



## WAYNE CLARKE

Member of the Gawler RSL.

Interviewed as part of the **Gawler Oral History Project**.

Wayne reflects on his time in the National Service. He was conscripted in 1965.

### Interview 6: **Vietnam; Operation Hayman, Patrol near Long Hai Mountains, and Calling in an Air Strike, November 1966**

Recorded by Barry Neylon

*(More details of Wayne Clarke's observations of Tan Son Airbase activities can be heard in interview number 7)*

Transcript as follows:

**Wayne:** After I turned back to being the Section Commander I was then engaged in all the Operations that ensued after the return to the Nui Tai Vai Hills. There were possibly two major incidents that were probably noteworthy. One of them was called Operation Hayman.

This was actually the last time that we used the 173rd Airborne helicopters in a big way. The Operation was actually the assault on an island which was called Long Son Island. And it was a large island in a river plateau and it was being used extensively by Viet Cong ... and this operation was quite large. It was mainly a 5 Battalion operation but there were several Companies of 6 Battalion involved as well. We were flown in the helicopters similar to the way we were flown into Nui Dat on the first occasion in Operation Hardihood.

Before the attack on the island the Battalion was on standby ... and the artillery bombarded the island very extensively with both 105mm artillery plus the American 155mm artillery. The helicopters were tasked to fly a specific route. To maintain the element of surprise we actually flew under the artillery shells as they were landing on the island. Quite an impressive situation !! .. and a bit nerve racking. You've got to remember that we were flying in helicopter "stick" formation ... there were probably 5 or 6 helicopters and we were all

flying only about 30-50 metres apart behind each other. As we approached the landing spot we could see the firing from the Viet Cong. You could see little puffs of smoke which looked like little cigarettes ... and they were obviously the Viet Cong shooting at the helicopters. Fortunately, no bullets hit our helicopter, although one helicopter was damaged with enemy fire at the time.

We landed on the island and it was a very successful operation and we ran into quite a lot of Viet Cong. We actually had to round up certain of the population that were permanent residents on there. I think that we ... aah ... obviously killed a few Viet Cong. The Viet Cong that were on the island, according to a book I read later, they were so demoralised that 15 of them, two or three days after we left, made their way to the South Vietnamese Army and surrendered. So, that was 15 live one's, .. and a few others who didn't make the distance. It was code named Operation Hayman which ... obviously ... some military planners had a sense of humour about it. This Operation was conducted on the 8th to 12th November in 1966.

After that operation we conducted a considerable number of Company Operations in the vicinity of the base of the Long Hai Mountains. These operations were very intensive, and we did actually strike a lot of Viet Cong.

One of the incidents I recall was when we were on a patrol and my section was crossing a creek and there was a large lot of enemy fire on my right-hand side. I had crossed the creek ahead of the balance of my platoon ... and I only had my forward scout, my machine gunner and his number 2, and myself over the creek .... and we had walked across a fallen log. Anyway probably 10, 15 or 20 Viet Cong were shooting at us from a distance of about 200 metres. They decided that there were so many Viet Cong that we would call in an air strike. Later on, I had to recall what I had seen up at the Tan Son Airbase ... and we called in the artillery first and then we called in the air support. It was a frightening bit of exercise for me. First of all, I had to extricate my forward scout, my machine gunner and his number 2 ... and I was left on one side of the creek while the rest of my platoon decided to leave at a rate of knots, and I was left there to throw a red flare ... which was the colour of the flares that were being used on that day. Then I had to run across the creek with these guys shooting at me. Then I decided to join the others in the platoon and run away about 150 yards.

Up in the air or over the combat area at the time there were always small Cessna planes flying around that had rockets under them, which were phosphorous rockets ... and the job of the aeroplane was to fire the rockets where I threw the red smoke flare. Well, anyway, the spotter plane saw the red smoke, fired the phosphorous rocket, the phantom jets arrived, and they blew up quite a bit of jungle. Thankfully we were far enough away to do that. I mentioned at the time the Viet Cong were also aware of what we were doing ... and also decided to get away from the area as well.

End.

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