

Book Review
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**MENTIONS IN DESPATCHES: AN
INFANTRY PLATOON IN VIET
NAM, JUNE 1966 – JUNE 1967**

*By Dave Sabben MG, Lothian
Custom Publishing 2023,
400 pp hardback \$82*

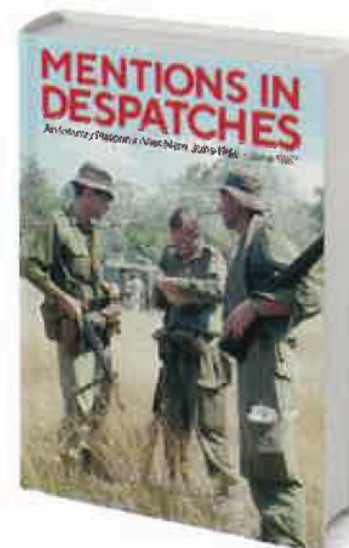
Part love story, part military history: here Dave Sabben has delivered an outstanding account of his war in Vietnam. Through almost daily letters to his then wife Sue, Sabben takes the reader on a very personal journey through a year of his life. He writes to Sue with tenderness, candour and a dry yet cheeky sense of humour as his pen

gives voice to his thoughts.

From leaving Australia and arriving in South Vietnam, Sabben provides unique insights into the lives of his men and other members of D Company, 6RAR. One standout character is Major Harry Smith, the no-nonsense company commander. Smith's guidance and mentoring of Sabben is apparent throughout the book. Humorous interactions between Sabben and Jack Kirby, the experienced Company Sergeant Major, provide some light moments.

Setting up the 1st Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat is described in fascinating detail, as are the operations and patrols. The reader gains a sense of the joys and frustrations of being a young infantry officer in charge of young infantrymen inside and outside the wire. The action, when it occurs, is mostly short in duration, and Sabben keenly feels the deaths of several of his men and that of Jack Kirby. As the tour draws towards its end, his fatigue and frustration are palpable.

The battle of Long Tan is described in detail yet does not define the book.



(available from www.sabbenmidbook.com)

However, the fight for justice regarding gallantry awards began in-country. The bitterness of the men of D Company at the parsimonious allocation and misallocation of awards is not missed.

The book is generously illustrated with images and clearly understandable maps, particularly of Nui Dat and Long Tan, which help to bring Sabben's account to life.

This book should be required reading for the young men and women entering RMC Duntroon and ADFA, whose role it will be to lead other men and women in uniform.

MICHAEL KELLY