



Major General Nguyễn Nam Hưng  
(Battalion Commander, CofS, CO - 274 VC Regiment)

### **DEATH OF FORMER COMMANDER 274 REGIMENT**

Brigadier (Retd) Earnest Chamberlain has sent a notification of the recent death of Major General Nguyễn Nam Hưng.

Peter Isaacs comments as follows:

For those of us who can still remember Operation Canberra in October 1966, B Company might well have ended this remarkable soldier's life had OC Bruce McQualter been permitted to launch an attack on a large group of VC spotted by Colin Cogswell and Doug Hillier of 5 Platoon on Saturday 8 October 1966 on the Nui Thi Vai mountain. However, Jim Hall's section who were closest to the VC could well have incurred casualties, as would the rest of B Company.

HQ 1ATF had told us only minutes before, that the HQ of 274 Regiment was in our vicinity. We had earlier been told that one of its battalions was also nearby. Had B Company attacked, B Company, A Company and C Company would have inevitably have become involved. (D Company minus one Platoon was BHQ "Palace Guard" and under Ron Boxall's command, the other Platoon of D Company + the Anti-Tank Platoon was protecting the Fire Support Base alongside Route 15.

If we had managed to destroy the HQ of 274 Regiment, it would have been an outstanding tactical achievement, but would it have affected the outcome of the war? Of course not. Like many members of the battalion that day, I was hugely frustrated that instead of attacking, we put in air strikes and artillery bombardment. That night the Mortar Platoon fired 960 rounds into the target areas. Follow up searches the next day revealed wide spread damage to numerous VC camps, but with little sign that the VC has suffered casualties.

Years later, John Warr told me that General Tom Daly had given him a final piece of advice. It was to the effect that if ever he found himself in a position where he felt that by delaying an action he could achieve a similar result, but would probably save soldiers' lives, then he should delay, as those lives were of paramount importance.

On 8 October 1966, I believe that John Warr was heeding that advice and lives of our comrades were thereby saved.

Vietnam War: Death of senior VC veteran: Major General Nguyễn Nam Hưng (Bn Comd, CofS, CO - 274 VC Regiment)

From: Brig Ernie Chamberlain (Retd).

Major General Nguyễn Nam Hưng (aka Nguyễn Văn Trinh) - a former commander of the 274<sup>th</sup> VC Main Force Regiment, passed away in Hòa Long on 14 August 2019 (his obituary notice - in Vietnamese, was posted at: <https://www.qdnd.vn/ban-doc/tin-buon/tin-buon-588689>).

Born in 1933, Hưng grew up in Hòa Long village and from 1946-49 was an “intelligence operator” in the “Việt Minh’s” 25<sup>th</sup> Section in Bà Chợ Province (ie Bà Rịa - Chợ Lớn Province).

In 1965, he was the commander of the 800<sup>th</sup> Battalion (ie the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 274<sup>th</sup> VC Main Force Regiment) - that had a significant victory over elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> US Infantry Division at Tầm Bó/Cắm Mỹ in early April 1966 during Operation Abilene - a 134-strong US infantry company suffered 48 KIA and 58 WIA.

From August 1966 to July 1967, Hưng was the Chief of Staff/second-in-command of the 274<sup>th</sup> VC Regiment. He subsequently commanded the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment from August 1967 to March 1969 - during which his forces clashed several times with 1 ATF elements. Promoted to Major General in June 1988, Nguyễn Nam Hưng retired in October 1999.

On 20 October 1966, 5RAR troops in an operation in the Núi Thi Vải mountains recovered the notebook/diary (completed to 7 October 1966) of Nguyễn Nam Hưng – then second-in-command/Chief of Staff of the 274<sup>th</sup> VC Regiment. At the same time, a 71B radio (probably of the 274 Regiment’s C-20 Reconnaissance Company), a radio diagram, a radio log book, a “CW key”, and documents were recovered. The capture of the diary/notebook - and an outline of its contents, was related in Professor Bob O’Neill’s 1968 book “Vietnam Task” (Captain R.J. O’Neill was 5RAR’s Intelligence Officer in October 1966 - see pp.48-49, pp.155-156, and p.191). Hưng’s diary/notebook provided very useful insights into VC activities in Phước Tuy, Long Khánh, and Biên Hòa Provinces - and was “translated/exploited” extensively by MACV’s Combined Documents Exploitation Centre (CDEC) in Saigon. A three-page “commentary” on Hưng’s diary/notebook was published in 1 ATF’s Troops Information Sheet in mid-February 1967.

For analysts - and historians, Hưng’s notebook/diary explained 274 Regiment’s role and activities in mid-August 1966 at the time of the Battle of Long Tân.

On “18 August” 1966 – see the attached Vietnamese/translation below extracted from Hưng’s notebook/diary, his detailed notes indicate a military operational appreciation for a future attack on two strategic hamlets on Route 1 (ie “The Road 1 Area”) in the Hưng Nghĩa-Hung Lộc region of central-western Long Khánh Province. In a subsequent “post-Long Tân” entry on 28 September 1966 - at the time of a senior VC cadres’ meeting to review recent 5<sup>th</sup> VC Division activities, Hưng mentioned Long Tân in his notebook - ie : “the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment ((ie the 275<sup>th</sup> VC Main Force Regiment)) attacked Núi Đất”, “600 Australians” were killed and “1 Australian battalion exterminated”.

