

EDUCATION RESOURCES

Compiled By Hannah McCarthy-Oliver



Brink Productions

in association with State Theatre Company and Adelaide Festival Centre
presents

LONG TAN

by Verity Laughton

Directed by Chris Drummond



the art of storytelling

Dear Teachers and Students,

Long Tan is a powerful, moving, engrossing and exciting production. We hope you enjoy the experience. This show is rich in content that can be explored in your classrooms covering a multitude of curriculum areas.

In preparation for your trip to the theatre we would like to reiterate the show's **warnings**:

- This play contains strong language, depiction of violence, depiction of guns, strobe lighting, haze effects and gunfire.
- All audience members wear headphones for the majority of the performance.
- The show contains potentially distressing content.
- Patrons who use hearing aids will need to identify themselves to the Front of House team so that they can assist you to ensure you have the best sound experience.
- The running time is 1h 45m with no interval.

It is also important to note:

Mobile phones may cause headphone interference to audience members – even if they are switched to silent. Please ensure phones are switched off or in airplane mode.

Due to the layout of seating and use of headphones, we also recommend that students refrain from taking notes until the conclusion of the performance.

Long Tan is a project that took its first breath with playwright Verity Laughton in late 2013, and we're humbled to be able to bring this important Australian story to the stage. We hope it resonates with you long after you've left the theatre!

Warm regards,

Brink Productions

A WORK IN TWO PARTS

Long Tan is an innovative theatrical/installation event marking the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam.

On a hot, rain-sodden afternoon in 1966, in the glutinous mud of a rubber plantation in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam, 105 Australian and 3 New Zealand soldiers clashed with over 2,000 North Vietnamese troops. In the ensuing battle, 17 Australians were killed (and 1 died of wounds after the battle) and more than 245 North Vietnamese.

In recognition of this significant event, Brink Productions delivers a work in two parts:

- *Long Tan* the theatre production is a ‘stand and deliver oratorio*’ built around archives and interviews researched and conducted by Verity Laughton with Australian soldiers who fought at Long Tan, Vietnamese contributors and with the family and friends of those who died.
- *Ripples of Wartime* has been specially commissioned by Brink to complement the stage production of *Long Tan*. Filmmaker Malcolm McKinnon presents stories from people impacted by the Vietnam War in a range of different ways.

The two elements of *Long Tan* stand alone and yet, by allowing them to co-exist within the same event and not contriving analysis or resolutions, a dialogue is created. *Long Tan* deals with memory and the fragmentation of history. It talks about the fracturing of mental wellbeing, the division of society and the legacy that war leaves for the future. In all this *Long Tan* is a work that will build a series of bridges between communities and generations.

LONG TAN – the play

A semi-verbatim text by award-winning playwright Verity Laughton, *Long Tan* isn’t simply a work about a contentious time and iconic battle. Rather, it’s a meditation on the ruptures in collective memory, the consequences of extreme demands on human beings in military conflict, and the need for forgiveness, empathy and faith in our common humanity.

Long Tan brings together a cast of 12 South Australian actors in an immersive audio-theatre production that will parachute audiences into the soldiers’ experience – gunfire, mortar fire, pounding rain, insect clouds, screams, groans and sudden silence – all orchestrated with sonic intensity to capture the pandemonium of entrapment under fire. The audience shares the space with the actors and wear headphones as an assault of sound and light parachutes them into the intensity of the soldiers’ experience.

RIPPLES OF WARTIME – the video installation

This exhibition presents first-hand stories not only from military veterans, but also from post-war Vietnamese migrants, anti-war campaigners, family members of conscripted veterans and medical, and other practitioners, who served in Vietnam. Together, they reflect the way in which the Vietnam War excited and divided public opinion. These diverse stories are considered and reflective.

For a country still at war in a foreign land, they aim to be instructive and provocative too.

The video exhibition will be displayed in the Space Theatre foyer during the season and available on www.brinkproductions.com

Further notes regarding *Ripples of Wartime* will be provided in the Study Guide.

LONG TAN by Verity Laughton

CREATIVES

Playwright Verity Laughton
Director Chris Drummond
Composer & Sound Designer Luke Smiles
Set and Costume Designer Wendy Todd
Lighting Designer Chris Petridis
Filmmaker – *Ripples of Wartime* Malcolm McKinnon

CAST

David Andri
Stuart Fong
Patrick Graham
Matthew Gregan
Antoine Jelk
Patrick Klavins
Nic Krieg
Guy O’Grady
Chris Pitman
Mémé Thorne
Elijah Valadian-Wilson
Taylor Wiese

PRODUCTION

Stage Manager Françoise Piron
Production Co-ordinator Stephanie Fisher
Assistant Stage Manager Deanna Covino
Head Mechanist Vince Louch
Head Sound David Gallasch
Head Lighting David Green
Wardrobe Co-ordinator Kellie Jones - State Theatre Company
Wardrobe
Set construction & Scenic painting State Theatre Company Workshop
Sound Design Consultant Glenn Hill

From the Playwright

As we get older, we feel impelled to go back, to reassess our youthful certainties with the eyes of age. I came to adulthood during the political controversies of the seventies, a little after the men of Long Tan. Thus, writing this play has been something of a reckoning.

The play is about one battle, and the echoes after. The protagonist of the play is Delta Company, rather than the individual soldiers, though some of them take a fuller part in the story than others. During my research, I spoke to as many veterans of the battle as would talk to me (many wouldn't); their friends and families; other soldiers; and to a number of Vietnamese people, too. From their testimony, working with Chris Drummond from Brink, and with later creative partners, we crafted this play. I'd like to thank them all.

Some people think 'verbatim' material offers a guarantee of 'truth'. It does try to do that; but no created piece is a straightforward record of events. If the source material is to work as theatre, it needs to be massaged a little: dull parts elided, tenses changed for urgency, some parts of the story foregrounded, and some, equally important – in this case, the ammunition resupply, the reinforcements' dash of 3 Troop and Alpha Company 6RAR, not to mention the gunners at the Task Force Base – given less priority. The play stays with the battle in the rubber plantation itself, and not the efforts elsewhere.

But the bulk of the text comes from the interviews I did with soldiers and families. After much agonising, in order to keep the narrative moving, we decided not to attribute this verbatim material directly; and purists will note the occasional telescoping of strict chronology and some radio calls. Needs must, in order to get a whole battle on a stage!

Much of the philosophy in the play reflects the views of the soldiers; a little comes from me. I have inserted one semi-fictional, but possible, character to show some of the other side of the story in a way that the (frankly, still propagandist) North Vietnamese histories don't. Because I was telling the story of the Australians and New Zealanders and their North Vietnamese 'enemy', there is also less of the South Vietnamese story than justice would dictate.

This is a fierce topic; many will feel it fiercely. All I can say is this play tells the story of Delta Company, 6RAR on the 18th August, 1966, who experienced something most of us will never approach in our lifetimes, and who have had to live with that. It also tells of the fluidity of memory, and the difficulty of testimony. We have tried to tell it with compassion and integrity. I hope we have done them all justice.

Verity Laughton

Director's Notes: Chris Drummond

When I first spoke to Verity about the play, I was intimidated by the task, and unsure of my own emotional response to such complex and harsh material and the great responsibility of bringing *Long Tan* to the stage. The Battle of Long Tan was a conflagration of unimaginable intensity and far-reaching consequences. So many lives have been changed and shaped by the Vietnam War in such profound and often terrible ways – in many cases still impacting people to this day – that I felt overwhelmed and fearful of causing more hurt, through no more than simple ignorance. Yet over the course of two years in working with Verity, I have been moved by the vision she has had to tell of the story of Delta Company 6RAR, allowing it to stand as an exemplar of so many stories of men and women who have fought in the name of country and government.

Long Tan seeks to understand what is it that we ask of our soldiers? How to convey even some small aspect of the horror they experience as well as the horror experienced by those they have fought and the continuing horror that is visited on families and friends at home and on so many generations that follow. In approaching these questions, our production seeks to give shape and form to the visceral, intimate and profoundly physical nature of the event.

I am deeply grateful to the creative team - Luke Smiles, Wendy Todd and Chris Petridis - for their extraordinary passion and commitment to finding a form that serves Verity's text. Equally I am grateful to the wonderful cast who have given so much of themselves to honour the very real people they are portraying. And mostly I am grateful to the men and women who have entrusted us with their stories. Our hope is that in telling the story of Long Tan we might bring some new perspectives to the questions that in turn might provoke new conversations for the future.

Lighting Designer's Notes: Chris Petridis

Lighting a play dealing with war, set on a traverse stage and heard on headphones provided me with quite a task! Verity's knowledge of the Vietnam veterans, the period and her writing have given me so many ideas and thoughts to work with while trying to find a visual language for the piece.

Chris D and I have developed a language of film style camera shots and transitions which has inspired me to try and create an animated way of moving the light around the space, pulling the audience's focus from one location to another. The collaboration with Luke as the Sound Designer has helped us both to focus the audience's attention on one or more locations. We've focussed on synchronising the lighting and audio choreographically. The challenges of Wendy's set have included lighting the rostra without lighting the audience and creating smoke effects to come through the layers of rubber on the set. Watching and talking to the performers about the character choices they've been making has helped me develop a mood and colour for the show and has been important to the way that I light each scene.

Designer's Note: Wendy Todd

On reading the text, Chris and I discussed the possibilities that the work find itself a place which was not merely about rein-acting the location and events of the Battle. Rather, to create a space where we experience the lives of those young men under extreme circumstances.

Originally, I was drawn to the structure of the rubber plantation and the impact that this terrain had upon the Battle. There are accounts describing how the rubber trees were shredded by the gunfire. However, as we looked at the presence of trees on the set, it became clear it was too literal. Having a floor covered in shredded rubber offers an abstracted version of this. Also, a description of the mud under the torrential downpour, and the blood of those killed in battle has given rise to the treatment of the surface. The uniforms and guns of the soldiers are deliberately pared back to an 'essence of uniform' rather than the literal.

Why were Australians fighting in Vietnam?

