

# THE VIETNAM WAR



# FIRSTHAND

TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCE



PUBLISHED AND SUPPORTED BY



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In this document the authors are sensitive to language usage. In line with advice from the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework and with respect for the purposes and content of this document for use in Victoria (and the Victorian Curriculum F-10), we recognise the diversity of Aboriginal people living throughout Victoria. Therefore, whilst the terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are commonly used to describe Aboriginal people of southeast Australia, and the term 'Indigenous' may be used to describe Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia, we have used the term 'Aboriginal' to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following resource may contain images of deceased persons.

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- Melbourne, Vic 1970. <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/P00671.003/screen/3787601.JPG>
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- Vietnam 1967, Nurse Lieutenant Margaret Ahern. AWM. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C36742>
- Australian and South Vietnamese soldier, Phuoc Tuy Province, 1970. AWM. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C327191>
- Dustoff helicopter, South Vietnam. AWM. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C290046>
- Vietnam 1966, Ong Hunag Village. AWM. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C309724>

## FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Ho Tram Area, Vietnam 1971 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C246986>

For teachers today, Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War presents a number of challenges. Almost every aspect of the war, including Australia's involvement, was attended by controversies, many of which have endured for decades. Even the name of the war is contested. What most in the West call the Vietnam War (or just 'Vietnam') is known by the victors as the American War, to distinguish it from their wars against the French in 1946-54 and their brief but bloody battle against the Chinese in 1979. Many historians would prefer to call these the First, Second and Third Indochina Wars, but those names have not stuck.

Australia's involvement came, with remarkable precision, a half-century after World War One and a quarter-century after World War Two. Some Australians regarded those who served as a third generation proudly upholding the Anzac legend. Others saw Australia's involvement as an unwise, or even immoral, commitment to an unwinnable war. Divisions in Australian society were exacerbated by a selective system of conscription for overseas military service, a longstanding source of political tension. The number of Australians who served in Vietnam was substantial – about 60,000 from a population of about 12 million – but considerably less than the hundreds of thousands who served in the world wars. The official death toll was 521, compared with nearly 60,000 and 40,000 for the two world wars. Consequently, although the Australian commitment lasted longer than either of the world wars, some Australians took passionate stands for or against the commitment, while others carried on their lives almost untouched by the Vietnam War and its controversies.

A further challenge relates to the nature of Australian society, which has changed more radically in the half-century since the Vietnam War than, for example, in the fifty years between landing of Australian troops at Gallipoli and the arrival of the first combat troops in Vietnam. Not the least of those changes is the inclusion of a substantial community of Vietnamese origin.

For some years the Vietnam Veterans Association has supported a team of veterans who visited schools to speak of their experience. Their firsthand experience is invaluable and an important contribution to the understanding of an important time in Australian history, but neither students nor teachers in the 2020s can be expected to understand the context of developments, in Australia and the world, that led to their service.

In 2018 the Victorian government undertook to expand the teaching of the Vietnam War in the state's schools. In response to that commitment, this guide has been created, to assist teachers to include topics related to Australia's Vietnam War into the curriculum. The Department of Premier and Cabinet wish to acknowledge the support of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (Victorian Branch), the Department of Education and Training, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Shrine of Remembrance.

Peter Edwards,  
Adjunct Professor Deakin University



## CONTENTS

# LIVING THROUGH THE VIETNAM WAR

P. 08

### 1. Fears and Alliances

Why did the Vietnam War start and why was Australia involved?

P. 10

### 2. Called to Serve

How were Australians recruited?

P. 12

### 3. 1968: An Unhappy New Year

What was the Tet Offensive and how was Australia involved?

P. 14

### 4. In the Crossfire

What was life like for people living in Vietnam during the war?

P. 16

### 5. Protests and Parades

How did people respond in Australia?

P. 18

### 6. Songs and Social Change

How was social change expressed through music and popular culture?

# REMEMBERING THE VIETNAM WAR

P. 21

### 7. The Long Tan Cross

Why is the battle of Long Tan historically significant?

P. 23

### 8. Memorials and Communities

How is the Vietnam War remembered in Australia today and in different communities?

P. 25

### 9. History, Myths and Memory

Why is the Vietnam War remembered differently by different people?

# LEARNING FROM THE VIETNAM WAR

P. 28

### 10. Legacies

How did the war change Australian society and what did Australians learn?

P. 30

### 11. Listening to our Vietnam Veterans

Why are we still thinking and talking about the Vietnam War?



Source: Demonstrators sit down at intersection of Collins and Swanston Streets, Melbourne, 1970. AWM.  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C40182>

# TEACHER GUIDE

**OVERVIEW:** The *Vietnam War Learning Firsthand Teaching and Learning Resource* is an initiative of the Victorian Government. The resource complements the the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (Victorian Branch)'s school guest speaker program, through which schools can host a veteran guest presenter. It is designed to provide a toolbox from which teachers can select topics and activities to support learning before or after a visit from a veteran, or as an independent resource to engage with the Vietnam War in levels 9-10 History. The resource is therefore not designed as a sequenced unit but as a toolbox of stand alone topics that can be accessed in any order. Each topic is its own entry point, so does not assume prior learning about other topics.

The notion of *learning firsthand* informs the overall approach and use of historical sources. The resource seeks to stimulate conversation and further inquiry about diverse perspectives on the Vietnam War and scaffold the development of historical thinking skills. The topics and activities speak directly to students. The historical knowledge section provides an anchor point and from there students can then select the activity or activities that best suit their needs and interests. Some are quite structured, and others offer opportunities for more open-ended inquiry. A range of other online sources are embedded throughout, such as those from the Australian War Memorial, Department of Veterans Affairs and other key cultural institutions. The curriculum toolbox on the following page indicates the curriculum connections. The diagram below further explains the purpose of each component for each topic.

## Curriculum Toolbox

Highlights relevant Victorian Curriculum links.

## Activities

A variety of activities are provided for each topic. Students can choose the activity that best suits their needs and interests. These activities do not need to be done in a sequence. Some of them could be extended into more substantial assessment tasks.

**FEARS AND ALLIANCES**

Legacy question: Why did the Vietnam War start and why was Australia involved?

**Curriculum Toolbox**

Chronology (VC9HC12)  
Cause and effect (VC9HC13)

**Historical Knowledge**

Have you ever tried to get on and watched them make each other work? The Vietnam War is said to have been caused by fears of the 'domino effect'. After World War Two, renewed tensions in many parts of Asia and Africa sought independence from the European empire that ruled them. At the same time a global Cold War broke out between the communist bloc (the Soviet Union and allies) and the West (the United States, Britain, Western Europe and democratic countries, including Australia). The Western powers were particularly concerned that, after the communists came to power in China in 1949, any further communist victory would lead to a domino effect in Southeast Asia, resulting in the fall of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia to communism.

The Australian government believed the spread of communism in Southeast Asia was a threat to Australia's security. It realised that it could not overcome this threat without the help of powerful allies, especially the United States and Britain. In the 1950s, Australian troops fought alongside British and other Commonwealth forces in the Malayan Emergency, and again in the 1960s to defend the newly independent Malaysia against forces from Indonesia, which at the time was very hostile to the communist powers. In both cases the Australians achieved a good result fighting alongside trusted allies, with very few casualties.

Although it looked similar, the situation in Vietnam was different from Malaya, where the communist-led independence movement collapsed the French in 1954. Vietnam was divided into a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North) and an anti-communist Republic of Vietnam (South). Vietnamese communists continued to look to unite all of Vietnam under their hard-line communist rule. In South Vietnam, the anti-communist elements tried to maintain a separate, independent state.

By 1968 it was clear that South Vietnam would collapse unless the United States and its allies stepped in with large military forces. Australia was eager to support the Americans, for the sake of its own security in the region and to strengthen the ties of the Australian-American alliance. From 1965 Australia sent combat forces to join the United States and other 'free world' allies in the Vietnam War.

Australia's involvement in the war lasted from 1962 to 1975. Almost 60,000 Australian personnel served, including 500 infantry and marine combat units. They did not all serve at the same time. At any one time there were no more than 7,700 combat troops in Vietnam. More than 6,000 Australian were wounded and 521 died in the course of their service.

**Your Thoughts?**

How do Australia's relations with Asia and the United States today compare to the situation when the Vietnam War began?

**Resources**

- 1. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/)
- 2. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/)
- 3. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/)

**References**

- 1. Australian War Memorial (2021). Vietnam War 1962–1975. <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/vietnam/>
- 2. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/)
- 3. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/resources/indonesia-in-vietnam/)

The Vietnam War: Firsthand — 4

**TOPIC:** Each topic is framed by an inquiry question that relates to the historical knowledge and activities. The topics are designed to be stand alone resources and do not require prior learning about the War and do not have to be done in sequence.

## Historical Knowledge

This section provides approximately 400 words of information. It speaks directly to the students and includes links to the glossary.

## Your Thoughts?

Designed to stimulate student discussion and relate the topics to the students' lives.

**RESOURCES:** The list of resources are relevant to students and teachers. They may relate directly to activities or extend the topic. While we have endeavoured to select the most current sites, the nature of online resources means the pages might change or the links might become broken over time.

**REFERENCES:** Gives details about the sources we have used for the topic.

**An intercultural approach:** To most of our students the Vietnam War is a historical event that happened more than fifty years ago. Yet to many Australians it continues to be lived in the present and through multiple generations. The ongoing trauma of war necessitates a sensitive and respectful approach to be facilitated in our schools and communities. The controversial and contested nature of the Vietnam War and how it is remembered also highlights the need to recognise a multiplicity of perspectives. Today's culturally diverse society is quite different to the Australia of the Vietnam era, which means our students bring with them different perspectives and personal histories that may or may not include narratives about the Vietnam War. This resource recognises these complexities and seeks to engage with them by taking an intercultural approach.

