

MAJOR MAURICE 'MORRIE' STANLEY, MBE (Retired):
Royal New Zealand Artillery (RNZA) Forward Observer (FO)
161 Battery, 16th Field Regiment RNZA attached to D Company, 6RAR at Long Tan



Morrie Stanley was born in March 1931 in Christchurch, New Zealand, but he grew up in Napier on the east coast of the North Island. Morrie's years at high school—until the end of 1948—were quite pleasant. He favoured science, technical subjects and mathematics and do not recall getting the cane very often. Out of the classroom he was in the second rugby team, captain of the shooting team, prefect and RSM of the school cadet unit.

In 1949 Morrie attended a selection course for entry to the Royal Military College, Duntroon. He heard nothing of the matter until just before Christmas, after he had already graduated as a sapper in the Royal New Zealand Engineers. In typical style he received an order to go to the Orderly Room, where the OC had something to tell him—what had he done now? Consequently, he felt quite relieved when told that on returning from his Christmas holiday break he should be ready to go to Australia for the four-year course at RMC with nine other New Zealanders. They were all about nineteen years old when we sailed on the MV Wanganella to Sydney.

Some of you may know something of the initiation ceremony that was conducted at RMC in those days. It is sufficient here to say that the trial was strenuous and stressful. When he was instructed to sing 'Waltzing Matilda' during the ordeal, he took exception and persisted in singing 'Maori Battalion', a well-known New Zealand marching song. After all, how could he be expected to know the words of an Australian song? No doubt he received some attention for his impudence. It was during his time at RMC that he met his wife Alva.

While at RMC he still wanted to be an engineer, and in his third year the academic work was focused in that direction. In his final year, however, he was transferred to specialise in artillery and graduated into the Royal New Zealand Artillery. Incidentally, one of the infantry instructors at RMC in his time was George Chinn. Would you believe it! When he was attached to 6RAR in 1966 George Chinn was the RSM, and he was in one of the helicopters that resupplied D Company with ammunition during the Battle of Long Tan. From 1953 until 1966 Morrie served in numerous regimental and training postings.

In January 1966 he received a telephone call in his Hamilton office from Army HQ inviting him to get ready to go to Vietnam at short notice because another officer from the first contingent had to return to New Zealand. Initially, that meant a rushed job to get him inoculated as protection from all manner of dread diseases.

Although he had been in Papakura with 16 Field Regiment two years earlier, he was not in the original 161 Battery when they began training for Vietnam. They deployed to Bien Hoa near Saigon in mid-1965. Because he knew most of the men in the battery very well, having worked with them for some time, Morrie felt as if he was just re-joining the old team when he arrived at Bien Hoa as the replacement Battery Captain.

At that stage, the battery was in direct support of 1RAR, and they were attached to 173 Airborne Brigade (Separate). 1RAR was engaged in Operation Denver in April, near Song Be, about a hundred kilometres north of Saigon and 161 Battery had moved in by air from Bien Hoa in support of the operation. During this period the Battery Commander returned to New Zealand for a short period and Morrie took over his role. After walking with Battalion HQ and wondering what was going to happen next and what he should do about it, Morrie was relieved to find that he was not personally involved in any contacts. When Morrie returned to the nearby battery area he found it necessary to cool down a situation which arose when a padre who was learning how to play his guitar commenced playing at last light 'Stand To'. An irate (large) gunner had told the guitarist what he could do with his instrument and was about to assist him. At about the same time, unfortunately, a soldier suffered a nervous breakdown and had to be extracted for medical attention and eventual return home.

Near the end of April the battery commenced dismantling the base camp at Bien Hoa in readiness for the move to Phuoc Tuy Province to form part of 1ATF. A friend of Morrie, 'Red' Potts, had arrived from New Zealand to take over the position of Battery Captain and a month later, the Battery Commander, Don Kenning, commanded the Task Force set up for the movement of units by road from Bien Hoa to Vung Tau and Nui Dat. The force included 161 Battery RNZA, 105 Battery RAA and several ordnance, transport and police units. Morrie found that rather than moving by road, he was to move by air to Vung Tau and join D Company, 6RAR as their Artillery Forward Artillery Observer (FOO), at the ripe old age of 35 years.