“The Vietnam War is the commonly used name for the Second Indochina War, 1954–1973. Usually, it refers to the period when the United States and other members of the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) joined the forces of the Republic of South Vietnam in contesting communist forces comprised of South Vietnamese guerrillas and regular-force units, generally known as Viet Cong (VC), and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The U.S. had the largest foreign military presence and basically directed the war from 1965 to 1968. For this reason, in Vietnam today it is known as the American War. It was a direct result of the First Indochina War (1946–1954) between France (which claimed Vietnam as a colony), and the communist forces then known as Viet Minh. In 1973 a “third” Vietnam war began—a continuation, actually—between North and South Vietnam but without significant U.S. involvement. It ended with communist victory in April 1975.” (Source historynet.com)

Australia was an ally of the USA. Our support for South Vietnam was consistent with the Western World’s contemporary aim to stop the spread of communism in Europe and Asia. Many Australians did not, and still don’t, understand why we were involved at all. In 1966, however, there was widespread community support for Australian involvement.

Who were the North Vietnamese troops?

They comprised two main types of enemy force:

1. The People’s Army of North Vietnam then known as the North Vietnamese Army
2. The National Liberation Front or ‘The People’s Liberation Armed Forces’, known as the Viet Cong (VC). They were the military arm of the National Liberation Front (NLF). They were established by the North Vietnamese Communists towards the end of the 1960s the VC existed to “escalate the armed struggle in South Vietnam”.

There were 3 sections of the Viet Cong (VC):

- Regular soldiers
- Full-time Guerrillas (the majority of the VC – Guerrillas didn’t wear uniforms and dressed in the same clothing as the local peasants. They blended with the landscape when their missions were complete) and,
- Part time self-defence militia (primarily for village defence).



worldatlas.com

The Battle of Long Tan – A Brief Summary

- D Company (AUS) left their base at 11.15am to the sounds of Little Pattie, an Australian Entertainer performing for the troops.
- By 3.15pm they were patrolling in the Long Tan rubber plantation
- At 3.40pm one of the platoons, 11 platoon, made contact with what seemed to be a small group of Viet Cong. They were given permission for pursuit.
- At 4.08pm they were attacked by very heavy fire, and a number of 11 platoon, were killed.
- The Company Commander, Major Harry Smith sent first 10 platoon, and then 12 platoon to try to relieve 11 platoon.
 - A torrential rainstorm began soon after the battle began with the Viet Cong.
- 10 platoon returned to Company Headquarters, while 12 platoon remained in the scrub to provide a way back for 11 platoon should they attempt to withdraw.
- 11 platoon was down to 10 out of 28 able men and almost out of ammunition. They withdrew to 12 platoon's position and from there back to Company Headquarters.
- D Company called for ammunition resupplies. At 6.00pm RAAF helicopters dropped supplies to them. The rain made this very difficult.
- A final battle was fought before relief troops from A company 6RAR arrived in 3 Troop, Armoured Personnel Carriers, plus part of B Company 6RAR as night fell at 7.00pm
- The Australians were not aware of the size of the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong Army soldiers they were facing, which was estimated to be at least 2,000.
- The artillery resources at the Australian Task Force Base, directed from the battlefield by New Zealander, Captain Maurie Stanley, were the major element in saving D Company.
- 18 Australians were killed (including one, not from D Company, who died after the battle) and 24 wounded.
- The average age of the Australian soldiers who died was 21.
- The North Vietnamese who had been preparing for another assault, retreated into the plantation.
- The Australians counted 245 enemy dead. This didn't include others who had been moved from the battlefield.

Other useful information to know...

What is a Company?

A Company (Coy) consisted of approximately 125 men on paper

- It was commanded by a Major
- Second in command was a Captain (who usually stayed back at Base during patrols); as did company cooks, storemen, etc
- Contained 3 platoons + HQ of Major, CSM, 2 regimental signallers, mortar fire control sergeant, Forward Observer team of officer and 2 signallers (New Zealanders in D Coy's case); medics (two)

What Is a Platoon?

In Vietnam the platoon was 30 men, on paper.

- It was commanded by 2nd lieutenant
- It has a platoon sergeant
- It was divided into 3 sections
- Plus a platoon headquarters, comprising the commander, sergeant, signaller (radio) and one other

What is a Section?

The section is the smallest infantry combat unit in the Australian Army (other than Special Air Service (SAS) units). For Vietnam the manning of a Section on paper was 10 soldiers. In practice there would often be gaps.

- A Corporal was the 'section commander'.
 - Leads one fireteam of four men
- Lance Corporal was second in command
 - Leads the other team of four men
- Given the above, the section was also divided into 3 groups.
- The 'forward scout' and his 'second scout'. The weapon was the 5.56 M16.
- The main group of infantry soldiers
- The (machine) gunner carried the (7.62 M60) machine gun, and his Number Two

Source - https://www.army.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1846/f/mlw_2-1-2_the_rifle_platoon_1986_full_obsolete_0.pdf

Introductory Links...

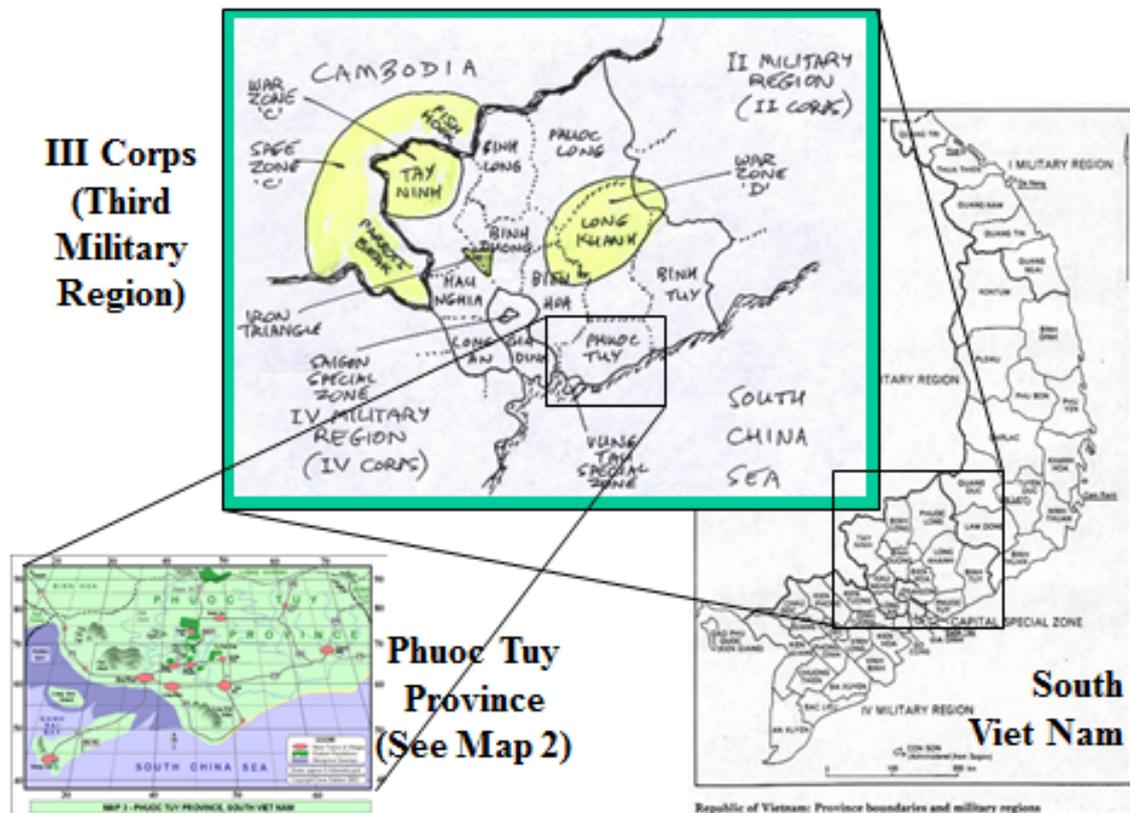
<http://adelaidereview.com.au/arts/performing-arts/long-tan-stories-brink/>

<http://scenestr.com.au/arts/long-tan-an-audio-visual-experience-of-war>

<http://anzaccentenary.sa.gov.au/event/long-tan-adelaide-festival-centre/>

<http://rslsa.org.au/state-theatre-company-long-tan-production/>

<http://www.stagewhispers.com.au/news/long-tan>



*Maps above compiled/created by David Sabben

Final points to note...

Long Tan is performed on a Traverse Stage:

- The audience sits on opposite sides to each other.
- The action takes place between the two.
- During the show think about why you think this choice was made?

Much of the dialogue in this show is 'semi verbatim' composed from interviews with the surviving Australian soldiers, Vietnamese contributors and family and friends.

For students writing a review:

- Whilst watching *Long Tan* take mental notes of the visual designs, technical elements, audience reaction and the performances of the actors
- As soon as you can, write your observations down
- Get ready to team this information with the contents our post-show Study Guide.
- Advice on writing a *Long Tan* review will be included in our next publication.

Prepare to pull the rip cord and land onto a battlefield in the middle of the Vietnam War as Brink Productions, in association with the Adelaide Festival Centre and State Theatre Company, recreate the overwhelming sonic barrage of the Battle of Long Tan.

scenstr.com.au

Enjoy the show!

The Brink Team

POST-SHOW EDUCATION RESOURCES

Compiled by Hannah McCarthy-Oliver



Brink Productions

in association with State Theatre Company and Adelaide Festival Centre
presents

LONG TAN

by Verity Laughton

Directed by Chris Drummond



the art of storytelling



Brink's *Long Tan*...

On a hot, rain-sodden afternoon in 1966, in the glutinous mud of a rubber plantation in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam, 105 Australian and 3 New Zealand soldiers clashed with approximately 2,500 North Vietnamese troops. In the ensuing battle, 18 Australians were killed and more than 245 North Vietnamese.

Long Tan brings together a cast of 12 South Australian actors in an immersive audio-theatre production that parachute audiences into the soldiers' experience – gunfire, mortar fire, pounding rain, insect clouds, screams and sudden silence – all orchestrated with sonic intensity to capture the pandemonium and entrapment under fire.

