




Unit Citation for Gallantry awarded to RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam

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Location(s): Australian War Memorial



Commanding Officer Flight 1, Rear Admiral Neil Ralph, AO, DSC, RAN (Retd) (right), presents the Unit Citation for Gallantry Burgee (pennant) to Commanding Officer 723 Squadron, Commander Bruce Willington, RAN, at the presentation of the Unit Citation held at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

The contribution of 196 Royal Australian Navy members as part of a combined Australian and United States helicopter unit during the Vietnam War has been recognised at a ceremony at the Australian War Memorial.

The helicopter pilots, gunners, aircrew and support staff were part of Helicopter Flight Vietnam, integrated with the US Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) flying helicopters in both utility and gunship configurations. They transported around 250,000 troops per year into and out of battle over a four year period.

Members of the Royal Australian Navy Helicopter Flight Vietnam (RANHFV) were presented with a Unit Citation for Gallantry at the ceremony. The presentation was conducted by the Governor General of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) along with Minister for Defence Personnel, the Hon Darren Chester MP and Vice Admiral Timothy William Barrett, AO, CSC representing the Chief of Navy Australia.

A number of high level honours had previously been awarded to individual RANHFV members. The decision to award the Unit Citation for Gallantry was made after a formal review by the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal in 2017.



Members of Helicopter Flight Vietnam and after the presentation of Unit Citation for Gallantry with guests, including the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, His Excellency The Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove, AK, MC (Retd); Minister of Defence Personnel, The Honourable Darren Chester MP; and Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, AO, CSC, RAN (Retd); at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Addressing the ceremony, Vice Admiral Barrett said that the month the 135th Assault Helicopter Company was declared operational, the Company flew 3,182 hours, carried 17,203 troops and had only one stand-down day that whole month.

“This was the standard that was followed for the next four years,” he said.

“The heroic work undertaken by the Helicopter Flight Vietnam men is not well known, or understood, by the Australian people. Their operations with the 135th were not widely publicised in Australia, nor even known widely by the other Australians in Vietnam.

“It was not just the pilots, observers and aircrew who were courageous; the unsung heroes of the Helicopter Flight Vietnam were the technicians and support staff. They faced the same danger as aircrew, in their role as door gunners, and also faced danger as convoy drivers and perimeter guards.

“Today we honour the service and sacrifice of those men who served in the Helicopter Flight Vietnam. We hope you remember your service with a sense of pride and achievement. You deserve to be counted alongside all those whose selfless courage has contributed to shaping our national character,” said Vice Admiral Barrett.

Five Navy personnel died whilst serving with the RANHFV and 22 were wounded in action.