

Memorial Address - John Fenton

16th October 2019

Your worship, the mayor of the City of Albany Mr. Dennis Wellington, Ladies & Gentlemen

17 Construction Squadron Workshop deployed to Vietnam in support of Operations as determined by the Commander Australian Force Vietnam. The Workshop provided Field Repair capability to all of the Plant, Vehicles, Electrical Equipment & Weapons of 17 Construction Squadron during the tasking of that Unit throughout Phuoc Tuy Province & the Vung Tau Special Zone. Almost 50% of the Workshop members were National Servicemen whereas the majority of junior NCOs, senior NCOs & Warrant Officers were Regular Army. This unique mix of soldier/tradesmen provided a wealth of knowledge, which ensured the parent squadron was well supported during Operations.

After initial deployment the parent Squadron came under Command of the Commander 1 Australian Task Force located at Nui Dat in central Phuoc Tuy Province. In the lead up to the Battle of Long Tan, three members of the Squadron were wounded by incoming enemy mortar rounds. The Workshop personnel were located variously at 1st Australian Logistic Support Group, Vung Tau, 1 ATF Nui Dat & an element, mainly vehicle mechanics, deployed with the Land Clearing Team maintaining under very trying circumstances the Team's primary equipment the armoured Caterpillar D8 bulldozers.

The Squadron's role was to assist in the construction of 1 ALSG, construct 1 ATF Base, including multiple helicopter landing pads, conduct Land Clearing Operations to deny the enemy safe havens & to maintain the routes throughout the area of Operations to allow quick access by infantry & armoured elements of the Task Force.

The men on parade today helped implement a program of prime importance "winning the hearts & minds of the civilian population." Improving their health & well being by improving water supply, constructing clinics, improving hospital facilities & constructing housing for Regional Force personnel, our generation set the standard of assisting the populations where we served. That tradition extended to the following generations of 17 Construction Squadron Workshop personnel in Namibia in 1989 with UNTAG Operation Safe Passage, in Australia's remote aborigine communities from 1996 to the present comprising the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program, in Timor Leste in 1999 & Afghanistan. All of these programs attest to the endeavours & standards set by the Vietnam Veterans in not only war fighting but doing their best to improve the population wellbeing in remote areas of Australia & areas of conflict.

Your worship, in honouring our members by presenting the Keys to the City of Albany to the Vietnam Veterans you will have made the contemporary generations proud of the Unit in which we served. We are humbled & we thank you.

Thank you for listening to our story.