Post-War - in October 1966, the Australian author Paul Ham interviewed retired Major General Hưng in *Vũng Tàu* in mid-November 2005 - Paul Ham queried Hưng on his “lost” notebook, but Hưng could not “recall the loss of his diary.” (Ham, P., Vietnam – The Australian War, 2007, p.710).

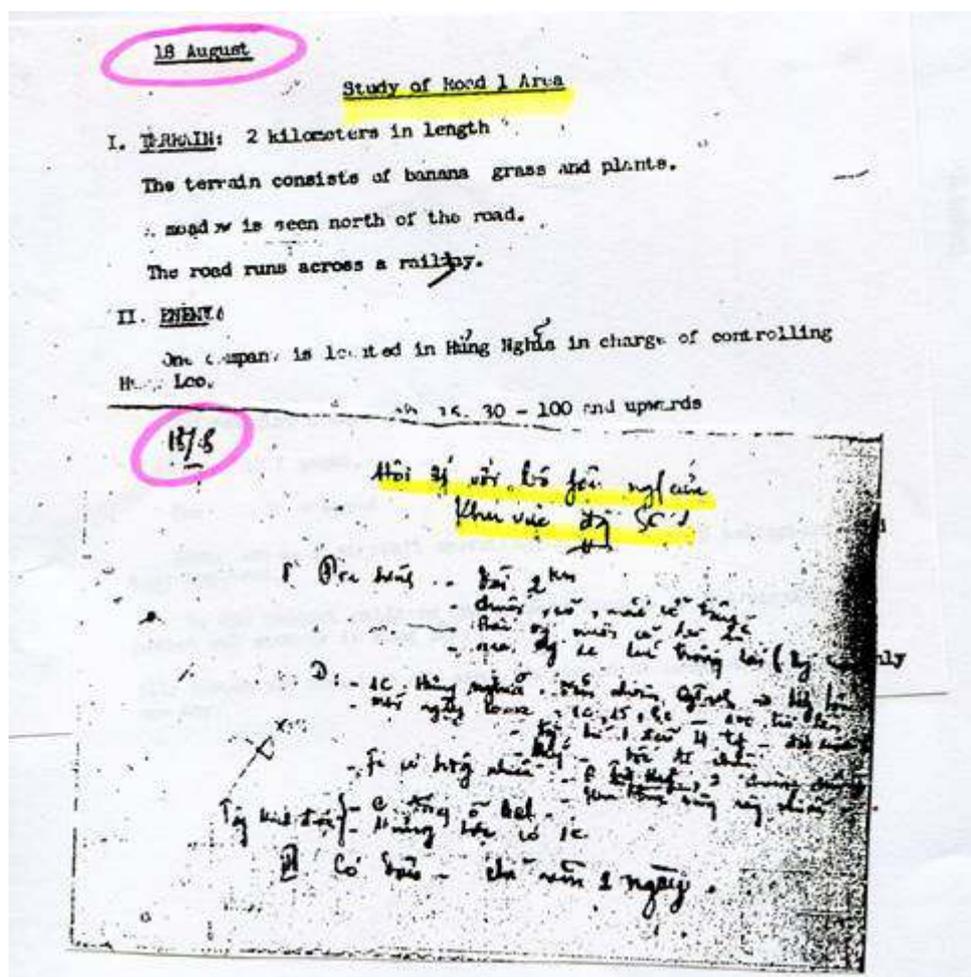
A few weeks after 5RAR’s recovery of Hưng’s notebook - on 9 December 1966, elements of the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment attacked the Vạn Kiếp firing range (located a few kilometres north-west of Bà Rịa Town at the base of the Núi Dinh Mountain), and captured 180 ARVN recruits from the Vạn Kiếp National Training Centre (on Bà Rịa Town’s eastern outskirts). The VC subsequently released 62 “elderly and sick” ARVN POWs from the captured group on 9 January 1967 - according to an ARVN Phước Tuy Sector S2 report. The VC Châu Đức History recounts that 187 ARVN recruits were

captured and 71 weapons of various types seized. According to the 5<sup>th</sup> VC Division History, the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment “organised an education program for the prisoners and chose 80 of the soldiers who had volunteered to join the revolutionary forces. 40 were incorporated into the Bà Rịa local forces and 40 into the units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment ((ie the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment)).”

Nguyễn Nam Hưng later served as the Chief-of-Staff of Military Region 7, the Deputy Commander of the 779<sup>th</sup> Front in Cambodia from February 1990 to late 1991; and the Commander of the Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu Province Headquarters from 1991 to 1999.

In 2006, Nguyễn Nam Hưng published his post-War memoir (Một Đời Chinh Chiến - A Life at War), but omitted any reference to the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment’s participation in offensive combat operations in Phước Tuy Province in the period May-September 1966 - apart from activity against road traffic and positions on Route 15.

Regards, Ernie



PS. When translating and reporting on Nguyễn Nam Hưng’s notebook/diary in late 1966, the staff at CDEC in Saigon did not include the Hưng’s entry on “18 August : Study of Road 1 Area” - as the date “18 August 1966” had no particular significance to CDEC’s US/Vietnamese staff.