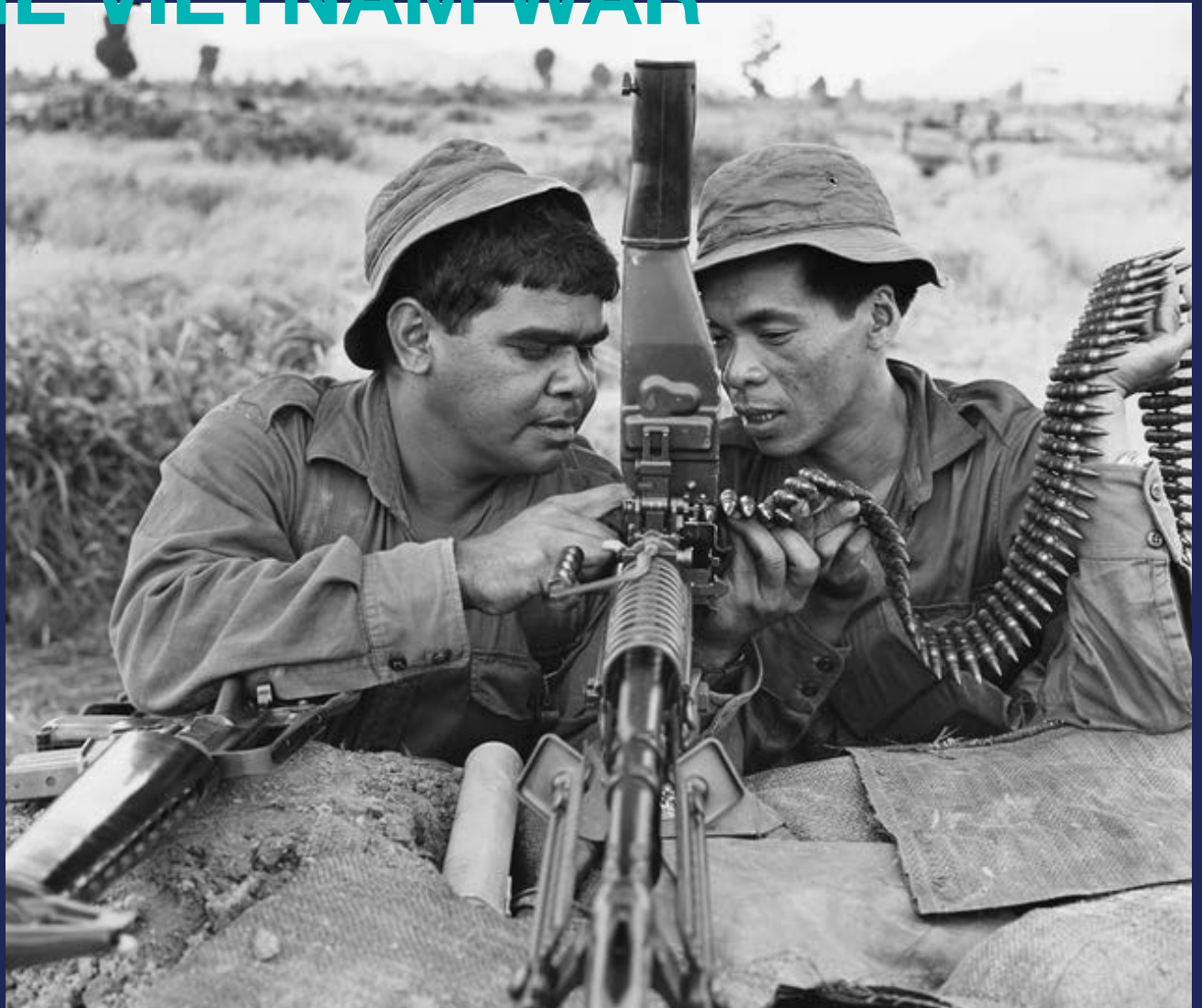
The Intercultural Capability is a key component of the Victorian Curriculum F-10. The sort of thinking, multiperspectivity and personal reflection encouraged by the sources and activities aim to extend students' intercultural understanding. In the context of history education, this challenges us to examine how traditional narratives are constructed and to explore the possibilities for developing more transformative and dynamic ones. No history resource can include everything and everyone. However, we hope the approach taken here will provide multiple entry-points through which to engage and inspire students to learn firsthand about Australia and the Vietnam War – especially alongside the veterans who so generously share their stories.



THEME	TOPIC AND INQUIRY QUESTION	HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE LEVELS 9 & 10	HISTORICAL SKILLS AND CONCEPTS LEVELS 9 & 10	INTERCULTURAL CAPABILITY LEVELS 9 & 10
<b>LIVING THROUGH THE VIETNAM WAR</b>	<b>Fears and Alliances</b> Why did the Vietnam War start and why was Australia involved?		Chronology ( <a href="#">VCHHC121</a> ) Cause and effect ( <a href="#">VCHHC127</a> )	
	<b>Called to Serve</b> How were Australians recruited?		Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC124</a> ) ( <a href="#">VCHHC125</a> )	
	<b>1968: An Unhappy New Year</b> What was the Tet offensive and how were Australians involved?		Chronology ( <a href="#">VCHHC121</a> ) Continuity and Change ( <a href="#">VCHHC126</a> )	
	<b>In the Crossfire</b> What was life like for people living in Vietnam during the war?	<b>THE GLOBALISING WORLD</b>  Effects of significant post-World War II world events and developments on one major global influence that shaped change in Australian society ( <a href="#">VCHHK157</a> )  Causes and developments of the major global influences on Australia ( <a href="#">VCHHK158</a> )  Changing social, cultural, historical, economic, environmental, political and technological conditions on a major global influence in Australia ( <a href="#">VCHHK159</a> )  The perspectives of people and different historical interpretations and debates from the period ( <a href="#">VCHHK160</a> )	Chronology ( <a href="#">VCHHC121</a> ) Continuity and Change ( <a href="#">VCHHC126</a> )	Cultural Practices ( <a href="#">VICICCB018</a> )
	<b>Protests and Parades</b> How did people respond in Australia?		Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC124</a> ) Cause and effect ( <a href="#">VCHHC127</a> )	Cultural Diversity ( <a href="#">VICICCD020</a> )
<b>Songs and Social Change</b> How was social change expressed through music and popular culture?	Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC123</a> ), ( <a href="#">VCHHC124</a> ), Continuity and Change ( <a href="#">VCHHC126</a> )		Cultural Practices ( <a href="#">VICICCB018</a> )	
<b>REMEMBERING THE VIETNAM WAR</b>	<b>The Long Tan Cross</b> Why is the battle of Long Tan historically significant?		Historical significance ( <a href="#">VCHHC128</a> )	
	<b>Memorials and Communities</b> How is the Vietnam War remembered in Australia today and in different communities?		Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC124</a> ) ( <a href="#">VCHHC125</a> )	Cultural Practices ( <a href="#">VICICCB018</a> )
	<b>History, Myths and Memory</b> Why is the Vietnam War remembered differently by different people?	Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC125</a> )	Cultural Practices ( <a href="#">VICICCB017</a> )	
<b>LEARNING FROM THE VIETNAM WAR</b>	<b>Legacies</b> How did the Vietnam War change Australia, and what did Australians learn?	Continuity and Change ( <a href="#">VCHHC126</a> ) Historical significance ( <a href="#">VCHHC128</a> )	Cultural Diversity ( <a href="#">VICICCD019</a> ), ( <a href="#">VICICCD020</a> )	
	<b>Listening to Our Vietnam Veterans</b> Why are we still thinking and talking about the Vietnam War?	Historical sources as evidence ( <a href="#">VCHHC123</a> ), ( <a href="#">VCHHC125</a> )	Cultural Practices ( <a href="#">VICICCB018</a> )	

This alignment is accurate as of 2020 and may not remain so as the Victorian Curriculum F–10 changes.

# LIVING THROUGH THE VIETNAM WAR



Corporal Vincent Roberts and South Vietnamese soldier, Nui Day 1970 : <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C235365>



# FEARS AND ALLIANCES

Inquiry question: Why did the Vietnam War start and why was Australia involved?

## Curriculum Toolbox

Chronology (VCHHC121)

Cause and effect (VCHHC127)



Front page headline from Australia's 'The Sun' newspaper, 29 April 1965.



## Historical Knowledge

Have you ever lined up dominoes and watched them knock each other over? The Vietnam War is said to have been caused by fears of the 'domino effect.' After World War Two, **nationalist movements** in many parts of Asia and Africa sought independence from the European empires that ruled them. At the same time a global **Cold War** broke out between the communist bloc (the Soviet Union and allies) and the West (the United States, Britain, Western Europe and democratic countries, including Australia). The Western powers were particularly concerned that, after the **communists** came to power in China in 1949, any further communist victories would lead to a 'domino effect' in Southeast Asia, resulting in the fall of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaya (Malaysia) and Indonesia to communism.

The Australian government believed the spread of communism in Southeast Asia was a threat to Australia's security. It realised that it could not overcome this threat without the help of powerful **allies**, especially the United States and Britain. In the 1950s, Australian troops fought alongside British and other Commonwealth forces in the Malayan Emergency, and again in the 1960s to defend the newly independent Malaysia against forces from Indonesia, which at the time was very close to the communist powers. In both cases the Australians achieved a good result fighting alongside trusted allies, with very low casualties.

Although it looked similar, the situation in Vietnam was different from Malaya. After the communist-led **independence movement** defeated the French in 1954, Vietnam was divided into a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (**North**) and an anti-communist Republic of Vietnam (**South**). Vietnamese communists continued to seek to unite all of Vietnam under their hard-line communist rule. In South Vietnam, the anti-communist elements tried to maintain a separate, independent state.

By 1965 it was clear that South Vietnam would collapse unless the United States and its allies intervened with large military forces. Australia was eager to support the Americans, for the sake of its own security in the region and to strengthen the credibility of the Australian-American alliance. From 1965 Australia sent combat forces to join the United States and other 'free world' allies in the Vietnam War.

Australia's involvement in the war lasted from 1962 to 1975. Almost 60,000 Australian personnel served, including 350 military and volunteer civilian nurses. They did not all serve at the same time. At any one time there were no more than 7,700 combat troops in Vietnam. More than 3,000 Australian were wounded and 521 died in the course of their service.



## Your Thoughts?

- How do Australia's relations with Asia and the United States today compare to the situation when the Vietnam War began?

## Resources

- Alpha History: Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War, <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/australian-involvement-in-vietnam/>
- ABC: Australia and the Vietnam War, <https://education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/2528395/australia-and-vietnam-war>
- Vietnam Veterans' Assoc. of Aust: Chronology of events, <http://www.vvaa.org.au/calendar.htm>

## References

- Australian War Memorial (2020). Vietnam War 1962 – 1975, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/vietnam>
- Edwards, P. (2014). *Australia and the Vietnam War*. Chapters 1 – 5. NewSouth.



## FEARS AND ALLIANCES



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Geography

Use Google Earth or an atlas to locate Hanoi in the communist ruled North and Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in the anti-communist South. How would you describe the geography of Vietnam? How might this affect how a war is fought? What countries border Vietnam?

#### Activity 2: Poster analysis

a) What do the red arrows symbolise? What does the line drawn with the pencil symbolise?

b) What is the effect of using the words 'your' and 'you' on the audience?



Liberal Party poster from 1966 federal election

c) What is the intended message the Liberal Party are trying to communicate?

d) Which other reasons for going to war are not communicated by this poster?

e) How might historians use this poster today in their research on the Vietnam War?

#### Activity 3: Chronology card games

**Option A:** Move into small groups and cut out the chronology cards found on the next page. Using the information on the cards, see if you can put the events into chronological order. Ask your teacher for the answers. Write the correct dates on the cards and create a timeline poster. See page 34 for answers.

**Option B:** Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a card (organise depending on class size). Using the cards, the whole class should construct a human timeline by guessing the dates of the events on the cards. Take a photo. Next each pair tries to find out the correct date for their card using online sources and then the whole class reorganises itself into another human timeline. Take a photo. Check the answers on page 34 and adjust the timeline if necessary. Take a photo. How different is this photo to the first photo taken?

## FEARS AND ALLIANCES



### Activities



### Chronology Cards

Date: .....

**Battle of Long Tan. Australians engage in significant fighting against North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong. 18 Australians die and 24 wounded.**

Date: .....

**Prime Minister Robert Menzies announces the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam.**

Date: .....

**Australian government announces an increase of service personnel from the Army, Navy and the Air Force.**

Date: .....

**Australia announces it will send the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) to join thousands of US advisors to train South Vietnamese.**

Date: .....

**The war ends as the South surrenders to the North. Also known as the Fall of Saigon or Liberation of Saigon.**

Date: .....

**Last major withdrawal of Australian combat troops. Overall, approximately 60,000 Australians served between 1962 and 1972.**

Date: .....

**Prime Minister John Gorton announces that Australia will not send any more troops to Vietnam.**

Date: .....

**Start of Tet Offensive. This large campaign of surprise attacks in the South by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong begins during Vietnamese New Year or *Tet*.**

Date: .....

**President Nixon announces the withdrawal of 25,000 US troops from Vietnam.**

Date: .....

**Australian task force lays over 3,000 mines to create a barrier minefield at Dat Do to block Viet Cong supply lines. This actually causes many Australian casualties.**

Date: .....

**First Moratorium protest. 120,000 people march across Australia. 70,000 – 100,000 march in Melbourne.**

Date: .....

**The *National Service Act* is introduced in Australia. All 20-year-old males are required to sign up for two-years-service.**

# CALLED TO SERVE

## Inquiry question: How were Australians recruited to the Vietnam War?



March out 1966 Pucka. Photo Archive of Australian National Service <http://nashosphotos.wikidot.com/1966>

### Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC124) (VCHHC125)

### Historical Knowledge

If you were 20 years old between 1964 and 1972 you may have gone to serve at war as a nurse or a soldier, but you were not old enough to vote. The voting age in Australia before 1973 was 21.