Adelaide's acclaimed Brink Productions (*When the Rain Stops Falling* and *The Aspirations of Daise Morrow*) have created this theatrical event from a semi-verbatim text by award-winning playwright Verity Laughton. Composed from interviews with the surviving Australian soldiers, Vietnamese contributors and family and friends of those who died, *Long Tan* isn't simply a work about a contentious time and iconic battle. Rather, it's a meditation on the fractures in collective memory, the consequences of extreme demands on human beings in military conflict, and the need for forgiveness, empathy and faith in our common humanity.



SCENARIO: LONG TAN

Scene 1: Set up. Who are Delta Company 6RAR?

Scene 2: Background to the Vietnam War itself.

Scene 3: Arrival of Delta Company in Vietnam.

Scene 4: The setting up of the 1st Australian Task Force Base. Which is not as secure as the 1ATF hierarchy assumes.

Scene 5: The Base is mortared...probably by North Vietnamese Main Force soldiers.

Scene 6: August 18th Delta Company starts its patrol into the rubber plantation at Long Tan.

Scene 7: 11 platoon makes contact with what it thinks is an isolated patrol of local guerrillas. We discover that soldiers' memories of the same event are different.

Scene 8: 20 years after. One of the soldiers of Delta Company meets a former enemy, and finds out her story.

Scene 9: The battle begins at Company Headquarters (CHQ). Further east, where 11 platoon is facing their North Vietnamese 'enemy', Private Douglas Salveron dies. And, 2nd Lieutenant Gordon Sharp dies.

Scene 10: The soldiers contribute their ideas of 'What is a soldier?'

Scene 11: The first attempt to relieve 11 platoon via a left hook from 10 platoon. It's unsuccessful. 10 platoon lose their radio.

Scene 12: More obstacles. An delayed response from back at the Base.

Scene 13: 10 platoon's radio is restored. They are ordered to return to CHQ. Major Smith sends out 12 platoon via a right hook to attempt to relieve 11.

Scene 14: The death of Mrs Xui's son.

Scene 15: The situation for 11 platoon worsens. 12 cannot relieve them. 11 also lose their radio. They will attempt to withdraw. Another moment of contradictory memory.

Scene 16: The last stand at CHQ. A series of assaults (narrated by the Vietnamese characters).

Scene 17: Epilogue. And after...



An Interview with Verity Laughton - Playwright

Why did you decide to write *Long Tan*?

A: I am part of the generation for whom the Vietnam War was the defining event of their youth – a bit like the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the World Trade Centre will be for many people who are still young now. It was a tumultuous period that was followed by a kind of collective deliberate forgetting. I think in many ways I simply wanted to unpick that. But I have also made a study of myth over the years and I do think *Long Tan* has the makings of a mythic event, one that will come to be part of the definition of Australia to Australians. So it was a chance to look at the complexity of that close up, too, while the main players were still alive.

What processes did you go through to bring it to life on the page?

It started with a lot of research. I had many hours of interview material. But I do also like to make a plan of the shape of a play before I start writing, even if I later abandon that (which I usually do). I had the notion of using the characters of Jack Kirby and Douglas Salveron as (sort of, though we don't find out till later) ghosts. And the lines that start the play, about the 'boots', the symbol of Delta Company, were there from the very beginning.

From there I wrote a first draft, cross-referencing the contributions of the various soldiers, large sections of which – about the rescue effort of the 3 Troop Armoured Personnel Carriers, and the ammunition drop by RAAF 9 Squadron helicopters – were subsequently cut, to keep the bulk of the military action in the rubber plantation.

I also sought out ways to include the experiences of their North Vietnamese 'enemy' too. My rule of thumb was that everything had to come from the soldiers, so the first Vietnamese section is taken (with his permission) from Terry Burstall's book, *A Soldier Returns*. The second one only turned up at the last of several workshops I had with Brink Productions, once Brink was on board, as a response to that original material.

Other sequences were written in response to requests from Chris Drummond, the director. Not all of these were used in the end, but it was a useful process to have gone through. (For example, Chris asked me to write dialogue showing the core actions at CHQ in order to clarify how central Harry Smith was to Delta Company's survival. Once we were rehearsing some of this was cut, and some changed, but it was all useful in making the final version.)

Once the full stories – quite big segments of the original text – of the Armoured Personnel Carriers and the ammo drop were cut, the shape of the piece has stayed the same, with a lot of fine-tuning of the text once we had access to actors and the luxury of working on the floor. The time shifts, the scene of philosophical questions ('What is a soldier?') and the Epilogue have stayed much the same, though with cuts of some quite good material in order to keep the action moving.

In creating “Long Tan” what were your main intentions?

A: I wanted what you want in any piece of drama – to convey what it felt like to be these particular people in this particular situation at this particular place and time. In this case I also wanted to hint at where that sits within (for what of a better word) eternity. We are very small creatures living in a vast universe. I wanted to show the extremity of the human condition, but within the context of a sense of ‘forever’ that is more-than-human.

What do you hope audiences experience and think about during and after watching *Long Tan*?

Whatever they need to, really. Each person will bring their own baggage, and fears, and experiences to any artistic event. Hopefully the event will illuminate some aspect of their lives: but you can’t really prescribe how another person’s subjectivity should respond. That’s the aim of propaganda in a way. I’m happy for people to see the piece, and make up their own minds.

What challenges did you face writing this show?

A: The size and complexity of it; the taking responsibility for using material from living people’s lives and testimony; the obligation not to do harm in so doing. And facing my own fears, too. There were many times when I was daunted by what I might uncover, and how I might have to proceed. I was very exercised by the opposing accounts of the same action that turned up and how strongly some of the soldiers felt about that, and about each other, for good or ill. In the end, I decided that my task might be to depict the fact that there *were* opposing accounts and not to judge them as anything other than that (while secretly wondering where the ‘real truth’ lay!). I had a lot of input from some really clever, and kind people. It all helped.

What have you learnt from this experience?

A: I have learnt a lot about the technical demands of making work for headphone theatre, though not as much, I’m sure, as those other members of the creative team who were more at the coalface of that process! I’ve learnt quite a lot about dealing with people in the context of asking difficult questions and listening to difficult answers. And I’ve learnt quite a lot, ironically, about the standout quality invoked by Delta Company, that is, discipline. You can do anything if you are really disciplined about how you go about training yourself for a task.



An Interview with Chris Drummond - Director

What were your intentions in creating *Long Tan*?

I wanted to draw the audience into the most intimate and up-close experience of the battle that we could. I hoped they would feel a sense of being isolated and trapped. It is a visceral, confronting experience with moments of release... I wanted to startle audience members into re-approaching the subject of war with a renewed objectivity... We've all seen it on the news, but often don't engage with the obvious fact that war is real. We endeavored to cut through all the clichés and startle the audience into the reality of it all. I hope the experience is unexpected and that it awakens compassion and empathy.

To demonstrate how leaders throughout history put the weight of the political machine on the shoulders of the innocent. The soldiers were, and still often are, so young.

I hope *Long Tan* provokes conversation and reflection... as it has resonance for today... And audiences leave the theatre appreciating their freedom and the sacrifice made by others to allow us to live in our current, comfortable lives.

In briefing your creative and technical team/designers, what key requests did you make?

The sound design was the way to make this play work. It was the predominant technical element/tool... We would use headphones and loud speakers and create a cinematic reality/rendering, which was complex.

The choice to remove the need to have a set was deliberate. Setting the show in a

traverse set up meant there is no need for set – the audience would primarily be watching bodies on stage... I wanted to make it an intimate and physical experience... Sitting opposite the other half of the audience, was like looking into a mirror... they could see themselves.

What process did you go through to bring *Long Tan* to life?

Our associate producer met with Verity one day, and discovered she had written this show... and it was available for production. We initiated a large number of script workshops over two years. A number of actors stayed throughout the entire process... But up to 20-25 actors helped out. As the script was verbatim it required a lot of editing. We spent a large amount of time speaking with Vietnam Veterans and learnt about their experiences. Spending time with Dave Sabben was particularly useful. We went to the RSL and handled hand guns and rifles and learnt hand signals. We also looked into what we could get away with not saying... Becoming confident to remove certain scaffolding... we were constantly moving the language and words around... Rehearsals were unique, sometimes it felt like directing a film. We picked the brains of the team from the Adelaide Festival show, *The Encounter*. This was useful as it helped to guide some of our technical decisions. For example, what type of headphones to use. Towards the end of the process we put all of the theatrical elements together and getting the sound right was particularly challenging.

What were some of the main requests you had of your actors?

Read and research. Understand the forces at play on the day of the battle. Be flexible. Play the truth of your character/the moment. Feel empathy.

What challenges did you face directing “*Long Tan*”?

Putting all the elements together especially the technical requirements and ever changing script structure. A show with headphones is still a relatively new form of theatre. At times we felt dwarfed by the challenge of making the tech work. It was all or nothing. It was actually terrifying as the script was built to include sound... in the end we gave over to it and resigned ourselves to it would be what it would be.

What do you think are the key moments in “*Long Tan*”?

- The show working backwards.
- The moment we take the headphones off.
- The final hour of the battle - where the audience hears a huge wall of sound and feels aurally fatigued.
- Delta Company’s moment of arrival – Immediate camaraderie – some found the beauty, some were not so sure - “It smells like a sock”.
- First contact – under gunfire.
- The moment they are encircled – big moment with sound... before nightfall.

How would you describe this production?

- Verbatim Theatre. An audio experience. Sensory. An art installation including sound. Narrative. Aesthetic clarity.
- The protagonist was Delta Company with moments of individuality.
- It shows - “blokey comradeship” something not often seen on the stage.

What are your favorite quotes from “Long Tan”?

- “There’s no memorials for the mothers and the wives and children...”
- “Why you come to my country?”
- “We don’t sleep in August...”
- Listing off Delta Company’s names and ages e.g. “Age – 21... Age 20” etc” ...

What lessons can we learn from the Battle of Long Tan?

- Why don’t we learn the lessons of history?
- We can only continue to talk about it – and be vigilant in keeping the conversations going.

An Interview with Two of the Cast Members...



Patrick Graham

What role(s) did you play in *Long Tan*?

Patrick Jack Kirby and a Delta Company Soldier (Ensemble Role)

Who is Jack Kirby?

