

A317809 Corporal David John Dubber, No. 9 Squadron RAAF

KIA 7 June 1971

Today we remember and pay tribute to Corporal David John Dubber.

David Dubber was born on 17 April 1943 in Coburg, Victoria, the only child of Alfred and Florence Dubber. He attended St Ambrose's in Brunswick, but left school at the age of 14, finding a variety of jobs including at an auto spares warehouse, a sheet metal works, and as an assistant at a funeral parlour.

David's main interests and hobbies included swimming, lifesaving, gymnastics and reading. In his early 20s he met June, a full-time nursing aid, and the two were married. A daughter soon followed and the pair settled in Melbourne.

In 1967 David applied to join the Royal Australian Air Force, and after being accepted, signed on in April. Mustering as an airfield defence guard (or ADG), David was first posted to No. 1 Recruit Training Unit at Edinburgh air base near Adelaide. His next postings were to Amberley, then Williamtown, where he completed his training. Airfield defence guards were primarily responsible for patrolling and protecting the perimeter of air bases, but their weapons training also meant they could serve as door gunners on helicopters.

In February 1968 Dubber was posted to No. 2 Squadron, based at Phan Rang air base in South Vietnam. Here he served on the ground as an ADG protecting the base from enemy attack. After returning home in January 1968, David was mentioned in despatches for leadership, courage and devotion during his tour of duty in Vietnam.

Now at the Base Squadron at RAAF Fairbairn in the Australian Capital Territory, in 1970 Dubber applied for training as a specialist helicopter door gunner. After qualifying, he was promoted to corporal and began his second tour of Vietnam with No. 9 Squadron, operating Huey helicopters. Arriving in

early May 1971 Dubber was in action almost every day. The tempo of operations was intense. During downtime he got on well with his comrades and enjoyed himself. Blessed with a remarkable singing voice, Dubber's rendition of *Danny Boy* was said to be unmatched.

On the morning of 7 June Australian infantrymen of 5 Platoon, B Company, 3RAR became involved in a protracted engagement with a North Vietnamese Army unit occupying a bunker system. This was the battle of Long Khanh. The Australians soon ran short of ammunition and a resupply flight was dispatched.

The fight continued and the Australians again ran short of ammunition. A second resupply flight was dispatched.

Flight Lieutenant Everitt Lance and his crew in Albatross Zero Six took off from Nui Dat with a load of ammunition and 3RAR's pad master, Sergeant Jimmy Griffith. Reaching the site of battle, Lance brought his aircraft to a hover near 5 Platoon's marker balloon. But before Griffith could rope the ammunition down to the waiting infantrymen, the helicopter was hit and fatally damaged by multiple heavy machine-gun rounds. Wounded, Lance tried to manoeuvre away, but the aircraft, now unresponsive, turned on its side and fell out of the sky. As they fell, a tree branch went through the windscreen, killing Lance. Griffith fell through the trees and landed between the Australians and the enemy, wounded in the leg and badly injured from the fall. Two other crew, co-pilot Greg Forbes and Corporal Peter Vidler survived.

Like Griffith, David Dubber was also thrown out of the chopper as it fell from the sky. But Dubber had fastened his safety belt and this sealed his fate. As he fell earthwards, Dubber reached the end of his belt, which suddenly jerked him back underneath the helicopter as it crashed through the trees and hit the ground. Pinned underneath and badly injured, Dubber had no chance to get

away as the aircraft was immediately engulfed in fire and consumed. His remains were recovered the following day. He was 28 years old.

Dubber's remains were returned to Australia and buried at Fawkner Memorial Park, near his birthplace of Coburg. He is also commemorated at the Garden of Remembrance in Springvale, Victoria. His name is also listed on the Roll of Honour on my left, among the 521 Australians who died while serving in the Vietnam War.

This is but one of the many stories of service and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Corporal David John Dubber, who gave his life for us, for our freedoms, and in the hope of a better world.

Craig Tibbitts
Historian, Military History Section
Australian War Memorial
Canberra ACT