#### Regulars

In 1962 the Australian Army was a small well-trained group of 21,000 professional soldiers. During Australia's involvement in Vietnam, 25,576 regular army personnel served. However, due to this involvement in Vietnam as well as other conflicts in the region, additional 'manpower' was needed. At first a pay increase was put in place to attract people to join the war, but with full employment at the time it was decided to reintroduce the National Service Scheme. On Remembrance Day 1964, Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced the introduction of the *National Service Act*. All 20-year-old men were required to sign up for national service and the majority did so. They then had to wait to see if they would be **conscripted** to serve.

#### Birthday ballot

Sometimes referred to as the 'birthday ballot' or the 'blood ballot', a biannual ballot was used to identify the 20-year-old men who would be conscripted. The ballot used the same equipment Tattersalls used for its

#### Resources

- ABC: Luck of the draw: the Vietnam 'birthday ballot' broadcast 1965 <https://education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/521089/luck-of-the-draw-the-vietnam-birthday-ballot>
- Australian War Memorial National Service Scheme, 1971-1972 <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/conscription/vietnam>

#### References

- Australian War Memorial: Appendix National Service Scheme 1964-72 [https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/viet\\_app](https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/viet_app)
- Australian War Memorial: Australian Casualties in the Vietnam War 1964-1972 <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/vietnam/statistics>
- Dapin, M. (2017). *The Nashos' War: Australia's national servicemen and Vietnam*. Penguin
- Davies, B. & McKay, G. (2012). *Vietnam: The complete story of the Vietnam War*. Penguin.
- Edwards, P. (2015). *The Nashos and Vietnam. The Strategist* <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-nashos-and-vietnam/>

lottery, similar to what you might know as Tattsлото. A predetermined number of marbles labelled with all the birthdays occurring in a 6-month period were randomly selected from a barrel. The marbles were labeled with numbers representing birthdays, not the birthdays themselves. The number drawn depended on the number of conscripts required at the time. If your birthdate was drawn, you were 'balloted in' and required to present for testing. The Army was very selective. Only 8% of the eligible cohort was selected. Some people were exempted for health reasons or not meeting the Army's standards. Therefore, not everyone who was 'balloted in' was conscripted. At first, birthdays were not announced for this and other reasons, which led to some conspiracy theories. They were later announced to counter the rumours of rigging the ballot. Married men, apprentices and university students could defer their national service.

#### Nashos

The young men who were conscripted as national servicemen for two years were known as '**Nashos**'. The first intake arrived in Vietnam in 1966. Although the combat units were made up of both regulars and national servicemen, not all Nashos went to Vietnam. Of the 15,381 national service men who went to Vietnam, 212 of them died. The *National Service Act* was suspended in 1972 when the Labor Whitlam government came to power, but the law remained until the 1990s.

#### Conscientious Objectors

At first, the protests against conscription were mild. The Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC) was formed by young men. It was aligned to the Labor Party, which also opposed conscription. Save Our Sons (SOS) was an anti-conscription group of mostly middle-aged women. As the number of national service men and deaths between 1968-69 increased, so did the protests. Young men who objected to service on religious, moral or ethical grounds could apply to be recognised as **conscientious objectors**; if their application was refused by a magistrate, they could be arrested. John Zarb spent 10 months in Melbourne's Pentridge Prison, which is why some of the Victorian protest signs and graffiti from the time say "Free Zarb."

### Your Thoughts?

- National service still exists today in many countries around the world. For example, in Israel all men and women are expected to complete national service. What are your thoughts about national service? How do you think young people would feel if Australia needed to reintroduce the scheme?

## CALLED TO SERVE



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Analysing statistics

Every individual who served in Vietnam had their life transformed; too many were lost. However, when we look more broadly at the statistics, we can see other stories about the past emerge.

- What proportion of those who registered for national service served in Vietnam?
- What proportion of those who served in Vietnam were conscripted through the National Service Scheme?
- What proportion of the total Army personnel in Vietnam were regular soldiers?
- What other conclusions can you draw from the numbers? What other questions do they raise?

Total no. who served in Vietnam (incl. Army, Navy, Air Force)	Approx. 60,000
Total Army personnel	41,957
Regular Army personnel	26, 576
Number registered for national service	804,286
Balloted in	237,048
Number conscripted to national service	63,735
Number of national servicemen who served in Vietnam	15,381
Conscientious objectors (determined by court)	1,242
Conscientious objectors granted indefinite deferment	35,548
Married before call up	20,502
Not meeting standards required of Army	99,010
Physical or mental disabilities	1,768
Number died in Vietnam	521
Number wounded	3,000
Number of conscripts killed	212



Robert Michaelis

Student  
who  
quit  
cadets  
expelled

#### Activity 2: The 15-year-old conscientious objector

In 1966, 15-year-old Robert Michaelis made the news and even Question Time in federal Parliament when he was expelled from Sydney Grammar School because he refused to stay in the school's Army cadet corps. In the article Michaelis says the training he had to do "propagates the idea that it is right to kill Viet Cong" and "shows the school cadets are serving as a training ground for the War in Vietnam." The full article (Student who quit cadets expelled, *The Canberra Times*, 27 September 1966) can be enlarged on Trove:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/106937766>.

Choose one of the following:

**OPTION A:** See what you can find out about Robert Michaelis and some other well-known conscientious objectors: primary school teacher William White; Simon Townsend who later became a TV presenter; and John Zarb. Create an info-graphic with the information you find.

**OPTION B:** Many young Australians look forward to a career in the Australian Defence Force. Do some research to find out what sort of jobs you would like to do in the Defence Force. Create an info graphic with the information you find.

#### Activity 3: Evaluating the birthday ballot

Do you think luck should have been used to determine who would be called up in the National Service Scheme? Create a Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) table to evaluate the pluses/advantages, minuses/disadvantages and interesting points/questions regarding the birthday ballot. Develop an argument to show whether or not you think it was a fair system OR design a system that you think would be fairer.



# 1968: AN UNHAPPY NEW YEAR

**Inquiry question: What was the Tet Offensive and how was Australia involved?**



Major Geoff F. Cohen and Corporal D. F. Butler dress the wounds of a North Vietnamese soldier captured after the battle of Balmoral in May 1968



## Curriculum Toolbox

Chronology (VCHHC121)  
Continuity and Change (VCHHC126)



## Historical Knowledge

Does your family celebrate the new year according to the lunar calendar or on 1 January? In Vietnam the lunar new year, or **Tet**, is an important celebration and a time when people return to their hometowns and spend time with their families. In 1968 there was supposed to be a ceasefire for the holiday but instead the North Vietnamese forces attacked more than 100 towns in in the early hours of 31 January. The attacks came as a complete surprise. The historic city of Hue was captured for four weeks and the **Viet Cong** also took control of government buildings in Saigon. The Tet Offensive lasted until April, with a further 'mini-Tet Offensive' in May.

The fighting was ferocious and both sides suffered many casualties. Graphic footage of the fighting was broadcast around the world. In 1971, the film "Đất khổ" ("Land of Sorrows") was made about the experiences of different people in Hue, before and during the Tet Offensive. Although the **South Vietnamese** and **allies** defeated the **North** in the end, the horrors shown in the media at the time meant that many people and politicians in America and Australia began to call for an end to the conflict.

The first group of four Australian Army nurses had arrived in Vietnam in 1967. They had to quickly learn new clinical skills to work in the intensive care units. The Tet Offensive was a very busy and difficult time for these nurses. During the war they encountered wounds that reflected the types of weapons used, including **land mines**, gunshot and shrapnel, hand grenades, high-velocity missiles and booby traps. Burns caused by explosives and **chemical warfare** were also common. The risk of infection was high because people were often wounded in rice paddy fields or along waterways where human and animal excrement was common. Malaria was also an ongoing problem.

The increased use of helicopters for medical evacuations was a feature of the Vietnam War. The medical helicopters with red crosses on their noses were known as "**dustoffs**". When a soldier was wounded, troops and medics applied field dressings and radioed headquarters for a dustoff. The pilot would be guided to the location with a smoke grenade or flare. The dustoff crews were highly skilled at flying and landing in difficult conditions and terrain. This decreased mortality rates because they could quickly get the wounded back to field hospitals and into surgery.



## Your Thoughts?

- Why do you think women were only allowed to serve as nurses during the Vietnam War? When do you think women were first allowed to apply for any roles in the Australian Defence Force? Look up the date. Are you surprised?

## Resources

- Alpha History: A Viet Cong guerrilla on the Tet Offensive <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/viet-cong-guerrilla-tet-offensive-1968/>
- Australian War Memorial: Dust-off <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources/dust-off>
- Australian War Memorial: The Battles of Coral/Balmoral <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/the-battles-of-coral-balmoral-may-june-1968>
- Australian War Memorial: Army Nurses in Vietnam: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F03240>
- Vietnam Veterans Association: The Tet Offensive <http://vvaavic.org.au/the-tet-offensive/>
- "Đất khổ" ("Land of Sorrows") <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmEcsIMR08g>

## References

- Biedermann, N. et al (2001). *The wartime experience of Australian Army nurses in Vietnam, 1967-1971*. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 35(4), 543-549
- Biedermann, N. (2004). *No Tears on my Pillow: Australian Nurses in Vietnam*. Random House.
- Brayley, A. (2016). *Our Vietnam Nurses*. Penguin.

## 1968: AN UNHAPPY NEW YEAR



### Activities

#### Activity 1: 1968

It has become common to describe 1968 as a year that changed the world. In Australia John Gorton was sworn in as Prime Minister because Harold Holt was still missing, presumed drowned. Lionel Rose was crowned the first Aboriginal boxing world champion. Feminism and civil rights were emerging as social movements. What other significant world events, movements and popular culture characterised 1968? Create a timeline or a collage to illustrate 1968.

#### Activity 2: Battles of Coral/Balmoral

The Battles of Coral/Balmoral occurred during the mini-Tet Offensive. Use the following sites to create an illustrated or annotated timeline of the battles and show why they were significant for Australian forces:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/coral>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-13/50th-anniversary-of-the-battle-of-coral-balmoral-vietnam/9722722>

#### Activity 3: Firsthand accounts

Read Ca Nha and Margaret Hopcraft's accounts of the Tet Offensive. If you were able to interview the women, what questions would you ask them? Make a list of at least 6 questions for each. What special considerations might you have if you were talking to someone directly about their wartime experiences?

In this excerpt Margaret Hopcraft (nee Ahern), a Nursing Sister of Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps, describes the beginning of the Tet Offensive. Biedermann, K. (2004). *Tears on my Pillow: Australian Nurses in Vietnam*. Random House.

"The Tet Offensive was something that was really unexpected. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army said that they would have peace over that holiday but instead they attacked the whole country at the same time. Every military installation in the South, including ours was attacked and it caused absolute chaos...

From the time that we were informed that something was happening with the Tet Offensive to the time when the Tet was finished, it was a constant flow of casualties. We would just get dustoff after dustoff and one time, from the moment the first causality arrived to the moment we had treated everyone, we'd have been going non-stop for 36 hours – and I was still the only nurse in the theatre. During the Tet Offensive we had over 120 patients in the hospital at one time. They would be evacuated, and more would take their place."



Lieutenant Margaret Ahern (left) and Lieutenant Terrie Roche, Hoa Long village near the Australian Task Force Base. AWM. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C312894>



Civilians carrying a white flag approach US Marines during a lull in street fighting between US units and the Vietcong, in Hue, February 1, 1968.

<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/anniversary-of-the-battle-of-hue-during-the-vietnam-war-2020-1?r=US&IR=T>

This is an excerpt from a book by Vietnamese writer Ca Nha. She experienced the battle at Hue and wrote this book about it in 1969.

Ca, Nha (2014/1969). *Mourning Headband for Hue: An Account of the Battle for Hue, Vietnam 1968*. Indiana University Press. pp. 19-21.