- Company Sergeant Major. An NCO. Career Soldier.
- Right hand man to Harry.
- Died 6 months after Long Tan in friendly fire.
- According to Dave Sabben – Harry was the bad cop and Jack was good cop.
- Jack was jolly and gruff – had a good sense of humour. He did tell “knock knock” jokes. He sourced them from monthly publications full of them.
- He enabled the soldiers to relax a bit more. He had seen war before.
- During the battle none of Delta Company could understand why he didn’t get shot. He was running around helping them.
- Jack didn’t drink. He promised his mum as her only stipulation for him joining the armed forces was that he was not allowed to drink.
- He was religious.
- In the show he is often seen as a narrator and reminiscent of a ghostly figure.

What process did you go through to bring your character to life?

Research... I read as much as I could. Harry’s recounts were particularly useful and listening to what the Vietnam Veterans had to say. I endeavored to plot Jack’s character traits with Verity... In other ways it was a leap of faith as there were no recordings of him and his voice. All I really could do was interpret key information. The cast trained every morning. Combat boots assisted greatly in dictating my physical portrayal of Jack – they ground you and influence how you move. Jack was a big guy – strong – his confidence and strength comes through in the records.

What was your character's motivation?

The driving force was – looking after the guys. Harry was the leader of the company, but in a way, it really was Jack. He was hands on and the bridge between the officers and the diggers.

What were some of the challenges you faced in bringing your role to life?

Working with a text that's reflective... It is a different experience finding a character in this format. (Information/exposition)

What will you take away from this experience?

- An increased awareness and knowledge of the Vietnam War.
- It was a controversial war and it is great to have a forum like this to make people think about it again.
- The diggers were inspiring and tough.
- We received high praise from a digger in the audience – *Long Tan* is... "Authentic and powerful"

What are two of your favorite quotes from Jack?

- "If you don't know em,... shoot em son"
- "I've told my family I'm not going to get killed by the enemy and I'm bloody well not" (And he didn't.)

Guy O'Grady

What roles did you play in *Long Tan*?

- **Neil Rankin** – A large figure in the play...he was a Non Commissioned Officer. His proudest achievement was training 11 platoon and what they achieved.
- **Lieutenant Adrian Roberts** – An intelligent man, bright, reflective. He speaks retrospectively. Sharper than some of the others... He was taller and larger than I. Robert's had a strong personality and wore a black beret. He stayed in the army and left as a Colonel. He was the commander of the troop.
- **Soldier G.O.G** - Actually Guy's initials... A soldier's voice/Chorus.
- **Corporal Graham Smith** – Regular Soldier. Harry Smith's Signaler – Never fired a shot.
- **Major Dick Hannigan** – In response to hearing the Delta Company was under attack, "What can we do if it's true?"... Philosophical – circumspect... Information about him can be heard in Lieutenant Harris' monologue.

What processes did you go through to bring your characters to life?

Research... but remained open to the fact that history records can be subjective... Wanted to avoid "mimicking" or doing impressions of these characters – We brought our own interpretation to our roles and endeavored to always honour the men involved. I looked at the "Given Circumstances" and deeply into the background of the battle including things like the climate. Pictures were also very useful...

We trained every morning for half hour before rehearsals – drills, strong physical element to the preparation – I also prepared outside the rehearsal room. In showing our characters' physicality we really focused on showing their weight as they moved

through the space. Vocally I listened to recordings to people I was playing... I did note a Queensland twang with some... Physically my characters were quite similar but with props/costumes they visually showed who the characters were.

The soldiers' relationships with each other were unwavering.

During preshow preparations, we asked the Vietnam Veterans what the regular army thought of the conscripts. At first they were not sure if they could trust them? (60% of the Australians in Vietnam were there because of conscription) They were hesitant but when they got out on the battle field, the difference wasn't seen. Delta Company were very well trained. They were tight, disciplined had each other's back.. Dave Sabben said – "Private soldiers had the time to think about things... Officers were constantly busy and solving problems... As a digger – their arc of responsibility was if you see something report it and shoot."

What are your characters' motivation?

To Survive.

Information from Dave Sabben – "Contract you enter as a soldier – kill rather than being killed – the country won't die for you but you won't die for your country..."

Vulnerable. Listening to primal instincts. War can bring out a person's true character.

The diggers also told me that during a battle adrenalin kicked in and the experience was exhilarating and a rush... It was after this, and in having time to process what had happened, that the enormity and danger of it all hit.

What were some of the challenges you faced in bringing your roles to life?

Learning lines, including a large amount of numbers, army jargon and radio calls. It was a new work (so the script was fluid for much of the process) and involved intensive technical conditions. I relished the whole experience.

What have you learnt from being involved in *Long Tan* and from your characters?

Roberts was asked – "What is a soldier?" his answer – "A lot of it is luck – it's out of people's control"... I appreciate this sentiment. It is reflective and honest.

As a new graduate coming out of drama school... I definitely learnt more about the craft of acting, the rehearsal process and about the business of "making theatre"... I learnt a lot from observing the older, more experienced actors. I also learnt how to be efficient with asking the right questions as it was a big cast... no time to waste.

In bringing this show to life, I feel the experience of the cast and creatives somewhat mirrored the experience of the diggers... obviously not involving the casualties or scarring effects of war, but more that we went through and were successful in taking on challenges together.

What is one of your favorite quotes from the show...

Roberts – "This is where the buffalo boys used to take the buffalos out to graze. It's quite clear they've been doing this for about 2000 years... suddenly we are shelling them every time they appear. I still see these people in my mind"....

An Interview with Wendy Todd - Designer



Please describe the set?

- A raked rostrum which is 15 meters long and 3.5 meters wide.
- It is 600mm off the floor at one end, with 2 steps leading onto it.
- It is 900mm off the floor at the opposite end with 3 steps leading onto it.
- There is an overhang on each side of 30cm so it appears to be floating.
- The surface is covered with shredded rubber to a thickness of about 30mm.
- The floor is painted red.

Please describe the costumes?

- 11 x army green uniforms consisting of Long sleeve button up shirt with epaulettes, green trousers with hip, side and leg pockets, army green khaki socks, black lace up boots, mid-calf height.
- 1 x Vietnamese female Villager consisting of Pale blue button up long sleeve blouse, no cuffs, madrid collar and loose pale beige pants and black thongs.
- 1 x Vietnamese Interpreter consisting of Dark blue pants, White collared button up shirt, no cuffs and black thongs.
- 1 x Viet Cong soldier consisting of Black pants, Black button up shirt with mandarin collar, no cuffs, leather belt around waist and over shoulder.

What were your inspirations for these designs? (what other images did you reference to inspire your design?)

The idea is the uniforms are 'generic' of the time, 1966.. No rank was delineated. In

essence, the figure of an Australian soldier without detail. The Vietnamese characters colour palette was deliberately lighter, the sense of ‘life’ in Vietnam and a contrast against the dullness of the green. I searched through many, many photos of the era to ensure there was an authenticity to the palette and the styles.

What are some of the props you had to source or create for this show? Why did you choose these?

Props were deliberately kept to a minimum. The guns specifically were ‘representative’ of a gun, the silhouette rather than detail. The shape of the guns is authentic but they are without the barrel of the gun. This meant the audience would see and acknowledge them without the guns being the focus. I had many other prop ideas, such as a Vietnamese peasant carrying bundles of crops on a stick across their shoulders but these were eliminated as it became clear that they were trimmings unnecessary to moving the story forward.

What process did you go through to bring the set, costumes and props to the stage?

A scale model of the set was made and scale drawings for the State Theatre workshop to build the set. Costume drawings to show the State Theatre Wardrobe Dept. with a detailed list of each item. Props were discussed at Production Meetings as they usually arise out of the rehearsal process.

What do you hope to “visually communicate” to your audience with your designs?

The set is an only an aid to the story-telling. It should never dominate or over-ride the story. In the script, we see the story set in several locations, though the battle is in the rubber plantation itself. By paring back the elements, we eliminate having scene changes as the story jumps too many times and is not always linear. It also allows the audience imaginations to flourish. We knew the soundscape could locate us easily and quickly and this was an important factor. The rake of the stage is important in the understanding of the battle and provide a more theatrical element too. The use of shredded rubber on the set, gave me an abstracted version of the rubber plantation and also helped with the many descriptions in the script and research of the conditions of the location. The use of smoke coming up through the rubber was again a solution to visually describing these conditions,

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

One of the outstanding things about the conditions of the battle was the monsoonal rains they endured. However, the use of Radio microphones and the transmitter each actor wears, meant that the use of actual water was almost completely unviable. Conveying them being completely drenched at the end of the battle had to be found another way. Again, sound and the smoke effects did this.



An Interview with Luke Smiles – Sound Designer

How is your sound design for Long Tan different to others you have created?

It is different because of the choice of presentation. We used loud speakers as well as headphones.

What headphones offer is - they bring the audience a sense of being incredibly close to the actor. They hear the vocal quality clearly, as if the characters are whispering in their ear... moments like that would be missed if not using headphones.

The type of headphones we used was important – they couldn't be noise cancelling, they were – “open face” to enable the audience to hear the direct speech as well as the sounds emanating from the loud speakers.

What processes did you go through to create it?

The process came in two parts... Technical and Creative

Technical - Lots of “leg work”. We needed to establish what we were aiming for and what we would be working with. We established the “tools” we required and that then informed my creative designs. It was imperative to know how it would all work before launching into anything else. How would the playback system work? We were “inventing the wheel” and needed to establish how we could distribute sound to 300 headphones?

Creative – The director and I spent 2 days in December, experimenting in a studio. We decided to play the majority of the warfare sounds through the loud speakers... We decided that the headphones would assist in putting an audience in the middle of the battle. The sound design is a bit like a film. Gun shots whizzing past your heard in the headphones – where the bigger explosions came from the loud speakers...

What challenges did you face?

Working under time constraints. The choice to use headphones was unfamiliar territory. We had to deliver on the sound... there were no contingency plans. The sound had to happen otherwise the show wouldn't happen.

What do you hope the audience experiences whilst listening to your sound design?

