle area. A number of enemy weapons, including a Chinese communist machine gun, were captured.

The 7th Battalion, supported by New Zealand and Australian Artillery
are following up the contact as Operation "Ballarat" continues in Phuoc Tuy Province, 40 miles south east of Saigon.

Lists: A
further information:

9 August 1967

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