'We are just standing in the yard looking out. A column of trucks carrying Americans and artillery slowly comes to a stop outside. American soldiers jump down.

Thái bursts out loudly: "Hey, auntie, it's quiet now, and the American army has just arrived. I am going outside; I will see what's going on."

My mother calls out: "Everyone come inside; come in or they will shoot you."

My elder brother blocks the way: "Everyone must stay where they are. Stay quiet, don't run, or they will think that you are Việt Cộng and they will kill you at once."

A unit of American soldiers jump down from the trucks and get to the gardens, crawling along the edges of the road toward the fields. In a moment, my garden is filled with American soldiers. I try to keep my cool, sitting silently and clenching my teeth...

The sound of B40s, falling like rain, comes from the mountainside and the direction of the railway. Outside, armoured vehicles carrying 40mm mortars vehemently shoot in response. Roof tiles are blasted or grazed by bullets and fall in a clutter upon our heads and necks. Everyone in the house creeps into the inner room. At the same time, strange crying sounds rise up from out by the street. What is it? Thái wants to run out there first. My mother grabs his shirt and holds him firmly. But Thái keeps begging and begging her and finally he disappears out the door, moving back and forth because of the gunfire flashing across the roof. Boom. Boom. Several big trees in the garden are knocked down. We all lie pressed to the ground, passively awaiting our fate. This time it's the end of us. Pray! The screams and crying beside the yard, just in front of us, become increasingly heart-rending.'

# IN THE CROSSFIRE

**Inquiry question: How did the war impact on Vietnamese people?**



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC124)  
Cause and effect (VCHHC127)  
Cultural Practices (VICCCB018)



## Historical Knowledge

The human cost of the Vietnam War was immense. An estimated 2 million Vietnamese civilians from **North and South Vietnam** were killed. Over 1 million Vietnamese soldiers died and another 300,000 soldiers were declared missing. 880,000 children were orphaned and 326,000 Vietnamese people suffered physical injury or impairment. Of the 60,000 Australians who served in Vietnam, 521 died and 3,000 were wounded.

For Vietnam the conflict was not just a battleground in the global **Cold War**, but a **civil war** which would determine whether Vietnam should be united or remain divided between a communist north and an anti-communist south. For them, what we call the Vietnam War was the American War.

The United States bombing of Vietnam was the largest **aerial bombardment** in history and caused horrendous suffering in the North. The wartime experience for civilians in the South, although different from the North, also caused much suffering. The war was fought mainly in the rural areas and many people, known then as **peasants**, wanted nothing more than to live in peace.

While many Vietnamese in the South wanted to maintain a non-communist state, they resented their dependence on the United States and its allies. The Americans had trained the South Vietnamese army to fight in the American way, relying on massive equipment and firepower, rather than with tactics suited to local conditions. **North Vietnam** used conventional large-unit tactics, but the **Viet Cong** also used **guerrilla warfare** tactics that included tunnels, ambush and sabotage, as well as conventional, large-unit operations. The Americans and Australians therefore adapted their approaches.

The effects of chemical warfare had, and continue to have, devastating effects. Huge swathes of land were blasted from the air with toxic chemicals like **Agent Orange** in an attempt to kill jungle, reveal enemy hideouts and destroy food crops. Agent Orange killed and injured service personnel and civilians, destroyed forests and seeped into the



Australian War Memorial Vietnam, 1966: Australians patrol near the village of Tan Phu CUN/66/0161/VN

waterways, soil and food chain. 50 million litres of the poison were dropped onto Vietnam. Today, more than a million people in Vietnam have severe health problems linked to these chemicals. The effects of chemical warfare were devastating. Post-war, physical and mental ailments suffered by some Australian servicemen were caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

For many South Vietnamese people, the war did not end with the victory of the **communists**. Many were killed or imprisoned, interrogated and 're-educated' by the victorious communist regime. Hundreds of thousands attempted to flee the country. Historian, Natalie Nguyen says, "For many Vietnamese refugees, leaving Vietnam was a way of registering their opposition to the postwar communist regime." Some left on dangerously unseaworthy boats, seeking asylum in other countries, including Australia. The trauma of being forced to flee their homeland continues to affect Australian Vietnamese citizens today. Every year the Australian Vietnamese Community commemorate the Fall of Saigon by mounting a protest outside the Vietnamese embassy in Canberra.



## Your Thoughts?

- How do you think the use of these chemical weapons might have been justified at the time? Brainstorm some arguments. In 1993 Australia became a signatory to an International Declaration to ban the production and use of chemical weapons. Why do you think Australia's policy changed?

## Resources

- Alpha History: The Costs of the Vietnam War <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/costs-of-the-vietnam-war/>
- ANZAC Portal: Agent Orange <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/vietnam-war-1962-1975/events/aftermath/agent-orange>
- SBS: *The Boat* <https://www.sbs.com.au/programs/go-back-to-where-you-came-from/article/2015/07/14/boat>
- National Museum of Australia <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/vietnamese-refugees-boat-arrival>

## References

- Australian Vietnamese Community (AVC) <https://www.vcavic.org.au/canberra-march>
- Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
- Nguyen, N. (2015). *New Perceptions of the Vietnam War: Essays on the War, the South Vietnamese Experience, the Diaspora and the Continuing Impact*. McFarland
- Rosen, E. (2015) 'The Vietnam War, as Seen by the Victors', *The Atlantic*.

## IN THE CROSSFIRE



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Analysing primary sources

Use the following questions to guide your analysis of the 1964 documentary *A Quiet Day in Vietnam* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C191219>



- Watch the first 2 minutes and 25 seconds without sound. What do you think the narrator might be saying? Which images stand out for you?
- Watch the first 2 minutes and 25 seconds again with sound. What stands out for you in the narration?
- Who might have created the film and why? What message do you think the filmmaker is intending to communicate to the viewer back in 1964?
- Why is this a useful or interesting historical source today?
- How do you think the values and beliefs of the Australian soldiers might have shaped their views and assumptions about the Vietnamese they encountered? How do you think the values and beliefs of the North and South Vietnamese civilians might have shaped their views and assumptions Australian and American soldiers they encountered?

#### Activity 2: Comparing perspectives

In 1967 Ho Chi Minh, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) wrote to the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson. Read the extract from the letter below or the full letter here: <https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrj/hotobj.html>



President Ho Chi Minh [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh\\_Anefo.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho_Chi_Minh_Anefo.jpg)

Use the text box below to record your reaction to Ho Chi Minh's letter. Consider what he hoped for his people. How do Ho Chi Minh's sentiments differ from those of the American President? Put on your historians' hat and find a primary source to assist you with this comparison.

*Your Excellency:*

*On February 10, 1967, I received your message. This is my reply...*

*The U.S. government has committed war crimes, crimes against peace and against mankind. In South Vietnam, half a million U.S. and satellite troops have resorted to the most inhuman weapons and most barbarous methods of warfare, such as napalm, toxic chemicals and gases, to massacre our compatriots, destroy crops, and raze villages to the ground. In North Vietnam, thousands of U.S. aircraft have dropped hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs, destroying towns, villages, factories, schools...*

*The Vietnamese people deeply love independence, freedom and peace. But in the face of U.S. aggression, they have risen up, united as one man, fearless of sacrifices and hardships. They are determined to carry on their resistance until they have won genuine independence and freedom and true peace. Our just cause enjoys strong sympathy and support from the peoples of the whole world, including broad sections of the American people...*

*Sincerely, Ho Chi Minh, February 15, 1967*

#### Activity 3: Analysing media sources

In 1976 the first Vietnamese fishing boat arrived in Australia carrying five young Vietnamese men. Read this 1976 newspaper article on Trove <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/110815287> and watch this video of Tac Tam Lam's story <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/tac.html>

Create a visual representation (e.g. illustration, comic, concept map, timeline) or write a blog post to accompany the video on the UNHCR website. Outline the reasons why the Lam family began their journey to Australia and their successes.



# PROTESTS AND PARADES

**Inquiry question: How did people respond in Australia?**



McIntyre, Iain Noncommercial-ShareAlive CC BY-NC-SA. Secondary school students in 1968. Sourced from the Mitchell Library [https://commonslibrary.org/when-the-bombs-drop-school-stops-eight-decades-of-australian-school-strikes-and-direct-action/#Melbourne,\\_1967](https://commonslibrary.org/when-the-bombs-drop-school-stops-eight-decades-of-australian-school-strikes-and-direct-action/#Melbourne,_1967)

## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC124)  
Cause and effect (VCHHC127)  
Cultural Diversity (VCICCD020)

## Resources

- National Museum of Australia: Vietnam Moratoriums, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/vietnam-moratoriums>
- Australian Screen: A high school student gives a speech at a moratorium rally, <https://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/or-forever-hold-your-peace/clip2/#>
- Museums Victoria: Badges from anti-Vietnam War protests, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/15181>
- Australian Screen: Interviews with veterans about protesters and returning home, <https://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/super-8-soldiers/clip1/>
- National Archives: Image of welcome home parade 1970, <http://vrroom.naa.gov.au/print/?ID=tcm:11-24186>

## References

- Dapin, P. (2019). *Australia's Vietnam: Myth VS History*. Sydney: NewSouth Publishing.
- Edwards, P. (2014). *Australia and the Vietnam War*. Sydney: NewSouth Publishing.
- Murphy, J. (1993). *Harvest of fear: A history of Australia's Vietnam War*. Allen & Unwin.



## Historical Knowledge

In years to come, someone might ask you if you or anyone you knew took part in the student climate change strikes and protests. On 10 April 1972, 500 striking students from University High held an anti-war demonstration in Melbourne. The following month 3,000 students attended an all-day student **strike**, organised by the Victorian Secondary Students Union (VSSU). Although the Australian government was already in the process of withdrawing troops from Vietnam, anti-war protests like these showed that public opinion had changed compared to the start of the war when the majority of Australians supported it.

**Conscription** was one of the main things that had begun to change people's opinions about the war. The anti-war movement also grew in the late 1960s as the number of troops increased and the devastating effects of the war were seen on people's television screens. Not all protesters were young though. The members of Save Our Sons were middle-aged women who campaigned through silent vigils, pamphlets and petitions. A protest tactic borrowed from the USA was the idea of a **moratorium**, which meant 'a halt to business as usual.' The Australian Vietnam Moratorium wanted to stop conscription and withdraw Australian troops.

The biggest rally was the Melbourne Moratorium on 8 May 1970. Some people feared it would be violent, but it is estimated that 70,000 to 100,000 people marched peacefully and participated in a mass sit-in on Bourke Street. Another Melbourne moratorium in September 1970 was smaller and less peaceful.

Throughout the war many thousands of Australians also took to the streets to show their support of the troops. Of the 16 occasions when **battalions** returned, 15 were marked with welcome home parades. Half-a-million people attended a huge ticker-tape parade in Sydney in 1966 and 300,000 people attended another in 1969. However, some returning veterans feel they missed out on a vital welcome home, because they arrived home in small groups on chartered Qantas flights, often late at night. They were also returning home as more Australians began to view the war as a losing cause. At the time and since, veterans often claimed that the Returned Services League (RSL) and Department of Repatriation (today Department of Veterans' Affairs) provided insufficient support. This led to widespread feelings that veterans had been abandoned and their service unrecognised. To address this, in 1987 the 'Vietnam Forces National Reunion and Welcome Home March' was held in Sydney. More than 60,000 people cheered on 25,000 Vietnam veterans.



## Your Thoughts?

- In 2019 thousands of Australian school students and millions of students worldwide joined the global climate strikes. Why do you think protests and strikes are still used as a way to pressure governments? How do you think strikes have changed in the last fifty years?