I really hope they stop thinking about what they are hearing and the technicality of how they are hearing it. We are separating audiences into individuals, shrouding them from the rest of the audience. I also hope that they are quickly drawn and immersed in the show. I want them to be caught up in the story – swept along but not distracted by the sound. I want the sound design to enhance their experience and connection with the action unfolding on stage.

My aim was to make the audience feel like they were a part of the experience.

Sound immediately provides you with the emotion and location of a scene...

My design is reminiscent of a film sound track. It feels like a live film for the entire time the headphones are worn.

I was pleased to hear a compliment about the show from one of the Vietnam Veterans in the audience who said... “Multiple times I felt the chills and it took me back there”.

Another gave the feedback that it was “Powerful and authentic”.

Did you take inspiration for your sound design from elsewhere?

I was influenced by the art form of film. Brink decided to make sound a huge part of the storytelling. The main challenge was to choose sound that was authentic to the real experience. For example the sounds of weapons used... AK47s and SLRs.

I knew that members of the audience, like the Veterans knew what it sounded like. I wanted to honour that.

Sound evokes emotion... I worked on sweetening the mixing and editing it to create the emotion we needed. We straddled the reality and drama and manipulated that all that the way through.

All technical choices were meticulously made by the designers and director. Every element, choice of look and feeling, has been crafted to enhance the audience’s experience... to influence and guide them. Much thought goes into assisting the audience to follow the story...

How would you describe the sound design you have created and do you have any final thoughts?

It’s intimate point of view of a massive battle.

We are putting an audience in and amongst the soldiers. The battle was huge... 108 up against 2,000+.

The story is profound. And based on real life experiences...

I find the moment when the names and ages as being read out to be the most

powerful... The average age being 21 years old

This is real... it did happen.... And the experience of sending young men into battle is still occurring today.



An interview with Chris Petridis – Lighting Designer



What process did you follow to bring your designs to life?

It was a collaborative exercise. I worked with the director and other designers to arrive at what we wanted the space to look like. We settled on the idea of a thin, narrow stage, set in the traverse. This gave me a clear idea of what I could and couldn't do. It led to a more traditional overhead design with the use of side lighting for effect. Setting a show in the traverse means there is a risk of glare in the audience's eyes. It was essential to minimize this in this show. I think we only "glared" the 1st row. Because lighting designs can only be seen in reality and tweaked during bump in and in tech rehearsals, I always map out my designs in 3D. (See images included in this document) I need to draw it out to see where the beams would land. It was essential to do this for this show.

Describe your design?

Wash lighting was used overhead.

Underneath the balcony, side lighting chiseled onto the performers. This idea came quickly in the process.

Artistically, decisions were made around colour and movement.

I focused on the "animation of the light" and concentrated on the way lighting leads the focus from scene to scene.

Lighting contributes to the story telling. It assists in setting the location and time. It is not a priority but is referenced in this show. The sound and script mostly did this.

The battle occurred in the daytime but in my design the lighting mostly hones in on individuals during the battle and captures the emotional level of the soldiers rather than emulating reality. The lighting choices evoke feelings and assist in building intensity.

In the plantation the rubber trees would have cast shadows and we emulated this with gobos.

The lighting was layered. It started simply then built to a climax, mirroring the narrative.

For example, at the beginning of the show, during the monologue, down light pin spots were used.

The bullets were a highlight of the design. Spare space above the actors – offered some weight to the visual presence of the bullets. These were achieved with moving lights, which can project a narrow beam and are really bright.

My main focus was on enhancing the storytelling and the aesthetic. Technical constraints were brought about by the physics of the space. Choosing the right quality of light was important to evoke the correct feeling and mood.

What types of lights did you use for “Long Tan”?

Moving lights, gobos, side lights, colour changing lights. All of these added to the dynamics in the space. Color was frequently used. For example – on the bugler – red was shone on his face with an open white from behind. During the narration scenes, grayish, LEDs were used which depicts a less realistic world.

Incandescent /LED’s lead to a feeling of the supernatural – whereas fresnels and standard lighting gives a feeling of warmth. HID Moving lights – are powerful and have high intensity discharge...

Where did the inspiration come from for each key design choice?

I mostly looked to the script for inspiration.

The line “about a million little lights” – inspired the depiction of bullets.

There was a line about the smoke/red mist/hazy mist. We mirrored this.

The reference to flying in on a plane... The sound of a plane was heard and the lights track from one edge of the stage to the other indicating movement. The lights guide the audience, informing them on where to focus.

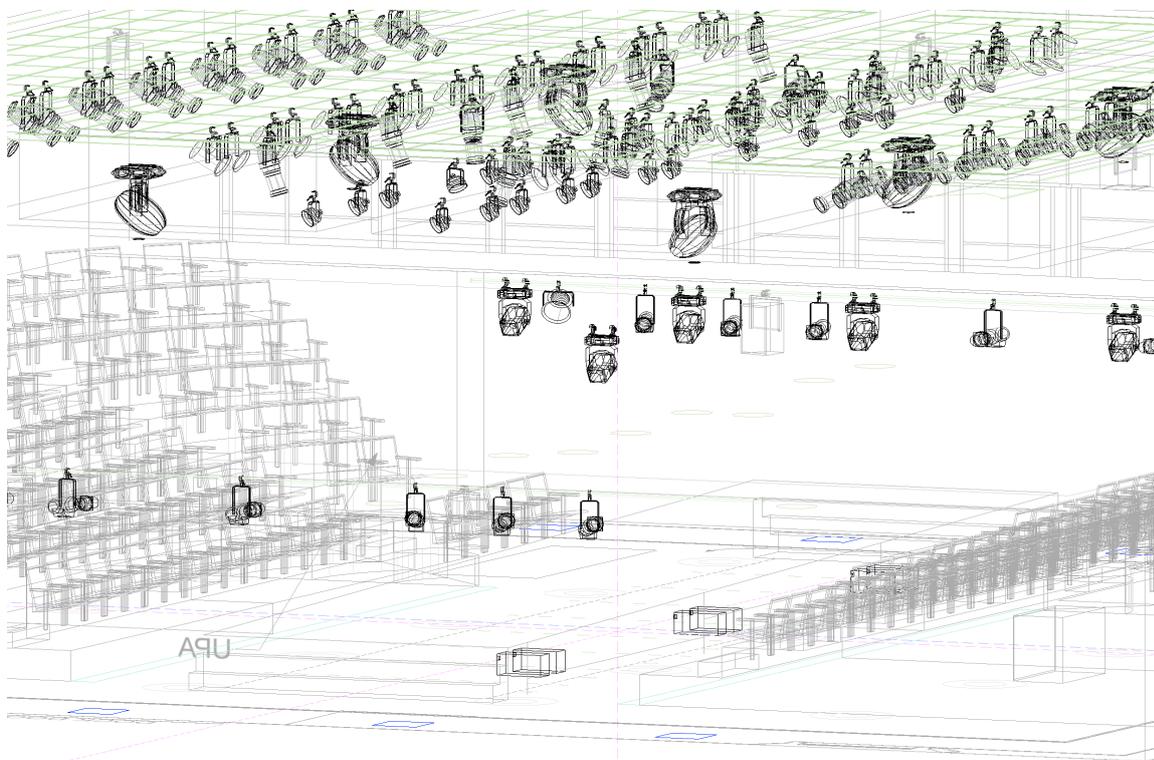
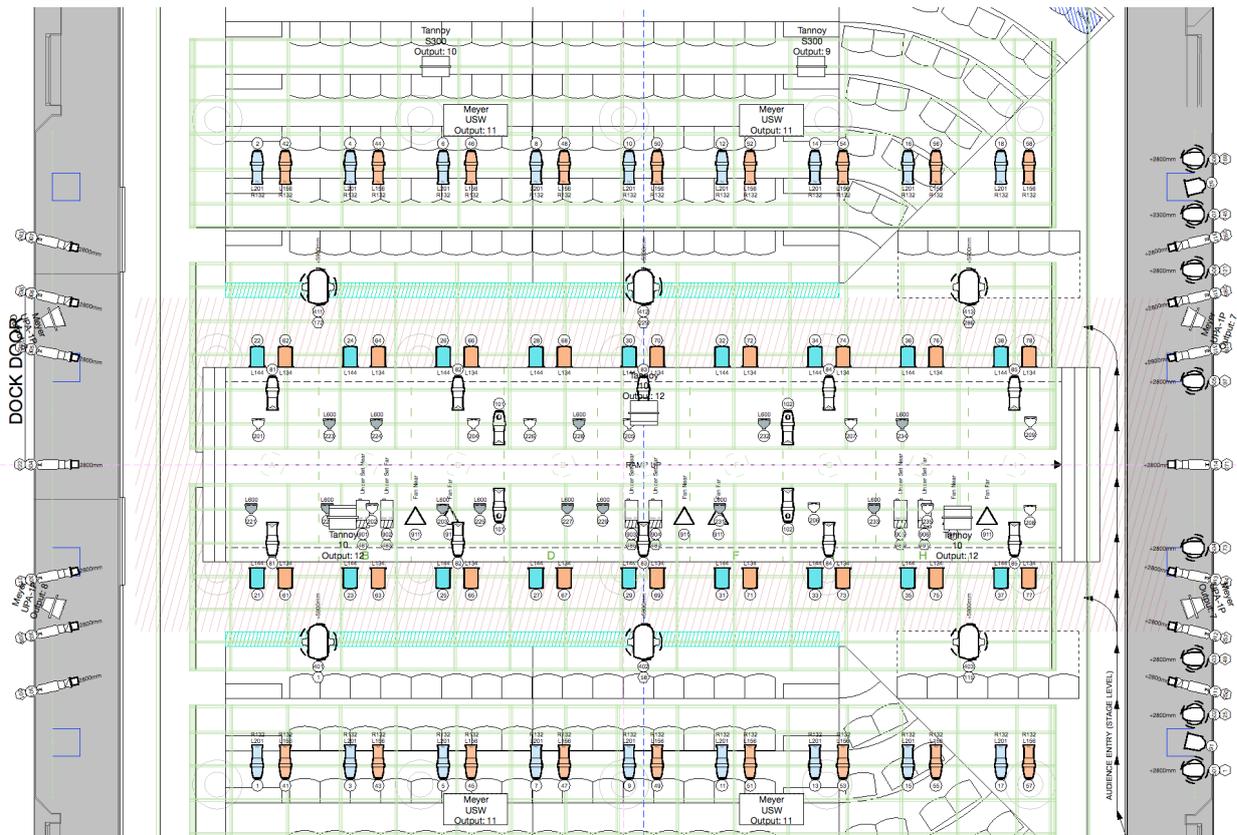
The stage was broken up into 9 sections for lighting focusing purposes.