1540hr 18th August 1966 D Coy 6 RAR came into contact with an enemy force of VC and NVA'

For more than three and a half hours, in the pouring rain amid the shattered trees of a rubber plantation called Long Tan, Morrie Stanley radioed in more than 61 artillery fire missions and corrections in support of the 108 besieged soldiers of D Company 6RAR. Unable to see in the rain and murk exactly where the 3,500+ rounds of high explosive rounds were falling, working entirely by radio communication with the forward platoons and the artillery units back at Nui Dat, from a folded map held in his hand, constantly wiping off the mud and running rainwater, this New Zealand officer was calling in every ounce of his experience and training. His M16 rifle lay unattended next to him in the water despite the repeated reminders of his radio operator, fellow New Zealander Willy Walker to keep it in his hand.

Many, including the Long Tan veterans and military historians credit the skill, professionalism and gallantry of Morrie Stanley in keeping much of the enemy at bay whilst the front line soldiers fought off the foremost attacking waves of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers. At critical points during the battle Morrie was directing artillery to within 50 metres of the Australian front line positions. The enemy forces are assumed to number approx. 3500 with something like 2500 either killed or amputees as advised by a Chinese General in 2006.

The Artillery being controlled and directed by Morrie in support of D Company during the battle comprised eighteen 105mm howitzers from 161 Field Battery (New Zealand, 103 Field Battery (Australian), 105 Field Battery (Australian) and six 155mm M109 self-propelled howitzers from 2/35th Howitzer Battalion (US Army).

In Morrie's opinion, his experience in Vietnam made him a better officer. He was more self-confident and had a better understanding of the military and the needs of soldiers in combat. As a result, he really enjoyed his brigade appointment, especially during exercises where they deployed three battalions and all the supporting arms and services. During that period Morrie was fortunate to participate in an exercise in Singapore and northern Malaya for a few months to practise cooperation between British, Australian, Singaporean, Malaya and New Zealand units. His role was generally to ensure that the administrative services were operating effectively. Major Maurice Stanley was awarded his MBE for his actions at Long Tan, he took his discharge in 1976.

Morrie met many returned servicemen and when they or anybody else express interest in the Vietnam War, he did not withhold his views or avoid discussion, and he will never be ashamed or embarrassed at having served. His parent unit and the one to which he was attached served with distinction. 161 Fd Battery RNZA was awarded the United States Meritorious Unit Commendation and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation. Delta Company, 6RAR and his FO Team were awarded the most prestigious United States Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism.

In 1986 Morrie attended the Special Commemorative Parade at Enoggera that marked the twentieth anniversary of the battle. Before he travelled to Brisbane, he had thought deeply about his Delta Company flag and where it would be best placed for the years to come. There was no doubt in his mind that it should return to Australia and he was pleased to present it to the CO 6RAR for preservation and permanent display in the unit museum.

Of all his military experiences, therefore, the one that will always be uppermost in his mind is when he was the Artillery Forward Observer with Delta Company, 6RAR at the Battle of Long Tan, 18 August 1966.

In May 2010, Morrie Stanley along with his former radio operator at Long Tan, fellow New Zealander Willy Walker, were presented with the Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry (UCG) at a surprise service in New Zealand attended by his former Long Tan comrades Harry Smith, Bob Buick and Dave Sabben. In an unprecedented move, both the Australian Government and New Zealand governments fast tracked the offer from Australia of the Australian UCG to Morrie and Willy and within a few hours of receiving the offer, the New Zealand Prime Minister approved it in time for the surprise presentation on Saturday 29th May 2010.

After a short battle with cancer, Morrie Stanley passed away peacefully at his home in Campbell's Bay, New Zealand on 16th September 2010. Morrie is survived by his wife Alva and two sons plus seven grandchildren.

I am very honoured to call myself a fellow gunner and a gentlemen of the Artillery and equally proud to be able to say that I served in the same regiment, 1 FD Regt RAA along with Morrie and am very pleased to have been able to serve on the guns in response to Morrie's excellent and level headed calls for fire support on the 18th August 1966 during the Battle of Long Tan and to assist in protecting and saving the lives of the majority of D Coy 6 RAR. On the 18th August 1966 the guns commenced firing at approx. 1540 hr. and continued through until approx. 0300hr. 19th August in support of this battle.

The majority of this information has been extracted from Morrie's Biography and personal knowledge of the battle from the gun end and other written reports.

John P Smith, OAM, JP (Qual)
Gun Number Echo Gun
105 Fd Bty RAA
1 Fd Regt RAA