## PROTESTS AND PARADES



### Activities

#### Activity 1: See, think, wonder

Look closely at the images below and read the editorial from *The Age*. What can you see? What stands out? What can't you see that might also be happening? What do you think it sounds and feels like to be at the Moratorium? How do you think the way you see the world today influences the way you view these historical sources? What do these historical sources make you wonder? What questions do they raise? Use the text box below to record your responses.



Source: Stephen (Steve) Brown, Vietnam Moratorium No.3, Melbourne's march was on May 9, 1970 & there was a crowd of over 80,000 outside Myers, Bourke St. in the city centre.  
<https://www.flickr.com/search/?text=vietnam%20moratorium%20melbourne>



Source: Melbourne Moratorium marchers moving down Collins St, Melbourne 1970.  
© Australian War Memorial. Creative Commons License. This item is licensed under CC BY-NC  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C40180>

#### **The Age, 9 May 1970, p.15 (Editorial)**

It was, without doubt, the most impressive demonstration seen in Melbourne. The sheer weight of numbers alone was staggering; at least 70,000 people packed in close marching rows across Bourke Street and stretching from Elizabeth to Spring streets. More significantly, the demonstration was non-violent: there were neither broken heads nor broken windows to mar the pleas of the marchers for peace in Vietnam. It was an admirable achievement - especially in view of the size of the crowd and the diverse elements which comprised it... By taking PEACEFULLY to the streets, the demonstrators showed that they understood the importance to democracy of effective public expressions of opinion by the people - who are, after all, the ultimate rulers in a democracy. Yesterday's march cannot be written off by the Government as the antics of communist-influenced fools. It was a legitimate expression of opinion by a substantial expression of the population.

#### Activity 2: Poster analysis

Annotate the Teachers of Conscience poster below by explaining the purpose and impact of the following features: use of colour, use of symbols, use of text, layout and design, appeals to emotions, calls to action. Who is the intended audience? When and why was it made? You can download the image from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C98625> to create your annotation.



Source: Teachers of conscience poster  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C98625>

#### Activity 3: Artefacts

Museums now hold collections of anti-Vietnam War badges. See if you can find some images of them online from the Museums Victoria Collections and other sources. Why do you think these artefacts are collected by museums? What sorts of artefacts could museums collect to represent the student climate protests?

Choose one of the following:

- Imagine it is 1970. Design a badge to be worn at the Melbourne Moratorium.
- Imagine it is 1970. Design a badge to be worn at a welcome home parade for returning servicemen.
- Design a badge, a poster or street art piece that communicates your perspective on an issue that is important to you.

# SONGS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

**Inquiry question: How was social change expressed through music and popular culture?**



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC123), (VCHHC124)  
Cultural Practices (VICCCB018)



## Historical Knowledge

*I left my heart to the sappers round Khe Sanh  
And my soul was sold with my cigarettes to the black market man  
I've had the Vietnam cold turkey  
From the ocean to the Silver City  
And it's only other vets could understand*

—Khe Sanh written by Don Walker and performed by Cold Chisel

In the opening verse of the Cold Chisel song 'Khe Sanh' the veteran expresses the feeling that only other veterans could relate to these experiences. Although it was hard for people not directly involved to gain a perspective on what life was like fighting in and returning from a **civil war** in a foreign country, a number of Australian songs about Vietnam have become classics and powerfully shaped Australians' views of the war. Another song that gives an account of the **perspective** of the returned soldier and the difficulties faced by them on their return is 'I was only 19' by Red Gum.

On the other hand, many songs written at the time reflected social angst and a call for change. From as early as 1963 until 1975, the official end of the Vietnam War, protest songs came out of the United States. Songs such as, 'What are you fighting for?' (1963) and 'I Ain't Marching Anymore' (1965) protested against America's involvement. In the war. Popular songwriter and performer Marvin Gaye wrote, 'What's Going On?' which went on to become one of the most popular songs of all time! Folk artist and singer Joan Baez wrote about the women of Saigon in the song, 'Saigon Bride' (1967), and blues singer Nina Simone delivered the song, 'Backlash Blues' in the same year, linking the civil rights movement to the Vietnam War. Vietnamese singer and songwriter, Trinh Cong Song, was well known for his anti-war songs which called for peace in a divided country.

Australia's first protest song appeared in 1969. Written by Johnny Young (later host of the television show Young Talent Time), the song is about a blue-eyed, blonde-haired, innocent young Australian man being sent off to the "Asian War." It is important to remember here, that in 1969 Australia was a very different place to today. The White Australia

## Resources

- You Tube: 'Khe San', [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTjvG4WJD\\_A&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTjvG4WJD_A&feature=youtu.be)
- My Place for Teachers: Australia in the 1960s. [https://myplace.edu.au/decades\\_timeline/1960/decade\\_landing\\_4.html](https://myplace.edu.au/decades_timeline/1960/decade_landing_4.html)
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences: Timeline of 1960s Australian News and Entertainment News <https://maas.museum/timeline-of-1960s-australian-news-and-entertainment-events/>
- ABC Education: Women's Liberation movement <https://education.abc.net.au/home/#!/media/2893100/women-s-liberation-movement>

## References

- History: [https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests?li\\_source=LI&li\\_medium=m2m-rcw-history](https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests?li_source=LI&li_medium=m2m-rcw-history)
- MOAD: Music, Protest and Democracy, <https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/music-protest-and-democracy/#>
- University of Melbourne Archives: <https://archives.unimelb.edu.au/explore/exhibitions/past-events/protest!-archives-from-the-university-of-melbourne/womens-liberation>

Policy, which had for so long prevented people of Asian background coming to Australia, was only just beginning to break down. Some Australians at the time had never met an Asian person. The song 'Smiley' outlined these characteristics of Australian society.

The women's movement gained momentum in Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and was a significant part of **social activism** that characterised the period of the Vietnam War. Women became a powerful force in Australia protesting against the war and their involvement in the protest movements provided women with a public voice. However, in terms of music, women had a particularly difficult time breaking onto the scene, unless they performed songs that were about men. Colleen Hewett, at the time Australia's 'Queen of Pop', performed the song 'Carry That Weight' (1971). This song appeared on the 'B' side of a vinyl single by John Lennon and Paul McCartney (The Beatles) and reflected an Australian society which focussed much more on the plight of men and what they endured during this period. Such attitudes contrasted to the lyrics of the 1972 song 'I am Woman' by Australian singer, Helen Reddy, which became an anthem for the Women's Liberation Movement.



## Your Thoughts?

- What sort of messages are there in the lyrics of the music you like to listen to? Can you list many recent songs that contain messages about changing the world?



Source: John, Mckinnon & Australian Information Service (1975). Women on the march wave their placards at the International Women's Day march, Melbourne, March 8, 1975 Retrieved October 18, 2019. Courtesy of 'National Library of Australia' nla.obj-137045864.

## SONGS AND SOCIAL CHANGE



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Analysing lyrics and images

The Redgum song 'I was Only 19' was released in 1983 and gives an imagined first-person account of a veteran's experiences and suffering. Read the lyrics and watch the Redgum version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGDhzVi1bqU>

A cover of the song was released by The Herd in 2007. Compare the images used in this film clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns82tHhJOr0>. Which do you prefer and why? If the song was to be covered again to appeal to young people of your generation, which singer, band or artist would you choose to cover it and what imagery would you use for the video?

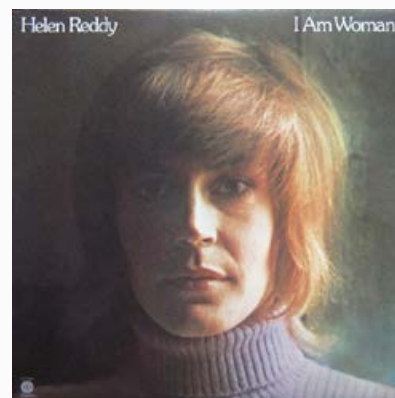
#### Activity 2: Inquiry: How has everyday life changed or stayed the same since the 1960s in Australia?

The Australia that young soldiers and nurses left to go to Vietnam was very different to the Australia you know. To what extent do you think everyday life has changed or stayed the same? Look at the 16 images in this gallery: <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2014/05/gallery-australia-in-the-sixties/>

Choose two images to analyse. Provide a new caption for each image to explain how Australian life has changed or stayed the same. Consider things like gender, race, sexuality, economics, social attitudes, technology and the environment.

#### Activity 3: Analysing songs of Women's Liberation

Listen to Helen Reddy's 'I am Woman' and read the lyrics. Make a timeline of songs over the last 50 years that show women as strong and empowered.



Source: Helen Reddy, 'I am Woman', <https://www.flickr.com/photos/epiclectic/2910828153>



# REMEMBERING THE VIETNAM WAR



Source: Private Paul King and Army Nurse Lieutenant Colleen Mealy with a Christmas cake sent by a South Australian scout troop, Vung Tau 1967  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C36942>

# THE LONG TAN CROSS

**Inquiry question: Why is the Battle of Long Tan historically significant?**



Long Tan Cross and Battalion 6, 18 August 1969  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1183238>



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical significance (VCHHC128)



## Historical Knowledge

Did you know that Vietnam Veterans Day which is commemorated in Australia on 18 August every year is also called Long Tan Day?

In August 1966, the **Australian Task Force** in Vietnam had just established its base at Nui Dat, in Phuoc Tuy province. On 17 August, the Task Force received a significant test of its capacity to gain control in the province when a force composed of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units first attacked the base with rifle and **mortar** fire. The next day, 18 August, a patrol composed of 105 members of D Company, six Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) moved into a rubber plantation near the village of Long Tan. Here they were greatly outnumbered by Vietnamese troops, perhaps by as many as ten to one. **D Company** was forced to ground and over the next three hours its fragmented units held their ground against persistent attacks. Heavy rain added to their difficulties. D Company received support from helicopters dropping **ammunition** supplies, and **artillery** from the rear focussed on the enemy. A force of Armoured Personnel Carriers and a further company also set out to relieve those under attack. Together, the additional strength pushed the Vietnamese attackers back, and forced an end to the fighting.

The Australians suffered 18 deaths in the fighting, with a further 24 wounded. Some 245 Vietnamese lay dead. The successful defence of the Task Force base meant that the Australian presence in Phuoc Tuy was not seriously challenged again for the remainder of its time there. While Australians might claim this as a victory, Vietnamese perspectives on the battle also claim it as a victory.

### Commemoration

The Battle of Long Tan did not reflect the experiences of most Australians in Vietnam. Australians were involved in other major battles, however, most Australian activity in Vietnam consisted of patrolling and efforts to deprive Vietnamese fighting forces of their links to the people in the province. Long Tan stands out, though, not only because of its spectacular nature, but because of its cost in lives.

The battle site at Long Tan has become an important site for Australian visitors. The Long Tan Cross was erected in 1969 at the site by Australian soldiers to remember their mates who gave their lives. Vietnamese sensitivities about Australians as former enemies visiting the site were evident up until the 50th anniversary of Long Tan in 2016. The Vietnamese government gifted the original cross to the Australian people in 2018. This generous act smoothed over some of the past controversies surrounding Australian commemoration in Vietnam. In Australia, the Battle of Long Tan remains firmly at the centre of a positive view of Australian service in Vietnam.



## Your Thoughts?

- How does war get remembered or commemorated in your family or community?

### Resources

- Australian War memorial: Dave Sabben and the battle of Long Tan <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/dave-sabben-and-the-battle-of-long-tan> and interview with Dave Sabben <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4IW7eBjgI>
- Department of Veterans' Affairs: Battle of Long Tan <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/vietnam-war-1962-1975/events/combat/battle-long-tan>
- Sydney Morning Herald 'Flashback...Little Pattie in Vietnam' <https://www.smh.com.au/national/after-long-tan-little-patties-battle-plan-20090814-eky0.html>

## THE LONG TAN CROSS



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Inquiry—Who is Little Pattie and what has she got to do with the Battle of Long Tan?