I wanted the lighting to convey a sense of energy, helping the momentum of things. It adds to the energy of the show. It builds on and mirrors the action unfolding on stage.

By the end I hope the audience members feel exhausted. The strobing used/bullets etc are constant and oppressive – it’s not a fun show... I also hope they connect with the gravity of what the men went through. At the end (‘Ironsides!’) a huge light blinds the audience and soldiers on stage... It is blinding relief.



Lighting Plot and Mapping



LONG TAN – THEMES

Ripple Effect – both large and small – the series of events in the lives of individual humans that lead to particular outcomes and the same process in the wider community - "A bomb drops" – the after effects of this... for individuals, social and politically. Also the effect in time on people who have lived through an extreme experience and how that experience – in this case, war – continues to affect their lives and the lives of those connected with them.

Love – the great predominant human need and mainstay and therefore, the importance of community, those who are 'zipped in our hearts'.

Discipline – it was the sheer discipline enforced by Harry Smith that – apart from the artillery – made the difference to Delta Company's survival.

Conflict and Warfare. if, as seems likely, aggression is part of our biological make-up where do soldiers fit in a society? What are we asking of them?

Is there an antidote to war? Although it is a muted suggestion, the play implies it might be in a widening of our sense of community, symbolized by Mrs Xui and Douglas Salveron meeting each other halfway at the end of the play.

Abuse of Innocence – the weight on the responsibility put on the shoulders of youth, who become fodder for the political machine.

Mateship – the Australian expression of the intensity of the experience of war, friendship and connection is a powerful force.

Survival – the power of the physical instinct under pressure and the related later emotional and physical struggle for survival of the individual psyche when that becomes threatened post the original trauma.

Memory – subjective perception is different for all people. When severe/traumatic events occur many people disassociate or exist as if in a dream state. How does this affect memory? *Long Tan* is primarily made up of memories.

The Impact of War - on the individual and on others.

Sadness and grief – the emotional scarring that impacts individuals for the rest of their lives.

LONG TAN – SYMBOLS

The Circle – of community, time, the enclosing arms.

Phoenix - resurrection – that something does arise even out of destruction.

Rain is both a symbol of unstoppable nature and a physical presence.

Mud – the earth from where we come and to which we return

Boots – essential item – what soldiers get around in.

Hercules in the Stars – the idealism and innocence of youth and masculinity, connection to myth

'Zipped in my heart' – the ties of love between individuals

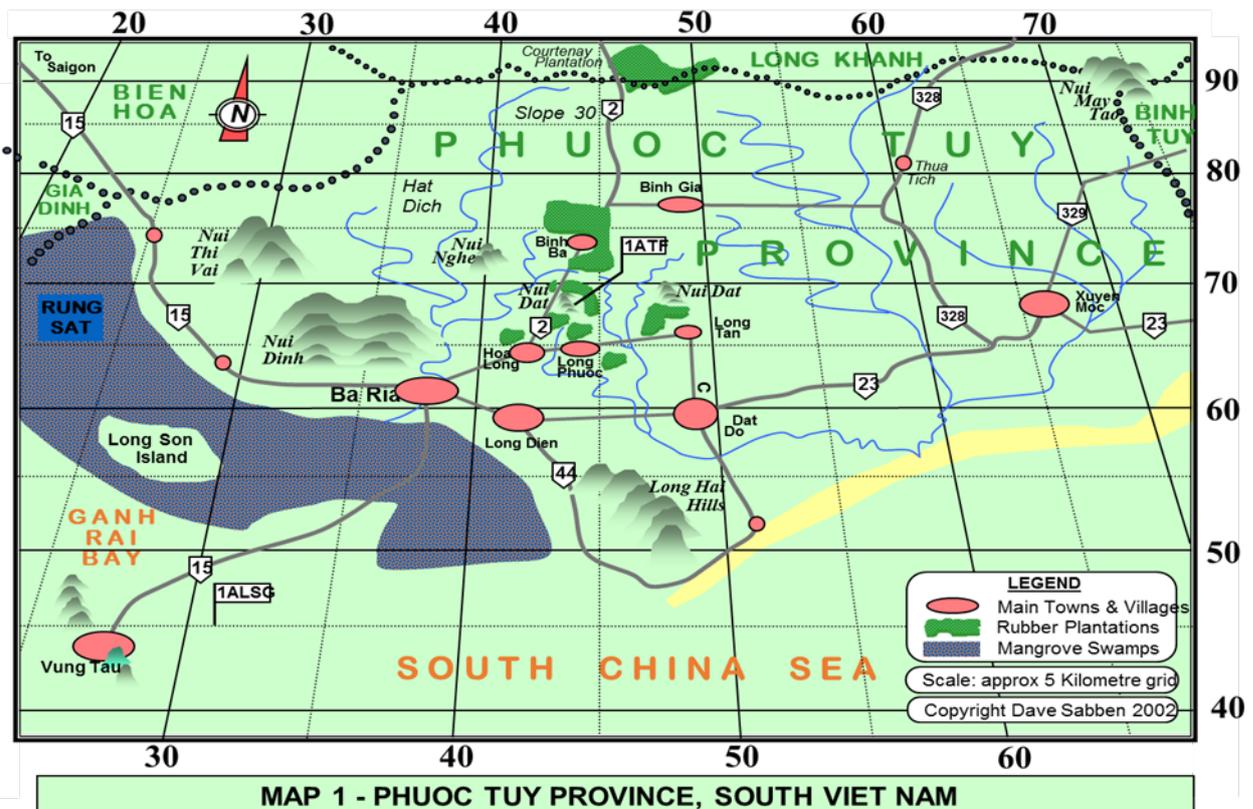


Vietnam War – Summary

The Vietnam War was a long, costly armed conflict that pitted the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong, against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The war began in 1954 (though conflict in the region stretched back to the mid-1940s), after the rise to power of Ho Chi Minh and his communist Viet Minh party in North Vietnam, and continued against the backdrop of an intense Cold War between two global superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. More than 3 million people (including 58,000 Americans) were killed in the Vietnam War; more than half were Vietnamese civilians. By 1969, at the peak of U.S. involvement in the war, more than 500,000 U.S. military personnel were involved in the Vietnam conflict. Growing opposition to the war in the United States led to bitter divisions among Americans, both before and after President Richard Nixon ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. In 1975, communist forces seized control of Saigon, ending the Vietnam War, and the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the following year.

Source – history.com - <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>

(Film included in link)



Map sourced and created by David Sabben

Glossary of Terms – Australia’s Vietnam War

<https://vietnam.unsw.adfa.edu.au/glossary/>

A Chronology of Key Events from 1957-1973

VIETNAM WAR

The United States and its allies, and South Vietnam failed to stop communist-led unification

The War, known as "American War" in Vietnam, claimed millions of lives 1955-1975

1957 - Beginning of Communist insurgency in the South.

1959 - Weapons and men from North Vietnam begin infiltrating the South.

1960 - American aid to Diem increased.

1962 – The number of US military advisors in South Vietnam rises to 12,000.

1963 – The Viet Cong, the communist guerrillas operating in South Vietnam, defeat units of the ARVN, the South Vietnamese Army.

President Diem is overthrown and then killed in a US-backed military coup.

The US enters the war

1964 - Gulf of Tonkin incident: the US says North Vietnamese patrol boats fired on two US Navy destroyers. US Congress approves Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorising military action in the region.

1965 - 200,000 American combat troops arrive in South Vietnam.

1966 - US troop numbers in Vietnam rise to 400,000, then to 500,000 the following year.

1968 - Tet Offensive - a combined assault by Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army on US positions - begins. More than 500 civilians die in the US massacre at My Lai. Thousands **more** are killed by communist forces during their occupation of the city of Hue.

1969 - Ho Chi Minh dies. President Nixon begins to reduce US ground troops in Vietnam as domestic public opposition to the war grows.

1970 - Nixon's national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, and Le Duc Tho, for the Hanoi government, start talks in Paris.

1973 - Ceasefire agreement in Paris, US troop pull-out completed by March.

Information sourced from the bbc.com – World News

Australian Casualties of War statistics...

<i>Service</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>Wounded/injured/ill</i>	<i>Total</i>
Army	478	3,025	3,505
RAN	8	48	56
RAAF	14	56	70
TOTAL	500	3,129	3,629

Source - <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/vietnam/statistics/>

The Battle of Long Tan

The battle of Long Tan occurred on the afternoon of 18 August 1966, just two months after the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) established its base at Nui Dat in the heart of Phuoc Tuy province, South Vietnam.

While searching a rubber plantation near Long Tan for communist forces who had attacked the base with mortar and rocket fire in the early hours of 17 August, D Company, 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR) encountered a combined force of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars and local and provincial forces of the National Liberation Front (NLF). D Company numbered 108 men (105 Australians and 3 New Zealanders of the artillery forward observation party of 161 Field Battery RNZA).

The combined enemy force, estimated at over 2,000 soldiers, comprised the local Viet Cong D445 Battalion (reinforced with North Vietnamese soldiers) and elements of the **Main Force** 275 Viet Cong Regiment. It was later learnt that 274 VC Regiment also occupied an ambush position on Route 2, north of Binh Ba.

Under intense enemy fire, the separated platoons of D Company fought off enemy attacks and then regrouped with the company headquarters. They continued to withstand repeated enemy attacks, supported by accurate artillery fire from the base at Nui Dat. As D Company's position became increasingly desperate, two RAAF helicopters succeeded in dropping ammunition to the men despite the heavy monsoonal downpour which persisted throughout the battle.

