

Battle of Long Tan: American SIGINT Assists in Australian Victory — History Today

By: Gregory J. Nedved, Center for Cryptologic History

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The 1966 Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam was fought between People's Army of Vietnam units joined by the Viet Cong and elements of the 1st Australian Task Force supported by a handful of American SIGINTers. The name of one of those Americans is now inscribed on the NSA/CSS Cryptologic Memorial Wall.

A small handful of U.S. Army Security Agency (ASA) personnel were already assisting the Australians with mobile direction finding. ASA (now Intelligence and Security Command, INSCOM) was the SIGINT component for the U.S. Army. PRD-1 teams — three-man jeep mounted units — had been assigned to assist Australian forces in Nui Dat, Phuoc Thuy Province. These jeeps carried an AN-PRD-1 receiver and antenna.



NSA/CSS Cryptologic Memorial Wall

The American teams were set up at three sites. The primary enemy target for at least one of the teams was codenamed DODO. Thanks to team location fixes, DODO was “arc lighted”* (bombed by American B-52s) on 17 August 1966, the day before the Long Tan attack.

The American teams were the first to identify and locate the enemy, discovering that they were just right outside the base camp. Upon notification by the Americans, the Australians then brought in their Signal Intelligence Unit, which concurred with the American reports.

On 18 August 1966, North Vietnamese Army regulars and their South Vietnamese allies, the Viet Cong, attacked an outnumbered company of Australian soldiers near the village of Long Tan, very close to the Australian base camp.

One of the Americans who assisted the Australians in the battle, serving as a liaison, was 1st Lieutenant John Cochrane. In fact, he received an Australian medal for the battle. A few weeks later, on 24 October 1966, Lieutenant Cochrane was killed by a sniper while checking PRD-1 sites. His name is now inscribed on the NSA/CSS Cryptologic Memorial Wall, honoring his service and sacrifice in support of cryptology.

Thanks to reinforcements and American air power, the Australians carried the day. It was an impressive victory, with enemy casualties well into the hundreds as opposed to just 18 killed Australians. Long Tan was the greatest battle Australia fought in the Vietnam War.

This story comes from Jan Walters, who informed the Center for Cryptologic History of his time as a PRD-1 member assisting the Australians. We thank Jan for telling us his compelling story.

* Operation Arc Light used B-52F Stratofortresses deployed to Guam to provide air interdiction in support of ground troops and other missions during the Vietnam War. The Arc Light verbiage became a verb, “arc lighted” used to describe a strike by the B-52s during the war.

LBJ’s Holiday Memory: Honoring 1st Lieutenant John F. Cochrane – History Today

By: Patrick Weadon, Center for Cryptologic History

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As we remember our fallen, we turn to 1st Lieutenant John F. Cochrane, an honoree on the NSA/CSS Cryptologic Memorial Wall.

https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/75/1960/1LT_John_F_Cochrane_USA.pdf?ver=dZlijcQL8j6QZOfzgYmZ5Q%3d%3d

In particular, his biography from the wall includes a portion of a letter that he wrote to his parents and wife prior to his October 1966 death in Vietnam. The letter touched US President Lyndon Baines Johnson (36th President, 1963-1969) so much that he quoted from it at the White House Christmas Tree lighting ceremony that year.



NSA Memorial Wall, which includes 1LT Cochrane