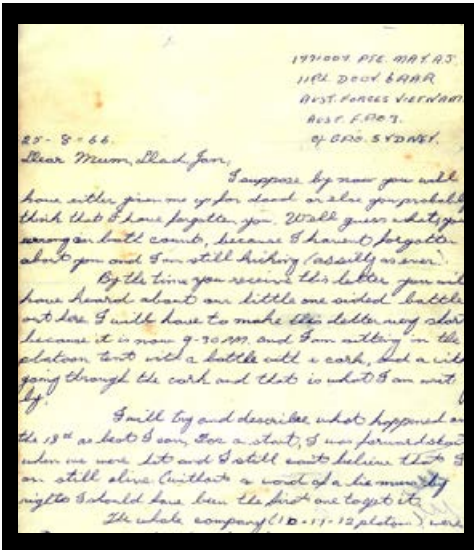
As soldier Dave Sabben marched into what would become the Battle of Long Tan, he heard music. As Little Pattie was singing at a concert for Australian troops at Nui Dat, she heard gunfire. What's the connection between Little Pattie, Col Joy and the Battle of Long Tan?

Use the following sources to write a newspaper article from 1966 that gives an account of the connection between the concert and the battle.

- Australian War Memorial Little Pattie and Col Joy Concert at Nui Dat Vietnam War — 18 Aug 1966 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAEQCEQb804&feature=youtu.be>
- Interview with Patricia Thompson (Little Pattie) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHkhct09jcs>
- After Long Tan: Little Pattie's battle plan *The Sydney Morning Herald* <https://www.smh.com.au/national/after-long-tan-little-patties-battle-plan-20090814-eky0.html>



Little Pattie performs with Col Joye and the Joy Boys in Nui Dat <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1289854>



Use this link to view the first two paragraphs of James Allen's letter home, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2140678?%20image=1>  
Follow the links to download the full version © Australian War Memorial.

#### Activity 2: Analysing letters as historical sources

Download the letter from Private May to his family and have a go at reading his handwriting. The letter dated 25 August 1966, describes in detail his experience of fighting with D Company, 6 RAR in the Battle of Long Tan on the 18 August 1966.

Private May wrote this letter to his parents and sister describing the Battle of Long Tan. He calls it the “one-sided battle.” The young Australian soldier writes of “being as silly as ever” showing his youthful enthusiasm. He is writing the letter in the **platoon** tent and can only see from the light of a wick stuck into a cork and a bottle.

This letter provides a glimpse into the life of a young soldier missing home. It also provides historians with primary evidence of the days after the Battle of Long Tan.

How useful do you think it is as a source about the Battle of Long Tan? Develop an argument about how you think it could be used to better understand Australian experiences of the war.

#### Activity 3: Inquiry—Two sides to every story

The Battle of Long Tan is not only an historically significant event during the Vietnam War, it is also what we refer to as a ‘contested’ history. This is when there is disagreement about the events and outcomes of an historical event, and the way it gets remembered. In the case of Long Tan, it is about ‘who won the battle.’ Learning about contested histories helps us to understand how and why people remember the past differently.

Research the controversy around the Battle of Long Tan. In a concise paragraph or two, develop your own argument about its significance and the competing views. Start by looking at these articles from *The Conversation*: The battle over Long Tan's memory – a perspective from Viet Nam: <https://theconversation.com/the-battle-over-long-tans-memory-a-perspective-from-viet-nam-64121> and Danger Close: The battle over the meaning of Long Tan: <https://theconversation.com/danger-close-the-battle-over-the-meaning-of-long-tan-121487>

# MEMORIALS AND COMMUNITIES

**Inquiry question: How is the Vietnam War remembered in Australia today and in my community?**



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC124) (VCHHC125)  
Cultural Practices (VICCCB018)



## Historical Knowledge

You have probably had experiences with ANZAC Day, but did you know **Vietnam Veterans Day** is commemorated every year on 18 August? The day also marks the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. War memorials and services are important in influencing how we remember war in our community. In the past there was more controversy about how the experience of the Vietnam War was remembered than there is today.

Memorials to the service of Australians in Vietnam have been growing in number since the 1980s. Among veterans there has been a sense that their service in Vietnam had been undervalued by Australians, which shaped their ways of remembering their war service. In the 1980s, Vietnam veterans' organisations spoke of the difficulties faced by their members, and the need for recognition of their service, but also their suffering during and after the war. A 'Welcome Home' march in Sydney in October 1987 helped many veterans to feel that a previously ignorant or even hostile society was beginning to recognise their service.

A Garden of Remembrance acknowledging a series of wars in Asia was added to Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance in 1985. In 1992 the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, in Anzac Parade Canberra, was dedicated to 'ALL WHO SERVED, SUFFERED, AND DIED.' It helped to align the experience of the Vietnam war and its participants with the Anzac tradition. Prime Minister John Howard declared that veterans had been poorly treated when in 2006 he referred to "our nation's collective failure at the time to adequately honour the service of those who went to Vietnam."

Veterans themselves have been raising memorials to reclaim the value of their experiences in Vietnam. They recognise those who gave their lives, but also the suffering of those who returned. Examples in Victoria are the *Vietnam Veterans' Commemorative Walk* in Seymour and the *National Vietnam Veterans Museum* on Phillip Island. The motto of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia is "Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living".



Vietnam Veterans Day,  
<https://www.onlymelbourne.com.au/vietnam-veterans-day#.Xrs481BS924>  
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

Recent memorials also recognise the war experiences of Vietnamese Australians, who arrived in large numbers as refugees following the end of the war in 1975. The *Vietnam War Memorial of Victoria* in Dandenong was dedicated in 2005 and features an Australian soldier and a soldier of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam *side by side*. The project was instigated by Vietnamese veterans and most of the funds were raised by Vietnamese communities. Vietnamese communities in Australia are also represented by the Vietnamese community flag. The yellow and red striped flag represents the South Vietnamese flag. Many Vietnamese Australians also recognise the yellow and red striped flag as a symbol of the Vietnamese community. Across Australia there are five of these side by side memorials. In Vietnam, war memorials tend to commemorate the North Vietnamese, which means the voices of South Vietnamese soldiers get forgotten.

At these memorials we can see that the effects of the Vietnam War have been deeply felt, and that there are many different experiences of the war remembered in our community today.



## Your Thoughts?

- Do you think we should spend money on memorials or could the money be used to support returned service personnel in other ways?

## Resources

- Australian War Memorial: Honouring Vietnam Veterans, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWv3TCrb0Nc>
- Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/media/file/vietnam-australian-vietnam-forces-national-memorial>
- Shrine of Remembrance Virtual Tour: <https://www.shrine.org.au/Visit-the-Shrine/Virtual-Tour>

## References

- Linke, C. (2014). Side by side memorials: Commemorating the Vietnam War in Australia. In Nguyen, N. *New perceptions of the Vietnam War*. McFarland.



## MEMORIALS AND COMMUNITIES



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Reflecting on your own cultural identity

Think about the different backgrounds and experience of the people in your class. How might their values, beliefs and cultural practices compare to yours? Write a personal reflection about how your own cultural identity, experiences, values and beliefs shape your opinion about war and conflict or how it is remembered. Consider how this might be similar and different to people of different ages, backgrounds and communities.

#### Activity 2: Reflecting on a physical or virtual war memorial visit

Use the table to reflect on your visit to a local memorial. If you cannot physically visit one in your area, visit one virtually. Go to the websites for: Shrine of Remembrance virtual tour; Australian War Memorial virtual visit; Monument Australia and Virtual War Memorial Australia. You could then compare this to a virtual tour of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC in the USA.

War memorial name: .....

Location/URL: .....

##### Before

What do you think you know about this memorial already? What are you expecting to see or feel?

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##### During

What you see, feel, notice and wonder? What might happen here on special days of the year? What questions does it raise? Take some photos or screen shots.

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##### After

Based on what you saw, find out more information about the people or events commemorated. Try to answer the questions you noted and identify any you still have.

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#### Activity 3: Interpreting War Memorials

The image on the left is an Anzac memorial in Geelong that commemorates WWI. The lone Digger on a tall plinth is a design commonly found in Victorian towns and suburbs. The image on the right is the 'Side by Side' sculpture at the Australian Vietnamese War memorial in Dandenong showing an Australian soldier and a soldier of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam standing on a low plinth. Consider their similarities and differences.

How would you create a commemoration for your local community to encourage people to reflect on the importance of peace? What could be used instead of monuments to encourage reflection? How would you try to include different perspectives? Draw or describe your ideas.



Photo supplied by Rebecca Cairns 2020



Monuments Australia photo supplied Graham Saunders & Sandra Brown  
<http://monumentaustalia.org.au/themes/conflict/vietnam/display/30962-vietnam-war-memorial-of-victoria>

# HISTORY, MYTHS AND MEMORIES

**Inquiry question: Why is the Vietnam War remembered differently by different people?**



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC125)  
Cultural Practices (VICCCB017)



## Historical Knowledge

What do you already know about the Vietnam War? What has influenced these impressions? The history of Australia's involvement in the war continues to be created through the **oral histories** of the people who were there and the **archival research** of historians, as well as the ways it is remembered by memorials, museums, music and movies.

History is said to be the stories we tell about the past. The movie *Forrest Gump* tells a story about the Vietnam War, but would you use it to gather factual information for a history assignment? For a story to be considered history, it needs to be supported by an argument and **historical evidence**. Although historians sometimes disagree on the arguments they make about the past, their different interpretations are based on the careful analysis of **historical sources**. As new evidence becomes available, these arguments can be reinterpreted. For example, in his book *Australia's Vietnam: Myth vs History*, historian Mark Dapin explains that the history he writes has changed due to the evidence he has and has not been able to find over the years.

Historical interpretations of the war will also differ depending on peoples' cultural and political backgrounds, beliefs and lived experiences. Australian histories will be different to American histories. **North Vietnamese perspectives** will be different to **South Vietnamese perspectives**. The views within these groups will also be different. Some points might be commonly agreed upon and others might be considered controversial. Part of doing history is engaging in these debates.

We know from personal experience that our individual memories change over time. Things can be forgotten or are difficult to forget. **Social memory** is the common history people share with a specific group and it



Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: A6135, K14/10/92/86 , Veterans marching at the dedication of the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial 1992. <http://vrrroom.naa.gov.au/print/?ID=19557>

can create a sense of individual and community identity. For example, some veterans have a shared social memory that shapes their identity. However, other veterans have very different experiences. The social memory of anti-war protestors might encourage them to think most Australians were against the war, but we can see from opinion polls and the huge welcome home marches for troops that Australians had different views at different times. Vietnamese perspectives on the war are also diverse. Quite a few Vietnamese Australians who migrated to Australia after the war, or whose families did, have published memoirs about these experiences. Anh Do's *The Happiest Refugee* is one example. Individual stories continue to shape social memory and give important insight into the ways lives are drastically transformed by war.

History and memory can also be blurred by popular culture. Have you heard of the Rambo movies? We know they are not an accurate representation of the experiences of Vietnam veterans but like so many other Hollywood movies they have shaped the way the war and veterans get imagined. Thinking critically about the stereotypes and misconceptions presented in American movies can help us evaluate how they might get woven into Australian stories.



## Your Thoughts?

- Imagine it is 2050 and you are being interviewed about what life was like during the COVID-19 pandemic. How might your memories be similar or different to the history that is written about this period?

## Resources

- Dept. Of Veterans' Affairs: Vietnam War Myths <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/vietnam-war-1962-1975/resources/vietnam-war-myths>
- British Library: The 40th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War: <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2015/05/40th-anniversary-of-the-end-of-the-vietnam-war.html>
- SBS: *The Boat* interactive graphic novel: <http://www.sbs.com.au/theboat/>
- ABC: The Vietnam War in pop culture: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-18/vietnam-war-in-pop-culture-how-history-has-been-shaped/7752134?nw=0>

## References

- Dapin, M. (2019). *Australia's Vietnam: Myth VS History*. Sydney: NewSouth Publishing.
- Working with Historical Memory in the Classroom* (2012) <http://memoriesatschool.aranzadi-zientziak.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/informeFinalENG.pdf>
- Nguyen, N. (2014) *New perceptions of the Vietnam War*. McFarland.

