

Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize

2013



Private Errol Wayne Noack

By Lauren Wallis

Vietnam War

Private Errol Wayne Noack

Service Number: 4717546

In the early 1960s, South Vietnam was a land overwhelmed by problems. The government was under threat from a growing communist uprising, losing control over the countryside outside major towns and cities and facing internal dissent. The South Vietnamese government sought assistance from the United States and her regional ally, Australia.

Errol Wayne Noack was born on 28 March 1945 in North Adelaide. The only child of Australian-born parents Walter and Dorothy, his mother left him when he was just a baby. Errol was raised by his father, aunts and uncles. He completed his schooling at Concordia College in Highgate. A good-looking young man, he was 6 ft. 1 in. (185 cm) tall, with fair hair, blue eyes, firm features and a brooding expression. His nickname suitably being "Flex" proposes he had an easy-going personality and eye-catching looks.

In the year 1964, the Federal Government of Australia introduced a National Service Scheme, where 20-year-old males were nominated with the expectancy of most aboriginal men, via ballot, for two years full-time service in the Australian Army.

Whilst working as a professional fisherman with his father in 1965, Errol Noack was conscripted into the Regular Australian Army. He completed basic training in New South Wales and was dispatched as a rifleman to the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. As well as training in NSW he also completed exercises in Western Australia. While on this exercise in Western Australia, he began a relationship with Sandra Harrison, a 17-year-old girl who lived in Perth. She believed that they would marry when he completed National Service.

Having belatedly celebrated his 21st birthday with his family in Adelaide on 8 May 1966, he left Australia four days later for the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). He was assigned to the 5RAR, whose first operational task was to clear suspected People's Liberation Armed Forces (Viet Cong) from around Nui Dat, the proposed base for the 1st Australian Task Force. As a member of No.5 Platoon, 'B' Company, Noack was flown in by helicopter on the morning of 24 May 1966. This operation was called *Operation Hardihood*.

As his party moved through the dense scrub, it was unexpectedly fired upon. Everyone went to ground and returned fire. During a pause, Noack rose to move to another position and was hit in the side by a bullet from a sub-machine gun. Whether or not the Viet Cong had initiated the action, it soon became apparent that 'A' Company and 'B' Company were shooting at each other. When the firing stopped, Noack was still conscious. He died in a helicopter on the way to hospital at Vung Tau, only 10 days into his service for his country.

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PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT SCHOOL PRIZE

Errol Wayne Noack was the first Australian conscript to die in the Vietnam War. He died at the very young age of 21 and became a symbol for the growing anti-war movement. The official conclusion at the time was death by enemy fire, but it appears that Errol's death was the result of a tragic accident. In death, Errol Wayne Noack became a symbol of the small but growing anti-Vietnam War movement in Australia.

The person most affected by the death of Errol Noack was of course, Walter Noack, who had so tragically lost his only child. Walter's distress over his son's death is still evident in a letter written to the manager of Channel 7 many years later, in 1979, where he asks about obtaining a copy of an episode of the television program, "This Fabulous Century", about conscription in the Vietnam War. He also writes that it was only on his insistence that the Army brought Errol back to Adelaide for burial, and that thankfully, this set a precedent for others. Walter Noack died on Kangaroo Island in the year 1996. A great honour for Walter was the opening of the Errol Noack House in 1989. The house, in Mitchell Park, South Adelaide, commemorates Errol's war service and continues to provide emergency accommodation for Vietnam and other war veterans and their families.



Errol Wayne Noack is buried in the Derrick Garden of Remembrance, Centennial Park cemetery.

ANZAC Spirit

The word ANZAC has spirit living within itself. Originally it was not a proper word but a set of initials that represented *Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*. Soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Indian and French made an amphibious assault on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey (a place most had never heard of) landing at several locations on the 25th of April 1915. It was because of the way those Australians and New Zealanders fought, and the way they courageously faced the hardships and dangers that confronted them, that the initials became a word - ANZAC - which today is respected in both Australia and New Zealand.

For me, the ANZAC spirit represents the spirit within the community where people selflessly put others before themselves. ANZAC is a short yet powerful word that Australians will have forever engraved into their souls. The ANZAC spirit means courage, strength and resourcefulness. Above all the ANZAC spirit means loyalty and respect to your comrades, families, and friends as well as strangers in times of hardship.

The men of the Fifth Battalion in *Operation Hardihood* are prime examples of soldiers who have the ANZAC spirit within them. Only 6 days into service they were thrown into unfamiliar territory. The first days in Nui Dat were spent setting the defences and digging in, amidst the thick mud and heavy daily monsoonal rains. The atmosphere was cloying and wearisome; the battle between man, machine and the weather, constant. The tasks of the Fifth Battalion in Operation Hardihood was firstly to clear the area to the north and east of Nui Dat to a distance of five thousand metres, so the enemy mortar fire could not reach the future base area, and secondly, to establish a defensive position to give security to the Nui Dat area while the other units of the Task Force concentrated in the new base. The men would have been relying on the known spirit exemplified of past soldiers as well as the spirit within them, a willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country, their pride and their mates to courageously carry out a successful operation.

Private Errol Wayne Noack Commemorative



Front page of The Age on May 26, 1966, reporting his death.



Private Errol Wayne Noack (left) with his father Walter Noack (right) and an unidentified friend. Visiting Windy Point Lookout during Pte Noack's second to last leave before embarking for service in Vietnam.



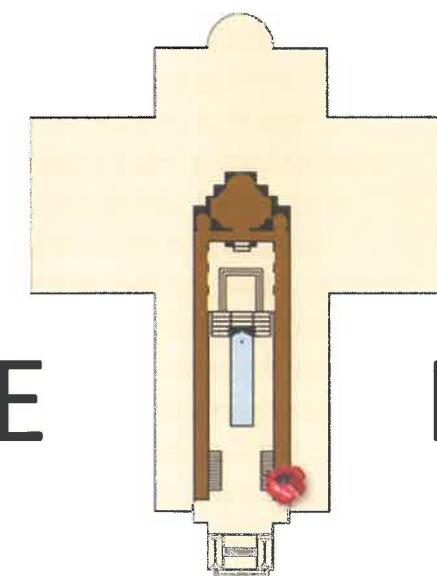
Private Errol Wayne Noack with his father Walter.

TROOPS TO VIETNAM



Private Errol Wayne Noack with his father Walter at Glenelg, South Australia.

LEST WE



FORGET

Location on the Roll of Honour

Errol Wayne Noack's name is located at **panel 5** in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial (as indicated by the poppy on the plan).