

## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemorations

Vice President of the Thames and Districts RSA, Mark Binning, was invited by New Zealand Defence to be part of the Veteran delegation from New Zealand attending the Anniversary in Canberra, Australia, on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Also in the party was RNZAF Veteran Gerald Gaston of Pauanui.

Mark joined the 39 other Vietnam Veterans and current serving members of 161 Battery of the 16<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment and flew to Canberra on a RNZAF Boeing 757 aircraft. The Veterans were well supported by Defence staff for the five days.



*The delegation of Vietnam Veterans and NZ Defence personnel. Mark Binning standing fourth from the right.*

The Anniversary of the Vietnam War falls on the 18<sup>th</sup> August which is the date in 1966 when the Australians of 6 RAR supported by the Artillery of New Zealand's 161 Artillery Battery fought the Battle of Long Tan. In this battle 17 Australians lost their lives when their company of just over 100 men faced an enemy force estimated to be in excess of 2500. The New Zealand 161 Battery back in the Task Force base supported the Australians with sustained artillery fire which held off the North Vietnamese and was a major factor in reducing the number of casualties suffered by the Australians.

The Australian Government organised a series of events around the anniversary which the NZ Veteran group attended.

On Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> August the group headed by The Colonel Commandant of the Royal New Zealand Artillery, Barry Dreyer, himself a member of the battery that fought in the Battle of Long Tan, presented a statue of a Bronze Gunner (by artist Matt Gouldie) to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps in recognition of the many wars and actions the New Zealand Gunners had supported the Australians. See photo below.



*Mark Binning is standing at the right behind Barry Dreyer (in uniform) in the centre.*

Following this presentation Mark Binning was chosen as one of the three New Zealand Veterans to attend a performance in the Hall of Remembrance, Australian War Memorial, of the song 'I Was Only 19' sung by the John Schumann who wrote the song. This song has become the song that defines the Vietnam war for Australian and New Zealand Veterans.

Following this performance, we attended the traditional Last Post Ceremony and the laying of wreaths by dignitary's from both countries.

The day ended with a reception hosted by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs Australia in the Great Hall, Parliament House.

On Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> August, the New Zealand delegation was up early and attended the Stand to Service at the Stone of Remembrance, Australian War Memorial. John Deazely, the President of the New Zealand Veteran's Association, along with Willie Walker and Murray Broomhall, both part of the NZ 161 Battery Forward Observer party during the battle, laid a wreath.

The group then attended the main National Service commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vietnam War, at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial. This was attended by a huge crowd of Australian Vietnam Veterans and families and featured the detachment from our 161 Artillery Battery alongside Australian and American artillery firing in the background to simulate the sounds of the Battle of Long Tan. Along with the speeches by dignitaries, the laying of wreaths there was a flyover of Vietnam era aircraft and helicopters including two USAF B52's which made two passes. They had flown from their base in Guam to be part of the ceremony at the request of the US Ambassador to Australia.

It was a busy week for the Veterans who returned home via RNZAF aircraft on the Friday.