## HISTORY, MYTHS AND MEMORIES



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Women in war

In 2017, Australia Post launched a series of stamps to recognise the contribution of women in war. The stamp on the Vietnam War commemorated war correspondent Kate Webb and Red Cross worker Rosemary Griggs. Watch this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cThzNsPNqU> and use other online sources to find out about Kate Webb.

There are plans to make a movie about Webb's experiences in Vietnam. Movies have been criticised for creating stereotypes and misrepresenting the past, yet they also engage people in thinking about the past. Develop an argument to show your reasons why or why not there should be a movie made about Kate Webb.



Kate Webb, war correspondent  
Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gaylegorman/2149375859/in/photolist-HyMCAL-noZTR1-nHgMj6-noZTX3-4gW7yt>

#### Activity 2: Oral histories

Recently the Department of Veterans' Affairs recorded video interviews with veterans. Compare the experiences and views of Adrian Roberts and Patrick O'Hara by watching the videos (select one or two) or read the transcripts below.

**Patrick O'Hara:** <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories-service/veterans-stories/patrick-ohara>

Patrick talking about being conscripted:

"No, didn't think at all about Vietnam. Didn't know where Vietnam was, didn't have any idea. When I was told I had to register, I think I was eighteen and a half, you had to register. I registered in a bit of, not a daze, but a lack of realism. This won't come to anything, it's just paperwork..."

I remember at work all waiting for the ballot to come out, I never thought I'd get picked because I never got picked for anything, you know. It was a huge surprise. My recollection is I was sitting in the public service and someone had a newspaper and he called out the dates and one of them was the 1st of December and I just thought "Bloody Hell" and that's when, "What happens now? What's it going to be like? How am I going to go?"...

There were people who knew a lot more than me... The whole thing of just, this is an adventure, an excitement, different to what I'd done before. I just rolled along."

**Adrian Roberts:** <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories-service/veterans-stories/adrian-roberts>

Adrian talking about coming home:

"When I came home the first time, I remember standing on the edge of Luscombe Field watching my troop going out on operation because I'd gone up earlier, I was going back earlier.

I got back to Melbourne, Victoria, and I was in the kitchen with my mother-in-law and my wife and they were talking about matters domestic and all my head said was "I want to go back. This is foreign country. I don't belong here."

So, I went back, that was one of the reasons. The other reason was I generally felt concern for the Vietnamese people, and I had a much closer, by virtue of the training team, a much closer relationship with the Vietnamese people and I still retain affection and respect for them."

a) Suggest some reasons why there are similarities and differences in the ways Adrian and Patrick remember the Vietnam War.

b) Design some questions for interviewing someone you know who has memories of the Vietnam War, either as a civilian in Australia, Vietnam or another country. Discuss with your teacher the possibilities of conducting an interview.













## HISTORY, MYTHS AND MEMORIES



### Activities

#### PMI CHART: Where should I start my research on Australian experiences of the Vietnam War?

Source	Description	PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
	The <b>Australian War Memorial</b> website has many pages about the Vietnam War and specific pages on historical artefacts, footage, images, documents, educational activities and more.			
	The song <b>Khe San</b> (1978) written by Don Walker and performed Cold Chisel describes the experiences of a Vietnam Veteran as he returns to civilian life. In 2014 it was added to the National Film and Sound Archive.			
	<b>Australia's Vietnam War</b> (2014) is a history book by Peter Edwards. As a historian Edwards has worked for the Australian War Memorial, written and edited books and taught at universities.			
	<b>The National Vietnam Veterans Museum</b> at Phillip Island seeks to remember, interpret and understand the experience of the veterans and the enduring impact of the war on society.			
	<b>Our Mob Served: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories of war and defending Australia</b> (2019) by Allison Cadzow and Mary Anne Jebb uses oral histories and family photos to tell the stories of Aboriginal Australian's involvement in war, including the Vietnam War.			
	<b>The Battle of Long Tan: As told by the Commanders to Bob Gradin</b> (2004) is a book that gives the accounts of five Australian commanders and one New Zealand commander of the units that fought in this significant battle.			
	<b>The Sapphires</b> (2012) is an Australian film about four women singers that went to Vietnam to entertain mostly black American troops. It is loosely based on the true story of two Aboriginal women.			
	<b>The Boat</b> (2015) is an interactive graphic novel by Vietnamese Australian artist Nam Le, adapted by Matt Huynh. It is based on Le's parents' boat journey as refugees and is available on the SBS website.			
	The film <b>Good Morning Vietnam</b> (1987) is an American comedy drama starring Robin Williams as a popular radio DJ in Saigon in 1965. It is loosely based on a true story about two US radio DJs.			
	<b>Our Vietnam Nurses</b> (2016) by Annabelle Brayley presents 15 stories from nurses and medics who served during the Vietnam War.			
YOUR CHOICE				



# LEARNING FROM THE VIETNAM WAR



An Australian soldier and a small boy, Vietnam 1966 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/CUN/66/0414/VN/>

# LEGACIES

## Inquiry question: How did the Vietnam War change Australia, and what did Australians learn?



### Curriculum Toolbox

Continuity and Change (VCHHC126)

Historical significance (VCHHC128)

Cultural Diversity (VCICCD019), (VCICCD020)



Lion Dance, Footscray Victoria. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/90321069@N08/9760141596>



### Historical Knowledge

The multicultural Australia we know today is in many ways the **legacy** of social and political changes that took place after the Vietnam War. The 1970s in Australia saw successive governments work to build stronger, more peaceful ties with neighbouring countries in Asia, including both communist and non-communist countries. Australia responded to new conflicts in the region using **diplomatic** and **peacekeeping** measures rather than physical warfare.

As Australian troops were beginning to be **withdrawn** from Vietnam in 1972, the new Labor Whitlam government formalised the end of around 70 years of White Australia policies. This marked an enormous shift in Australia's immigration policy which, since 1901, had pursued the racist agenda of restricting immigration to white Europeans only. Policies like the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act reflected these changes.

Both sides of politics in Australia, agreed we had a moral responsibility to help the South Vietnamese we had fought alongside. Prime Minister

Malcom Fraser (1975-1983) reflected: "Our presence there had encouraged them to fight, and we had a commitment, an obligation to these people." In the ten years following the war, over 80,000 Vietnamese refugees were settled in Australia. As Cambodia was also caught up in the Vietnam War, Cambodian refugees also came to Australia during this period. This was the biggest wave of immigration the country had seen since the Goldrush of the 1850s. Malcom Fraser considered the dismantling of these racist attitudes and a broader acceptance of the idea of a multicultural Australia as the most important legacy of his time in government. By 2011, Vietnamese Australians represented over 1% of the Australian population. Today Australia is home to dynamic Australian-Vietnamese communities and Vietnamese culture and food have become part of the diverse fabric of Australian society.

An important legacy that is still highly sensitive is the impact the war had on those who served. "Honour the dead but fight like hell for the living" is the motto of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA). Since its founding in 1979, the VVAA has worked to shine a light on the physical and psychological suffering experienced by some veterans. They have lobbied for increased public recognition of mental health conditions, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and have paved the way for improved support and services for the veterans and their families. The VVAA's decade-long campaign to have the negative health effects of exposure to the toxic chemicals known as Agent Orange recognised, have also resulted in the Government creating pathways for all veterans to receive compensation for injuries received in the line of duty.

Improving Australians' understanding of the Vietnam War is a valuable legacy which continues to hold a significant place in commemorations of war such as ANZAC Day. Vietnam Veterans' Day is commemorated on the 18 August every year. The Vietnam War makes its mark in Australian history not just because of lives lost but for what it has taught politicians about committing its people to go to war. In Australia we are still learning about the social and mental health problems inherited from the Vietnam War, well into the 21st century. Lastly, the acceptance of so many Vietnamese refugees helped to further breakdown the prejudices of White Australia, encouraging Australians to embrace the benefits of a multicultural Australia.



### Your Thoughts?

- How has multiculturalism made positive changes to your community? What can Australia do to become an even more inclusive multicultural society?

### Resources

- Culture Victoria: Cuc Lam <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/immigrants-and-emigrants/cuc-lam/>
- Museums Victoria: Immigration History from Vietnam to Victoria: <https://origins.museumsvictoria.com.au/countries/vietnam/>
- Migration Heritage Centre of NSW: <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime-history/1965-1990/index.html>

### References

- Edwards, P.(2014). *Australia and the Vietnam War*, NewSouth.
- Edwards, P.(2020). *Australia and the Vietnam War 50 years on*. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-the-vietnam-war-50-years-on/>
- Nguyen, N. (2015). *New Perceptions of the Vietnam War: Essays on the War, the South Vietnamese Experience, the Diaspora and the Continuing Impact*. McFarland

## LEGACIES



### Activities

#### Activity 1: Immigration timeline

Discuss and outline steps using the timeline provided by the Victorian Immigration Museum <https://museums.victoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/resources/immigration-to-victoria/>. Investigate how immigration patterns in Victoria changed after the Vietnam War. Create an info-graphic or visual timeline to illustrate these changes and the reasons for these changes.

#### Activity 2: Campaigning for change

The Vietnam Veterans Association successfully lobbied the government for better recognition and compensation for ex-military personnel in Australia. In a group, or with a partner, identify political, social or environmental issues in Australia today or your local community that you think need fixing. Discuss steps you could take to draw more attention to this issue.

#### Activity 3: History through photographs

Look at the photographs that were taken of recently arrived Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s.

- What do the photos show us about the contributions made by newly arrived refugees from Vietnam?
- What message do these photos communicate about the new immigration policies of the mid-1970s?
- Who might have been the intended audience?
- How have Vietnamese Australians continued to contribute to Australian society? Provide at least two examples.



(1): Courtesy of the NAA: Vietnamese refugees at work on Melbourne trams, National Archives of Australia A6135, K13/7/79/34

(2): Courtesy of the NAA: Nissan factory worker, National Archives of Australia A6135, K14/9/79/5

(3): Courtesy of the NAA: Vietnamese refugees shopping in Melbourne, National Archives of Australia A6135, K13/7/79/3



# LISTENING TO VIETNAM VETERANS

**Inquiry question: Why are we still thinking and talking about the Vietnam War?**



## Curriculum Toolbox

Historical sources as evidence (VCHHC123), (VCHHC125)  
Cultural Practices (VICCCB018)



## Historical Knowledge

### Recognising different experiences

The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (Victorian Branch) works within schools in Victoria to tell the stories of Vietnam veterans. Vietnam veterans come from all over Australia and each with different experiences during and after the war. In 1965, Commodore Jim Dickson, a young naval officer, sailed on the HMAS Perth to Vietnam. Commodore Dickson speaks of being under the command of governments during war time and experiencing “high pressure” as a young man: “The Vietnam War was a turbulent time in every way. I know damn well we must have killed people. That’s what war is. It was not us making the decision to go to war. That was the government of our country. We were servants of that government.”

In 2018 a number of Aboriginal soldiers were interviewed about their stories of the Vietnam War on National Indigenous Television (NITV). The men were part of a unit of twenty-eight men who continued to serve in Vietnam as the Australian Embassy Guard, for five months after Australia withdrew troops in 1973. The report helps us to understand the personal and cultural beliefs important to these Aboriginal soldiers. Noel, a Wullli Wullli man, says, “I was very naive about why we were going, but when I got over there I found out that in my own mind it was more about protecting not only Australia, but my Country.” Noel continues, “That was the motivation in the back of my mind. From a cultural side, mother earth, mother provider, drove me and I was going to do the best I could to protect her.”

