

MENTIONS IN DESPATCHES

An Infantry Platoon in Viet Nam, June 1966 – June 1967

DAVE SABBen MG



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Intimate, raw in places, sometimes shocking, always authentic. To those who would aspire to lead that part of the Nation's treasure, our men and women in military uniform, read this book.

Peter Cosgrove, Infantry Platoon Commander, Vietnam – 1969/70

A most accurate and enduring example of Australian Infantry operations at platoon level; comparable in quality and impact to the classic *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

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Dave's book is well worth reading and to get a copy and understand what young officers would be well advised a very good platoon commander.

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VIET NAM

We know about the politics that got us into and out of the 'war'. We know about the big battles: Long Tan, Coral, Balmoral, Binh Ba... We know about the social issues: conscription, drugs, moratoriums, the uneasy returns home... And we know about the legacy: the trauma, the PTSD, the divorces, the suicides...

But do we know what actually happened there? Do we know exactly what our soldiers did, day-by-day, week-by-week? Do we understand what they experienced? What they did? What they thought about what they did?

This book will take you into an average Infantry Platoon for a 12-month 'Tour of Duty' in the year the Task Force base was set up.

It will take you from the early days – June 1966 – when a bare rubber plantation was occupied in the middle of an enemy controlled province, and a new operational base established.

Hundreds of soldiers endured getting six two-hour sleeps every three days for weeks on end. In between those sleeps, they patrolled with heavy kit in dust-dry or monsoon-wet (but always-dangerous) conditions to clear the enemy from their own bases. And when not on patrol, they were digging pits, trenches, command posts and latrines. When not on patrol or digging, they were clearing the undergrowth and erecting barbed wire fences.

And when they did sleep, it was on groundsheets under plastic 'hoochies' without lights and always with a weapon within reach. Showers were rare but mildew was everywhere. Food was mostly out of ration cans; feet were rarely out of boots.

It was only later, when the base was a little more secure, that tents and stretcher beds became available. Then the pace did slacken, but only slightly. One- and two-day patrols gave way to one- and two-week operations, as they cleared further out from the Nui Dat base.

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DAVE SABBEN MG

David Sabben was born in Suva, Fiji in 1945 but moved to Australia in 1958 to attend High School in Sydney, where he boarded through to Leaving Certificate in 1962.

Aged 20 in 1965, Dave volunteered for the first intake of Australia's National Service scheme. He applied for officer training and completed the first course of the Scheyville National Service Officer Training Unit (IOTU).

In January 1966 Dave was posted to 6RAR in Brisbane and appointed commander of 12 Platoon. 6RAR was sent to Viet Nam in June 1966. Dave served the full 12 month tour and was a platoon commander at the Battle of Long Tan for which he was recommended for a Military Cross (MC) but that award was downgraded to an MID. In 2008, the award was upgraded to a Medal for Gallantry (MG).

After returning to Australia in 1967, Dave was discharged from his National Service obligation but served a further four years with the CMF, attaining Captain rank. He resumed his civilian career first in Sydney and then Melbourne, finally working as a Project Manager in the computer (IT) industry.

Dave retired in December 2004 and has spent his retirement mostly writing. He lives on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria with his Melbourne born wife, Di.