

## Foreword

I am delighted to contribute a foreword to *On the Gunline* by David Bruhn. His latest book describes in detail the operational activities of some 270 U.S. Navy and four Royal Australian Navy (RAN) warships that served on the 'gunline' during the Vietnam War. The book gives an excellent overview of the war from the maritime perspective and provides the reader with a clear and comprehensive understanding of the impact the navy made in support of the troops ashore.

Within the context of the war, the RAN contribution was modest compared to the significant resources deployed by the U.S. Navy. This contribution however, in response to U.S. requests, was valuable because it filled a gap in specific U.S. Navy shortages. Australia's contributions to the war grew incrementally from the first commitment of Army advisers to fielding a Task Force and air and naval units. Australia was the only allied nation to provide naval support to the U.S. during the Vietnam War.

In late 1966, the Australian Government directed Defence to consider an increased force commitment to the war in Vietnam. From the naval perspective, the provision of one of the new Guided Missile Destroyers (DDG) recently arrived from the U.S. and fully compatible with the U.S. Navy logistical system was straight forward. The U.S. had made it clear that a clearance diving team able to undertake explosive ordnance disposal duties would be welcome. This request was quickly endorsed given the significant dividend such a deployment would bring and the fact that such a capability was immediately available.

Following discussions between commander in chief Pacific Fleet, Adm. Roy L. Johnson and the RAN chief of Naval Staff, Vice Adm. Alan W. R. McNicoll in February 1967, the RAN agreed to provide a destroyer on a rotational basis under the operational command of the Seventh Fleet and a clearance diving team (CDT3) under the operational control of the U.S. Commander Naval Forces Vietnam. A RAN destroyer was provided to Seventh Fleet on a rotational basis from March 1967 to September 1971, involving nine deployments at six to seven-month intervals. RAN warships provided naval gunfire support and also participated in Operation Sea Dragon.

CDT3 operated within Operation Market Time (Task Force 115) and was fully integrated within the US Navy EOD Group in Vietnam (CDT3 was known as EODMUPAC Team 35). Eight teams were deployed between February 1967 and May 1971, totaling eight officers and 41 sailors, rotating through the war zone at approximately seven-month intervals. The two (i.e. destroyer and CDT) comprised the RAN Force Vietnam.

In response to a U.S. request for flying support, Australia announced in July 1967 it would provide a detachment of RAN aircrew and support personnel. Named the Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam (RANHFV), it was assigned to the U.S. Army 12th Combat Aviation Group which provided rotary-wing support for forces in III Corps Tactical Zone. From October 1967 it was incorporated into the 135th Assault Helicopter Company flying helicopters in both utility and gunship configurations. Each flight consisted of pilots, gunners, aircrew and maintenance, and support personnel. Some 200 personnel in four annual contingents were deployed from September 1967 to June 1971 and, flying in support of the South Vietnamese, unquestionably saw the most intense combat of any RAN personnel in the war.

The Australian naval forces proved an outstanding success in the operations in which they took part, and attracted the warmly expressed appreciation from their U.S. counterparts. This is reflected by the award of five U.S. Navy Unit Commendations to the RAN—two to HMAS *Perth*, one to HMAS *Hobart*, and two to CDT3.

As an example of U.S. Navy appreciation for RAN participation, Capt. Guy R. Griffiths commanding officer HMAS *Hobart* forwarded the following message from commander Seventh Fleet, Vice Adm. John J. Hyland, USN, as he left for return to Australia: “While operating with the Seventh Fleet, *Hobart* has drawn well deserved praise from all echelons of command both afloat and ashore.... Your aggressive response to all missions has been unsurpassed. Your outstanding performance in the face of enemy fire in Sea Dragon and in support of First Marine Division has been a tribute to exceptionally strong leadership, exemplary training and a strong cohesive spirit. By continuing the long tradition of the navies of our two countries working together for a common cause you have made a definite and highly significant contribution to the mission of the free world forces in Southeast Asia...”

The three DDGs (*Hobart*, *Perth* and *Brisbane*) fitted in seamlessly with the USN whose confidence in their operational abilities meant they regularly assumed the duties of Commander Task Unit, demonstrating the high level of integration the RAN achieved. With *Perth* and *Hobart* scheduled for maintenance, the *Daring*-class HMAS *Vendetta* was selected in late 1968 to relieve *Brisbane* and deployed in September 1969. During the ensuing seven months, *Vendetta* performed credibly in a role for which she had been specifically designed—naval gunfire support—and proved to be a more than adequate replacement for a DDG on the gunline. To keep *Vendetta* operational within a U.S. support organisation tested the RAN's logistic system but confirmed the RAN's ability to successfully operate with the USN.

Vietnam provided the RAN with an excellent opportunity to deploy its surface ships in a high tempo operational environment, which tested both crew and equipment serviceability and reliability. The navy passed the test with flying colours and contributed positively to the enduring relationship the RAN has with the U.S. Navy.

With its comprehensive coverage of the maritime war in Vietnam *On the Gunline* offers a valuable and interesting analysis of naval operations off Vietnam. Such an analysis will contribute to longer term strategic thinking on the use of naval forces in the future.

Commodore Hector Donohue, AM RAN (Rtd)