After three hours of continuous fighting, as it seemed that enemy forces may be gathering for a final assault, the besieged company was reinforced with the arrival of A Company, 6RAR mounted in armoured personnel carriers of 1 APC Squadron. On the following day, 245 enemy bodies were counted on the battlefield although the enemy is believed to have retrieved many more dead and wounded during the night. Australian losses were 17 dead from D Company, and 25 wounded, one of whom died later.

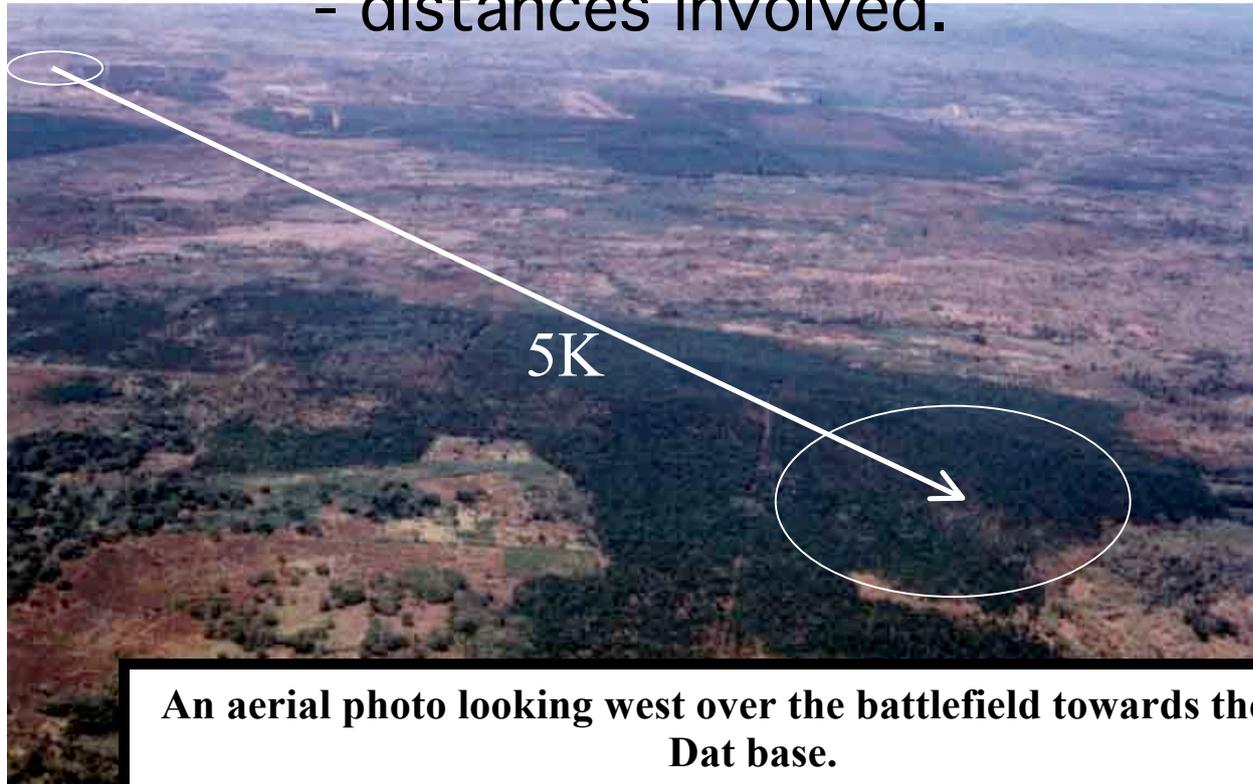
The decisive victory at Long Tan was achieved against odds of over ten to one but left one-third of the Australian company killed or wounded. Sixteen Commonwealth decorations were awarded to individual soldiers for their actions during the battle and D Company 6RAR was awarded a US Presidential Unit Citation. In March 2008, an independent review panel recommended that Commonwealth awards to three soldiers should be upgraded by the award of modern Australian decorations.

Although challenged at the time and since in communist Vietnamese accounts the victory effectively imposed the Australian's dominance in Phuoc Tuy province for the duration of their

presence there. During Australia's ten-year-long involvement in Vietnam, there were bigger and more sustained battles, involving larger Australian formations. But few were so intense and dramatic. It was also the army's most costly single engagement in Vietnam. The bravery, tenacity and sacrifice of Australian and New Zealand soldiers at Long Tan became legendary. That single engagement on just one afternoon in August 1966 has come to symbolize Australia's ten-year-long involvement in our nation's longest war. Since 1987, when Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared 18 August "Vietnam Veterans Day" the anniversary has commemorated all Australians who took part in the conflict.

Ashley Ekins
Head, Military History Section
Australian War Memorial
24 July 2016

The Australian base and the battlefield - distances involved.



An aerial photo looking west over the battlefield towards the Nui Dat base.

The large oval is the battlefield – the small oval is where the artillery was.

Image acquired from and sourced by David Sabben

Public Opinion – The Vietnam War

“The Vietnam War was the most divisive war in which Australian men and women were involved. The events that surround it are complex. Historians and other social commentators do not always agree on the nature of that war and the positions taken by supporters and opponents of the various issues that impacted on the war itself - the validity of Australia’s involvement; the issue of conscription especially for overseas service; the use of chemical warfare (e.g. napalm and Agent Orange). The war was as complex as the changing society within which debate about the war was conducted.”
Shrine of Remembrance Education Program... shrine.org.au

splash ABC – Public Reactions to sending troops to the Vietnam War – Video Clip

Source - <http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/153694/public-reactions-to-sending-troops-to-vietnam-war>

“Do you think Australian governments have always acted wisely when deciding to send young Australians to wars? Does the public usually know enough to support such decisions? On 29 April 1965, Australia's prime minister, Robert Menzies, announced the decision to send Australian troops to fight in Vietnam. In this clip, filmed shortly after Menzies' announcement, discover what the 'man and woman in the street' thought about this.”

In the early 70s, people became more aware of the death toll and carnage occurring in Vietnam. As the casualties rose in number, the anti-Vietnam War movement went from a small number to millions around the world.



Source – <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/50th-birthday/turning-up-the-heat/story-fnlk0fie-1226892549167>

ROLL OF HONOUR - BATTLE OF LONG TAN

Australian casualties amounted to 18 dead (17 KIA, 1 DOW) and 24 wounded.

The 18 dead comprised 11 National Servicemen and 7 Regular Army soldiers. The average age of the soldiers who died was 21 years.

Number	Rank	Name	Unit	ARA/NA	Age	Date of death
2781465	2 Lt	G.C. Sharp	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
2781847	L/Cpl	J. Jewry	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
1730993	Pte	A.F. McCormack	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
1730994	Pte	D.J. McCormack	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
3787607	Pte	C.J. Whiston	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
1731040	Pte	D.J. Salveron	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
38712	Pte	D.J. Thomas	6RAR	ARA	21	18 Aug 1966
3411673	Pte	E.F. Grant	6RAR	ARA	20	18 Aug 1966
1200265	Pte	F.B. Topp	6RAR	ARA	19	18 Aug 1966
1730929	Pte	G.A. Drabble	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
43893	Pte	J.M. Houston	6RAR	ARA	22	18 Aug 1966
1730941	Pte	K.H. Gant	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
216559	Pte	M.R. Wales	6RAR	ARA	22	18 Aug 1966
2781704	Pte	P.A. Large	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
55120	Pte	R.A. Aldersea	6RAR	ARA	20	18 Aug 1966
1730947	Pte	V.R. Grice	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
1731013	Pte	W.D. Mitchell	6RAR	NS	21	18 Aug 1966
54570	T/Cpl	P.E. Clements	1 APC Sqn	ARA	21	27 Aug 1966 (DOW 9 days after battle)

Three soldiers were also evacuated suffering severe battle shock.

Do you recall hearing the names and ages above during the show? The ages range from 19-22 years of age... How close to the age of 19 are you? How would you feel if you were called up to fight in a war?

Long Tan Action, Vietnam, 18th August 1966



Artist – Bruce Fletcher

Item copyright: © [Australian War Memorial](http://www.awm.gov.au)



This item is licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

A reconstruction of the Battle of Long Tan, Vietnam, 18 August 1966, between 'D' Company and Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces; several events that happened at intervals during the battle are shown here happening simultaneously.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART40758/>

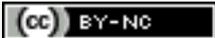
Long Tan – August 1969



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

EKN/69/0080/VN

Item copyright: © [Australian War Memorial](http://www.awm.gov.au)



This item is licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Long Tan, South Vietnam. 18 August 1969. A memorial cross, made by the Assault Pioneer Platoon of 6RAR /NZ (ANZAC) (The ANZAC Battalion comprising 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment and a component from the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment), was placed in a sunlit opening in the rubber plantation for a commemorative service, three years to the day after D Company, 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), fought an overwhelming Viet Cong (VC) force on this spot. Eighteen Australians died here in the Battle of Long Tan. They left 245 enemy dead buried on the battlefield.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/EKN/69/0080/VN/>

Five of these soldiers are members of the D Company, 6th Battalion



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

BEL/69/0558/VN

Item copyright: © [Australian War Memorial](http://www.awm.gov.au)



This item is licensed under CC BY-NC

Long Tan, South Vietnam. 1969-08-18. Five soldiers who were members of D Company, 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), at the time the company fought the Battle of Long Tan, three years ago, examine a battered rusty weapon found on the ground when 6RAR /NZ (ANZAC) (The ANZAC Battalion comprising 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment and a component from the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment), returned to place a memorial cross to the eighteen Australians who lost their lives in the clash. The gun is one of many relics of the battle still lying around in the lonely rubber plantation. Left to right: Corporal (Cpl) Brian Halls of Stafford, Qld; Cpl Bill Roche of Narrandera, NSW; Cpl **Geordie** Richardson of Kelloe, UK; Cpl Malcolm Campbell of Bicton, WA; Cpl Brian Reilly of Auchenflower, Qld. In front is Cpl Richard Brown of Stafford, Qld. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/BEL/69/0>

RIPPLES OF WARTIME – Interviews with 12 people on how the Vietnam War impacted on their lives...

