

218853 Private Paul Manning

3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment

KIA: 2 March 1971

Last Post Ceremony
9th June 2021

Speech transcript

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Today, we remember and pay tribute to Private Paul Manning.

Paul Manning was born on 30 July 1951 at the Martyr Hospital, Newcastle, the second of three children of Vincent and Deidre Manning.

Paul spent his early years growing up at Kilaben Bay, Lake Macquarie. He was keen on sports, playing rugby and squash, and enjoying swimming and boxing.

Manning attended All Hallows College at Bathurst and then St Stanislaus College. He was a noted rugby player, and an enthusiastic member of the school's 1st Fifteen. He also served as a member of the school's army cadet unit.

In August 1967, Manning joined the New South Wales Police Academy, training as a police cadet. After training for a year and wanting something more, he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and join the army. His father Vincent had been an original member of the Australian Special Air Service.

Paul Manning joined the Australian Regular Army in Sydney on 4 September 1968. After basic training at Kapooka, he was sent to the Infantry Training Centre at Singleton, and was regarded "a reliable soldier who works well".

His next posting was as a rifleman in the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), then based at Woodside, South Australia. On arrival in early April 1969, he was posted to 10 Platoon, D Company.

In early September, Manning was promoted to lance corporal. Less than a fortnight later, he suffered a knee injury while playing rugby for 3RAR. After surgery he spent the rest of the year in rehabilitation.

In February 1970 he attended a promotion course, passing two of the three required subjects. His course report stated: "This soldier has the potential to become a very good NCO and should be encouraged. He has the ability and drive, but at this stage lacks the knowledge." He was recommended to re-attend the failed part of his course and to be a section 2IC with guidance and supervision.

As the battalion continued to prepare for deployment, at the start of May D Company was sent to the Jungle Training Centre to attend a battle efficiency course. Further training took place at Puckapunyal where the men worked co-operatively with tanks.

In mid-September, Manning went absent without leave for a day. Combined with a civil offence the previous month, this saw him heavily fined and reduced in rank to private. Despite this blemish on an otherwise clean record, Manning attended courses and in October passed the final subject required to be promoted to corporal.

On 15 February 1971 the main body of 3RAR sailed from Port Adelaide aboard HMAS Sydney, bound for Vung Tau in South Vietnam.

Only days after arriving, the battalion began its shakedown operation outside the wire of Nui Dat. On 2 March, patrols had had minor encounters with the enemy, who were thought to be from D445 Provincial Mobile Battalion. That evening, the four rifle companies, supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers, went into night harbour positions.

D Company, located a short distance away from the main battalion, was hit almost as soon as it had completed its defensive setup.

The enemy opened up with automatic rifle and machine-gun fire and what was possibly a satchel charge was thrown into D Company's positions. The explosion killed Manning's platoon commander, 22-year-old Lieutenant John Wheeler, and wounded another man. Shortly afterwards, Manning was shot through the neck and killed.

The dead and wounded were evacuated by a US medevac helicopter which flew in to provide assistance. The contact continued sporadically during the night until the enemy withdrew after 6 am.

Manning's body was taken to 1 Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau before being returned to Australia. His funeral was held at the Our Lady Star of the Sea Church at Miranda, and he was laid to rest in the Woronora Lawn Cemetery. He was 19 years old.

His name is listed on the Roll of Honour on my left, along with more than 500 others from the Vietnam War.

This is but one of the many stories of courage and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Private Paul Manning, who gave his life for us, for our freedoms, and in the hope of a better world.