

### **A Morale-Boosting Bulletin – for the 33<sup>rd</sup> NVA Regiment personnel after the Battle of Bình Ba in early June 1969**

Background: On 10 September 1969, the 199<sup>th</sup> US Lt Inf Bde killed a number of VC in an engagement at YT 557333 in southern Long Khánh Province – including the 2ic of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion/33<sup>rd</sup> NVA Regiment ie: Bùi Đức Nhật. They recovered a 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment “News Bulletin” titled: “Information/Propaganda and Training – Đoàn 84C” (Đoàn 84C – as with “A57”, was a 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment cover-name). Published quite soon after the Battle of Bình Ba in early June 1969, several articles referred to combat against Australian troops.

#### **Post-Bình Ba – A Bulletin to Boost 33<sup>rd</sup> NVA Regiment’s Morale**



News Bulletin Cover – September 1969

The 33<sup>rd</sup> NVA Regiment’s Museum at Bình Ba, its history monographs, and its formal history published in mid-2016<sup>1</sup> all acknowledge the Regiment’s defeat and heavy casualties at the Battle - ie “50 soldiers of our 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion were killed.”

However, in the weeks after the Battle, the Regiment’s political cadre published a 14-page News Bulletin extolling their victories in 1969. Several articles referred to combat against Australian troops - eg claiming to have killed a total of 205 Australian troops to September 1969, and having wiped out two Australian infantry companies – including a mechanised infantry company at the Battle of Bình Ba.<sup>2</sup> An account of the exploits of a 33<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published in April 2017 by Ernie Chamberlain in English with a critical commentary and several amplifying annexes including 1 ATF signals intelligence (SIGINT) aspects – free-to-read on the Internet at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/346613212/The-33rd-Regiment-North-Vietnamese-Army-Their-History-1965-1989-including-the-Battles-of-Binh-Ba-1969-and-Nui-Le-1971>

<sup>2</sup> One Australian soldier was killed in action at the Battle of Bình Ba – Private Wayne Teeling of 5RAR. Based on 1 ATF records and the Australian Official History, total Australian losses in engagements with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment during the War probably numbered about nine KIA. ie: Operation Hammer (5RAR: 6-8 June 1969) – one KIA, 10 WIA (99 NVA/VC KIA); Operation Lavarack (6RAR: 30 May -30 June 1969) – three KIA, 29 WIA (NVA/VC KIA 99); Operation Ivanhoe (3RAR, 4RAR: 19 September – 2 October 1971) – five KIA, 30

Regiment “model rifleman” – Private Hoàn, specifically claimed that at the Battle of Bình Ba, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment destroyed 22 armoured vehicles and killed 90 enemy.

The News Bulletin also included a “soldier’s derisive poem” recounting the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment’s “victory” at the Battle of Bình Ba – see below. The poem was titled: “The rats’<sup>3</sup> tails of the fleeing Australians exposed!” (ie a Vietnamese expression also meaning something like – “Australian deficiencies and evilness revealed”).

*The news has spread far and wide,  
Some Australian soldiers have left their homes and come here,  
Where there are rivers and streams, swamps and marshes,  
High mountains, and low hills – all obstacles to them,  
They crept and groped everywhere seeking our sanctuaries,  
Their soldiers painted their faces and ambushed our tracks.*

*In the fires, the people’s houses were set aflame,  
The fleeing Australians showed their true rats’ tails, and we laughed derisively,  
Let’s tell the story from beginning to end,  
In Long Đất District<sup>4</sup> everyone knew,  
It was just the Australians that had to take the bitter pill,  
In this time of death they fled seeking rescue,*

*This time the Australians met with the “VC”,  
They felt heavy as if their limbs weighed a thousand kilos,  
The “Royal” troops even took off their trousers,  
Threw down their guns, cast away their ammunition, and fled afar,  
Their deafening screams gave us headaches,  
We ask whether the Australians have any capability remaining,  
Is it true that they’ve eaten too much candy,  
The ghosts of the Australian soldiers fear the mountains and rivers of our land,  
The 19<sup>th</sup> Company ((the 33’s Sapper Company)) fought very skillfully,  
The 5<sup>th</sup> Company ((the 1<sup>st</sup> Company of VC D440)) also joined hands with us very well,  
The people of Long Đất are very appreciative,  
Blossoms flower on a happy summer afternoon.*

*Thổ Giang ((poet’s name))*

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WIA (NVA/VC KIA 15). Some of those Australian casualties may have been inflicted by NVA/VC elements other than the 33<sup>rd</sup> NVA Regiment. See: Ekins, A. with McNeill, I., *Fighting to the Finish*, op.cit., 2012, p.735, p.736, and p.762. See also: Fairhead, F., *A Duty Done: A Summary of Operations by the Royal Australian Regiment in the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, Linden Park, 2014, pp.86-91 and pp.156-159. For a detailed analysis of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment’s casualties during the War, see Annex F to Chamberlain, E.P. *The 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment – North Vietnamese Army: Their History (1965-1989)*, 2017 – free-to-read on the Internet.

<sup>3</sup> According to a 1968 article in the Australian Army Journal, “the term ‘Red Rats’ was affectionately bestowed on the 1st Australian Task Force in Phuoc Tuy Province by the South Vietnamese peasants. Its derivation stems from the red kangaroo which was initially painted on all the Task Force vehicles. As the Vietnamese had never seen a kangaroo, and as there was therefore no comparable word for it in their language, they inevitably called it ‘the red rat’.” Hutchinson, I. Captain (former GSO3 Ops, HQ 1 ATF), “The ‘Red Rats’ and Phuoc Tuy”, Australian Army Journal, No.227, April 1968, p.3. The Sino-Vietnamese word for “kangaroo” was “*con đai thú*” – literally: “great rat”; and this also contributed to the belief that the Australian Army symbol was a red rat.

<sup>4</sup> The poet is mistaken. The Battle of Bình Ba took place in VC Châu Đức District – not Long Đất District.

**Note:** The Regiment's soldiers would have been aware of their heavy losses – and such morale-boosting hyperbole as included in the Bulletin was routinely disseminated by their political officers. During the Vietnam War, over 3,000 of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment's soldiers were recorded by the Regiment as killed or missing – with the Regiment's average strength being only about 1,300. Following the “fall of the South” in 1975, the Regiment also fought the Khmer Rouge in the “South-West Border War” and later within Cambodia from 1978. The Regiment was deployed back to “North Vietnam” in December 1979 – ie following the early 1979 Chinese “incursion” into Vietnam (however the Regiment was not involved in any combat operations against the Chinese forces).



**Note :** The red kangaroo symbol was painted on many Australian military vehicles in Vietnam – and also on road signs and unit signs. The red kangaroo – in the style as depicted on the Australian penny, had also appeared on RAAF aircraft roundels from 1956.