Ripples of Wartime has been specially commissioned by Brink to complement the stage production of *Long Tan*. Filmmaker Malcolm McKinnon presents stories from people impacted by the Vietnam War in a range of different ways. The exhibition presents first-hand stories not only from military veterans but also from post-war Vietnamese migrants, anti-war campaigners, family members of conscripted veterans and medical practitioners who served in Vietnam. Together, they reflect the way in which the Vietnam War excited and divided public opinion. These diverse stories are considered and reflective. For a country still at war in a foreign land, they aim to be instructive and provocative too.

Video Link

<http://brinkproductions.com/productions/ripples-of-wartime>

Jean McLean – ANTI-VIETNAM WAR ACTIVIST

There were newspaper articles saying the Save Our Sons women were probably 'communists'. Then they started saying we were just 'naïve'. Eventually, as opinion about the war shifted, they started referring to us as 'dedicated' women.

Lynn Arnold – ANTI-VIETNAM WAR ACTIVIST

There was very much an idea of people power – a belief that people working together could make a difference. We had to confront the government but we also had to shift public opinion. It was a long-term campaign...

Ruth Clare – DAUGHTER OF RETURNED NATIONAL SERVICEMAN

I think the impact of war on families of veterans is a secret history. But I don't think you can talk about the cost of war unless you talk about the cost to families and about the trans-generational impacts of that, ad infinitum.

Jean Matthews – RED CROSS AID WORKER

Nothing was ever routine in Vietnam. Every day, you never knew what you were in for. It was crazy, and crazy was the norm!

My-Van Tran – SOUTH VIETNAMESE AUSTRALIAN

Most of my suffering derives from the war and from the victory of the communists. My family lost everything....

Trung Ton – AUSTRALIAN OF VIETNAMESE DESCENT

The thing I've learned is that everyone suffered. Everyone who participated in the war in some way - they all lost something.

Neville Sinkinson – RAAF HELICOPTER CREWMAN

When you came home no-one asked you how you were feeling or anything like that. It just didn't happen. The attitude was like: "You've been to Vietnam – you'll be right – get on with it..."

Des Files – ANTI-CONSCRIPTION ACTIVIST

Conscription was really the compulsory acquisition of somebody's life. We were just so angry about the bastardry of it all.

Frank Clarke – AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER IN VIETNAM

We were on alert 24 hours a day so the adrenalin was just on the edge of bursting – as soon as anything happened it'd just go sky high, and that was it.

Di Fairhead – ADF PHYSIO IN VIETNAM

The injuries were horrific – especially the guys who'd survived mine incidents. But even though they were in really bad shape they'd always be asking how their mates were. That mateship thing was just incredible.

Chas Martin – ANTI-VIETNAM WAR ACTIVIST

It was an important political statement - that there was someone in jail for refusing to be involved in that kind of killing and in the war that was going on.

Angela Mertens – WIFE OF RETURNED NATIONAL SERVICEMAN

A lot of the wives of veterans, we don't talk amongst ourselves like the men do. It's all very personal. It's a hard journey to walk, and it's one that we walk by ourselves.

Excerpts from “BRINGING TRUTH TO THE STAGE”

By Chris Drummond

Long Tan – my response – Intimate Distance, Tender Brutality, Luminous Shadows, Sparse Intricacy, Balanced Asymmetry, Frenetic Composition

Long Tan deals with a sense of history and future inside the present. Its hallmarks are a recurring feeling of intimate distance, tender brutality, luminous shadows, sparse intricacy and frenetic composition.

I want the audience to walk out overwhelmed, stunned and reflective about what goes on right beneath our noses. I want this to come from a deep connection to their fellow human born out of a forced sense of isolation.

Long Tan – my response

- Arriving in Vietnam. Heading out into the scrub. First contact. The unexpected scale of the enemy. The rain and elements. The silent presence of the local Vietnamese. The loss of life and the reflection on it all.

The Battle at Long Tan

- It felt close, huge, chaotic, overwhelming, terrifying, confusing, disorienting...

The chaotic fragments of the text. The multiple perspective. The extremity of the experience. The visceral nature of the event. The camaraderie of the soldiers. The confusion of it all. The absence of the Vietnamese.

Aftermath of the battle. For me this became:

- Relief vs Despair
- Communion vs Revulsion
- Survival vs Destruction
- Horror vs Wonder
- Courage vs Fear
- Darkness vs Light
- Dreams vs Nightmares

What is that we ask of soldiers? How do we continue to live in the safety of our daily lives oblivious to the horror that underpins so much human experience? How are we implicated in that? How do we bear witness to that? Ultimately, with history repeating itself, to what ends are people running to their destruction? There are wars going on now and we need not be concerned with the ramifications of what goes on - on the front line. Speaking personally, I think I am guilty of thinking these men (and women) are ‘other’ from me. I feel I am not really implicated in what they do.

My production of *Long Tan* will bring a community of audience members into a deliberately isolating yet intimate experience in which the past and future are alive in the present and the intensity and visceral horror that is visited upon the characters becomes both all-enveloping and detached and distancing.

The audience, I hope, will be aware of the feeling of being casual observers, seemingly un-implicated and uninvolved. The production will utilise qualities of intimate distance, tender brutality, luminous shadows, sparse intricacy and frenetic composition to create an emotive atmosphere in which the story can be told clearly and simply. And my questions of what we ask of our soldiers and how we can live oblivious to daily horror that underpins so much human experience will be framed by the staging the work in traverse: two mirrored banks of audiences watching a cast of actors go through the act of war games on a stage that floats between them. A stage that I hope might feel akin to a petri dish.

The use of an immersive sound experience through headphones and a cinematic scaled sound design is intended to both immerse and distance the audience. All leading up to the important and defining moment of the play when the audience are invited to take off their headphones and reconnect to the simple human voices of the actors as they reflect upon what it is that these men have confronted and we are asked to collectively remember the dead, both Australian and Vietnamese. If we can, I want the audience to feel moved, reshaped, disorientated, sad, lonely, inducted into secrets, compassionate and raw... just as I felt when I first heard the story.



Activity Starters For the Classroom...

Ultimately, “*That regiment stuffed up the Viet Cong’s plan to attack the Australian’s base.*” What do you think would have happened if Delta Company had not intercepted the Viet Cong?

Recollections of battle... We don’t hear too many stories from the soldiers of today regarding their experiences? Why do you think this is so?

What is a “guerrilla war”? How is this different from other areas of combat and what issues did this cause for the Australian Soldiers in Vietnam?

Do you recall experiencing or hearing the following?

The smell of rubber.

“Most boys want to be men”

“NOT TO GIVE IN”

The Lighting – Showing the shape of Vietnam... Bamboo stick used to indicate the location of North and South.

References to a Phoenix. What does a phoenix represent? Discuss how this image is related to the outcome of the Battle of Long Tan for the Australians?

Who wore, “Black Pyjamas”

Who referenced “Old ladies carrying sewing machines”?

Why would a 2nd Lieutenant feel lonely?

Why do you think Knock Knock Jokes were told by Jack Kirby?

Who said... “Why you come here?” why didn’t they know the answer to this question?

“What is a soldier?” Can you recall the answers to this from the show?

What are we doing today for our returned soldiers?

Why do we not hear about the details of the conflict they were recently involved in?

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? How does this affect returned soldiers? Research and discuss.

Research what is in a soldier's kit bag...

What is a moratorium? Why were these held in Australia in the 1960’s? Discuss.

What happened at the end of the war?

What does ‘Ripple Effect’ mean?

Long Tan was seen as a victory... Do you think anyone really wins in war?

What was New Zealand's role in this battle and in the Vietnam war? Research.

What effects do you think war has on... the soldiers and their families and friends?

Who writes history? Is it subjective?

What are primary and secondary resources?

Look further into Australia's attitude to the Vietnam War? Why do you think Australians today do not protest over our involvement in armed combat acting as allies to America and Britain?

Do you think Australians should fight in battles that do not directly involve us politically? Discuss.



USEFUL LINKS

Australians at War – School's Education Resource

http://www.australiansatwar.gov.au/pdf/aaw_secondary_p1.pdf

Excellent Article recounting the **Battle of Long Tan** by **Ashley Ekins**

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/battle-of-long-tan-draw-the-tiger-out-of-the-jungle/news-story/2cd88439da6b6ef84840e92fa470bd7c>

Australia and the Vietnam War (Australian Government department of Veterans' Affairs) Website <http://vietnam-war.commemoration.gov.au/vietnam-war/index.php>

Shrine of Remembrance Education Resources (Vietnam)

<http://www.shrine.org.au/Shrine/Files/dc/dc8b4c54-ca76-488d-9ffe-4c11ec2852fc.pdf>

How to write a theatre review? <https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/write-play-review/>

Writing a play review... <http://www.smu.ca/webfiles/WritingaPlayReviewDec2010.pdf>

Essay writing guide... University of Sydney

https://sydney.edu.au/arts/history/docs/resources/HSTY_essay_guide_2006.pdf

Further References - Films

Bruce Horsefield (Director), *The Battle of Long Tan* (1990), includes videotaped interviews with historians and participants, a number of which are held in the Film & Sound collections of the Australian War Memorial; released on DVD as *Long Tan: The True Story*, Forward Scout Films, n.d. www.forwardscout.com

Greg Swanborough (Director), *The Sharp End: Witnesses of Vietnam* (56 mins), Notion Picture Company, 1992, includes interviews with a number of soldiers involved in Long Tan and historians: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1864543/>

The Battle of Long Tan, documentary film produced by Martin Walsh and Damien Lay, narrated by Sam Worthington (101 minutes), broadcast on History Channel, August 2006; released on DVD by Animax Films, 2006.



Education Resource Writer

Hannah McCarthy-Oliver is an arts in education specialist, curriculum and free lance writer, primary through to tertiary teacher, theatre director, in school workshop leader/facilitator, technical theatre lecturer (Live Production Theatre and Events), administrator and producer who has been working in the world of the performing arts and education for over 20 years, with strong knowledge of current educational trends and standards. Hannah runs a company called *Theatre Kids Australia*, which exists to connect young people with professional experiences in the performing arts. *Theatre Kids* works with schools, teachers, professional companies and practitioners to create resources, and facilitate programs for pre-schoolers through to the senior years.

<https://www.facebook.com/theatrekidsaustralia/>

<https://www.theatrekidsaustralia.com.au>

