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The Battle of Long Tan is now in theaters, and it tells the story of these soldiers and how a combination of grit, danger close artillery, and gutsy support from helicopters got them out alive. The movie is, appropriately, named *Danger Close*.

The men of Delta Company, 6th Royal Australian Regiment, were sent out to patrol the area around their base at Nui Dat. The base was established in order to cut North Vietnamese supply lines, and the North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies were super pissed off about it.

So, in August 1966, the Australian command began to gather intelligence that said North Vietnamese troops were conducting reconnaissance in a rubber plantation just a few miles from the base and potentially building up forces for an attack. Senior leaders did not share this intelligence with the men of the 6th Royal Australian Regiment.



*This painting is a reconstruction of several different events that occurred during the Battle of Long Tan fought on Aug. 18, 1966, between 'D' Company, 6RAR and Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces.*

*(Bruce Fletcher, Australian War Memorial)*

On that August 18 patrol, 108 men of Delta stumbled into a fight with an estimated 2,500 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops in deep mud as massive rains poured onto the men. The company commander, Maj. Harry Smith, positioned his men behind a small rise that provided some cover as long as they were laying down. Bullets would fly over their heads for the next 3.5 hours.

Despite the discomfort of the rain and mud and how dangerously outnumbered they were, the Australian troops did have a few advantages. The rain was hitting hard enough that mud splashed up and camouflaged them, and the light silhouetted the North Vietnamese and helped the Australian troops target them. And, amazingly professional artillerymen fired thousands of rounds in support of them, including numerous fire missions within 60 yards of the friendly infantry.

But the men weren't equipped for a protracted battle. They nearly ran out of ammunition as the weather kept helicopters on the ground. Two helicopter pilots took it upon themselves to deliver a re-supply despite the dangers, giving the men enough ammo even as the men were firing their last few rounds of what they had carried in.

Reinforcements finally made it to the fight in armored personnel carriers and forced the North Vietnamese back. Eighteen Australian and New Zealand troops had been killed or would soon die of their wounds while another 24 were injured. Meanwhile, they had inflicted at least 245 fatalities on the enemy, and it is believed that the North Vietnamese had suffered many more losses but had carried the dead away to frustrate Australian intelligence collection.

While American and South Vietnamese leaders decorated Delta Company in the years that followed, it would take decades for the Australian government, wracked by protests at home, to commend the men for their bravery.

Now, the movie praising their exploits is available in Australian theaters, and it will soon be available online.