Australia also recognises the service of South Vietnamese veterans. In an oral history interview Hai says, “I am a Vietnamese Australian war veteran. Now I receive a pension from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. I’ve had it since July 1994... I march on Anzac Day every year.”

### The experience of coming home

Even though the official end to the war is 1975, the process of withdrawing Australian troops occurred earlier and over a number of years. The last Australian troops were withdrawn in mid-1973, although some RAAF aircraft and crew were involved in humanitarian

### Resources

- ACMI: ‘An Interview with Jim Dickson’ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrl2Th\\_ce4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrl2Th_ce4)
- Alpha History: Researching for Sources <https://alphahistory.com/researching-history/>

### References

- Archibald-Binge, E. 2018, ‘The unit that never existed: Indigenous Vietnam vets from secret unit reunite after 45 years’, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/04/25/unit-never-existed-indigenous-vietnam-vets-secret-unit-reunite-after-45-years>
- Victorian Vietnam Veterans Association: <http://vvaavic.org.au/>
- Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia: About PTSD, <http://vvaavic.org.au/about-ptsd/>
- Nguyen, N. (2014) New perceptions of the Vietnam War. McFarland.



Vietnam Veterans’ Walk Seymour <https://www.flickr.com/photos/caro6302/8547585958>

and evacuation missions in the last weeks before the Fall/Liberation of Saigon in 30 April 1975. Veterans also returned to Australia at different times throughout the war depending on the length of their tours or when their two years’ national service was up. Some veterans experienced huge welcome home parades, others arrived home on Qantas flights in the middle of the night to an Australian public very much divided by the war. The Vietnam War also ended in defeat.

Of the 521 Australians who died in the course of the Vietnam War, 98 service personnel from Victoria gave their lives. They are **commemorated** in private and public sites all over Australia.

Living with the memories and experiences of the war presented another kind of battle. The emotional trauma of the war—the violence, terror and loss of life —carved deep scars in many veterans and civilians alike. In Australia, returned servicemen often arrived home with mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Compared to more visible injuries like loss of limbs due to **land mines**, these injuries were not always visible and often went unrecognized and untreated, causing long-term harm to the veterans and those around them.



## Your Thoughts?

- What are some of the reasons that we need to continue thinking and talking about the Vietnam War? What are the benefits of listening to the firsthand stories of the people who experienced the war at the time and its ongoing effects in the present? Why do you think veterans are interested in sharing their stories?



# LISTENING TO VIETNAM VETERANS



## Activities

### Activity 1: Inquiry: How have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contributed to the Australian Defence Force since the 1860s?

Find out about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service personnel using the following sites. Present your research as a timeline with images, a poem, an info-graphic, a commemorative poster, a short essay or presentation format of your choice.

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/war-service>

<https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/anzac-day-2018>

[https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/lets-talk\\_military-service.pdf](https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/lets-talk_military-service.pdf)

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/indigenous-service/report-vietnam>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/indigenous-service/report-executive-summary>

### Activity 2: Interview preparation and reflecting on the tragedy and trauma of war

The Vietnam War was quite different to the previous wars. The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia notes some key differences to WWII including: ongoing and irregular combat; guerrilla warfare; difficulty in telling the enemy and civilians apart; the spraying of toxic chemicals; massive firepower; no rear lines to escape to for rest; short tours which limited the time available for bonding; and the perception that Australian society ignored veterans when they returned. These sorts of conditions resulted in ongoing stress and trauma, or what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder. Consider how these conditions are reflected in the quotes below.

You might have the opportunity to speak with a Vietnam veteran visiting your school. Discuss with a partner how you will show respect and be sensitive to their experiences. Make a list of questions you could ask a veteran.

"I think I was a pretty cool-headed person most times, but I think that it eventually got to us, because they were all young people that were coming in with their legs off, multiple wounds, and you were sending home week after week, planes full of young, mutilated people. Most people see amputated limbs as nice rounded finished-off stumps. We didn't get that. We had the ragged ends."

Fay Lewis, Army nurse, 1970, in Stuart Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian voices*, William Heinemann, Richmond, 1987, p.141

"I wasn't game to leave the house, for a long time. About six months I wasn't game to go outside. I was just so frightened of everything. My poor wife. She has to look after me, this dribbling, bloody, fragile, old man."

Barry Heard, Veteran, Dept. of Veterans' Affairs: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/barry-heard-australian-army-post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

"We have got to educate future generations to realise what a tragedy, agony, waste and horror war is."

Commodore Dixon, reflecting on the legacy of war, ACMI Collection  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrl2Th\\_ce4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrl2Th_ce4)

### Activity 3: Primary and secondary source analysis

The Vietnam veterans know the Vietnam War firsthand. Their recollections of what war is like are passed on through primary sources such as oral histories, conversations, presentations or interviews, as well as documents such as letters and diaries. Secondary sources include more recent history books, online articles, textbooks and educational resources such as this. Secondary sources offer interpretations of primary sources and other **archival research**.

In this activity you are asked to be the historian. Select one primary source about the experiences of veterans (e.g. letter, video interview, direct quotes) and one secondary source about the experiences of veterans (e.g. website, recent news report, textbook, history book). Draw up a table similar to the example below and use it as a template to analyse the strengths and limitations of these different types of sources. You can use some of the primary and secondary sources referred to throughout this resource or find some online.

Analysis questions	Primary Source	Secondary Source
Title and/or type of source?		
When was it created? Who was it created by? Why was it created?		
What are the strengths of this source?		
What are the limitations of source?		
Drawing conclusions: How does each source influence your understanding of the Vietnam War and the experiences of Vietnam veterans?		

## LEARNING FIRSTHAND GLOSSARY

- **aerial bombardment:** the use of long-range missiles and the dropping of bombs, herbicides and napalm by aircraft such as B52s; said to be the longest and heaviest in history during the Vietnam War
- **Agent Orange:** Agent Orange is often used as a catch all term for all herbicides/pesticides and other toxic chemicals used by the American military to kill off vegetation; such chemicals have caused major health issues for Vietnamese citizens and veterans
- **allies:** the countries or states that co-operate to fight together e.g. the Australia and the USA alliance
- **ammunition:** supplies of shells and bullets for mortar fire, guns, rifles and machine guns
- **archival research:** research based on historical documents and records kept in archives
- **artillery:** large guns
- **Australian Task Force (1ATF):** set up in 1966 based at Nui Dat; composed of two infantry battalions and other supporting arms and services; 1ATF began withdrawing in 1971
- **battalions:** part of the army structure; a group of 550 to 1000 soldiers; a battalion is made up of companies and platoons
- **chemical warfare:** use of herbicides and other toxic chemicals (e.g. Agent Orange and napalm) by US military to kill off vegetation and crops
- **civil war:** a war between the people of one country; the conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam was a civil war that became part of the Cold War when it involved the forces of other countries
- **Cold War:** rivalry over global leadership between the Soviet Union and the United States without direct conflict; an ideological struggle over the benefits of democracy or communism; the Cold War period lasted about 45 years and involved numerous direct conflicts such as Vietnam
- **communists:** support communism (i.e. North Vietnam); communism is the idea that society is organised in a way so that all property is owned by the community rather than being organised as a capitalist system, however, communist countries usually came to be controlled by the state
- **commemorate:** to remember and show respect for something or someone; a commemoration is often in the form of a ceremony or memorial
- **company:** a company is a group of 100 to 225 soldiers and is made up of smaller platoons
- **conscientious objectors:** a person who objects to war due to their conscience or moral sense of right and wrong
- **conscription:** civilians are conscripted for compulsory military training when there are not enough volunteers
- **dustoffs:** medical evacuation helicopters or ambulances of the air that picked up wounded troops and flew them to field hospitals
- **domino effect:** a theory about the spread of communism in south-east Asia now believed to be incorrect; it was thought that after Vietnam, Laos was would fall to communism, then Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand etc.
- **guerrilla warfare:** a type of warfare used by the Viet Cong that included tactics like raids, ambushes, sabotage, booby traps, surprise attacks, underground tunnels and small groups of armed civilians
- **historical evidence:** historical sources become historical evidence when they are interpreted by historians to make sense of the past and used as evidence to support arguments
- **historical sources:** anything that can provide information about the past such as documents, letters, film footage, artefacts, objects, diaries, newspaper articles, speeches, architecture, art etc; historical sources need to be placed in the context of the time they were made or used
- **independence movement:** after WWII some countries that were the colonies of empires wanted to be independent; for example, the communist leader Ho Chi Minh led the movement for Vietnamese independence from French rule, beginning the First French-Indochina war
- **infantry:** soldiers who fought on foot
- **landmines or anti-personnel mines:** explosive devices that are designed to injure rather than kill humans; often hidden and stepped on; causes loss of limbs
- **moratorium:** in this context a moratorium was a large protest; the Vietnam moratorium protests were the largest public demonstrations seen in Australia up until that time
- **mortar:** a large gun used for firing shells/bombs from an angle
- **nationalist movements:** in south-east Asia nationalist movements were driven by the idea that nations should be self-governing and independent from colonial rule; they wanted the development of new or improved nation-states
- **national service:** compulsory military training for young people; Australia had a National Service Scheme from 1951 to 1959 and from 1964 to 1972 for the Vietnam War
- **napalm:** a chemical weapon that has been described as liquid fire; originally used by US forces in flamethrowers and later dropped in bombs to burn large areas; the jelly-like mixture causes horrendous fifth degree burns to humans
- **Nashos:** the nickname given to national service men
- **North Vietnam:** The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the official name for the North, wanted to unite Vietnam under communism
- **oral histories:** a method of collecting and recording histories using interviews with people who personally experienced past events
- **peacekeeping:** maintaining peace and security during or after conflict
- **peasants:** people who did agricultural work and lived in rural areas; peasants often did not own the land they worked
- **perspective:** a particular way of looking at something; when we take a historical perspective, we recognise that people in the past had different beliefs and attitudes to ours in the present and we try to understand these differences by understanding contexts in which they lived
- **platoon:** a small group of soldiers within a company; about 30 to 60 soldiers
- **social memory:** the shared history that connects people and their identities to a group or a community
- **social activism:** developing local, national or international campaigns to bring about social or political change
- **South Vietnam:** The Republic of Vietnam was anti-communist of South Vietnam was anti-communist and the United States and Australia supported it to try and stop the spread of communism in south-east Asia; also called the Republic of Vietnam
- **Viet Cong:** a guerrilla force that supported North Vietnam; also called 'Charlie' by the Americans; often recruited teenage boys
- **withdrawal:** the process of the Australian and US governments bringing home troops; most Australian troops were withdrawn by the end of 1971

### Answers for chronology card game, page 10 of this resource:

1. 1962 May: Australia announces it will send the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) to train South Vietnamese (joining thousands of US advisors already in Vietnam)
2. 1964 November: The National Service Act is introduced in Australia. All 20-year-old males were required to sign up for two-years-service
3. 1965 April: Prime Minister Robert Menzies announces the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam.
4. 1966 18 August: Battle of Long Tan. Australians engage in significant fighting against North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong. 18 Australians died and 24 were wounded.
5. 1966 December: Australian government announces an increase of service personnel from the Army, Navy and the Air Force.
6. 1967 May: Australian task force laid over 3,000 mines to create a barrier minefield at Dat Do to block Viet Cong supply lines. This actually caused many Australian casualties.
7. 1968 January: Start of Tet Offensive. This large campaign of surprise attacks in the South by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong began during Vietnamese New Year or Tet.
8. 1968 2 February: Prime Minister John Gorton announces that Australia will not send any more troops to Vietnam
9. 1969: US President Nixon announces the withdrawal of 25,000 US troops from Vietnam.
10. 1970 8 May: First Moratorium protest. 120,000 people march across Australia.
11. Dec 1971: Last major withdrawal of Australian combat troops.
12. 1975 30 April: The war ends as the South surrenders to the North; also known as the Fall/Liberation of Saigon