



A story from the history of Australian Artillery:
Commemorating 150 years – 1871-2021

215284 Sergeant Leslie John Stephens MM
102nd Field Battery, 12th Field Regiment, RAA
Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces of South Vietnam
“Firing over open sights”



Sergeant Leslie John Stephens enlisted in the Australian Army on 6 June 1963 and joined 102 Field Battery, 12th Field Regiment, RAA on 18 June 1966. He accompanied the battery to Vietnam as the Gun Sergeant of Delta gun, arriving on 5 March 1968.

On 12 May 1968, the 1st Australian Task Force deployed on Operation Toan Thang as part of 70,000 Allied troops deployed to interdict North Vietnamese Army (NVA) infiltration and supply routes into and out of Saigon. At least five enemy regiments were known to be operating in the area. It was believed that the forces the Australians would operate against were disorganised and withdrawing from Saigon after protracted combat in the Saigon area.

Fire Support Patrol Base Coral was established as a regimental artillery base to support the ambushes established by the Australian infantry. The base initially contained the Regimental HQ of 12th Field Regiment and two widely separated batteries – 102nd Field Battery, RAA and 161st Field Battery, RNZA.

Early in the morning of 13 May 1968, a NVA enemy main force unit of Battalion strength attacked positions held by 102nd Field Battery, an infantry mortar position and Regimental Headquarters. Covered by heavy small arms and rocket fire, the enemy mounted a strong frontal attack against the guns of 102nd Field Battery. Sergeant Stephens exhorted his gun detachment to manhandle his 105mm Howitzer gun into a position where it could engage the enemy over open sights. For more than two hours, the enemy attempted to reach the gun position. Sergeant Stephens and his gun detachment fired eighty-four rounds of direct fire at the enemy, who at times were within five metres of his gun. During this time, the gun was repeatedly hit by small arms fire.

For his “great calmness and exemplary leadership under fire which contributed greatly to the successful defence of the position”, Sergeant Stephens was awarded the Military Medal.

Sources:

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 21 August 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 21 August 2021

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