



The Battle of Long Tan: As told by the Commanders

Robert Grandin

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This is the first time that those in direct command of Delta Company have shared their memories of the most significant battle fought by Australians in Vietnam, the Battle of Long Tan.

Each of the commanders shares the experiences that brought them to Vietnam, and describes how the company commander, Harry Smith, drove Delta Company to become one of the most outstanding units in the Australian forces. Delta's superb military discipline, and its commanders' ability to think outside the square were decisive in holding a vastly superior number of enemies at bay.

Each platoon played a crucial role in Delta Company's survival. The artillery's commitment in providing an unbroken wall of metal through which the enemy had to advance is told from the perspectives of both the forward controller and the gun positions. We fly with the RAAF helicopter pilots whose ammunition resupply was the turning point of the battle, and experience the carnage of the battlefield through the eyes of those in the relieving APCs.

Delta Company's trauma on returning to the battlefield to claim their fallen was lightened only by the miraculous survival of two of their wounded. The trauma of the battle did not end with the action, however, as politics began to play their part in the drama. The valour of those directly involved in the battle has never been duly recognised - in some cases it has been belittled, in others denied. The ongoing efforts of the Long Tan commanders to right the many wrongs perpetrated in the wake of the battle, and their own journeys from the events of August 1966 draw the reader into a compelling dialogue on the aftermath of Vietnam.

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