

Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)

Tamati Henare Tuhiwai

38805. Sergeant
Royal NZ Infantry Regiment
Victor Four Company

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CITATION

On 19th March 1970¹, Sergeant Tuhiwai was commanding a rifle platoon patrolling in difficult and mountainous country near Nui Dinh. Elements of the leading section had just crossed the floor of a deep ravine when, at short range, it came under intense and accurate fire from a well-entrenched enemy force. Five casualties were sustained immediately, including Sergeant Tuhiwai himself who received painful shrapnel wounds. One of the casualties could not be reached unless the enemy was dislodged from his positions. Another patrol of Victor Four Company nearby was unable to come to Sergeant Tuhiwai's assistance because it was itself under attack and being heavily mortared.

The situation was most hazardous. A number of the patrol were in exposed positions in the open, there were several wounded and all movement was drawing fire from enemy heavy machine guns, rocket propelled grenades and automatic weapons, and mortars were impacting nearby. The patrol nevertheless remained in contact and for the next hour, under Sergeant Tuhiwai's resolute and bold leadership, attempted to carry the fight to the enemy. Throughout, Sergeant Tuhiwai braved enemy fire to move around the patrol, encouraging his soldiers, directing their fire, and refusing at all times to give ground. His conduct was the more exemplary because of his wounds.

The enemy force, which it was subsequently learned numbered nearly one hundred, finally broke off the engagement and abandoned their well-prepared positions as a direct result of the aggressiveness of Sergeant Tuhiwai and the men under his command.

The quality of his leadership, his courage and personal example during this bitter action were an inspiration to all and his gallant conduct is deserving of recognition.

¹ 19-3-70 Pte Paenga TW, KIA; Pte Heke RT, WIA; Pte Keatch WG, WIA; Cpl Taukamo TN, WIA; Pte Thomas PD, WIA; Sgt Tuhiwai TH, WIA; Sig White JRM, WIA.

Additional Notes to the Citation

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Operation Napier 10 January-27 February 1970 saw 6 RAR (ANZAC) Battalion return to the area of the Courtenay Rubber Plantations where it had operated so successfully during operation Lavarack in June 1969.

On 13 January 1970², Victor Company conducted a helicopter air assault into the Viet Cong rubber plantation. During the first afternoon in their new patrol area, the forward scout of a patrol from 3 PI, Victor Four Company (Sgt TH Tuhiwai) saw recent tracks, and then sighted a group of VC to his front. The patrol had contacted 11 VC near the B6 Post.

The opening fire from the scout killed two VC, and supporting fire from the machine gunner killed another two and wounded a fifth man, forcing the enemy to withdraw. Three weapons and 11 packs were captured. The group contacted were identified as belonging to the Ba Long Province Medical Unit and the Ba Long Forward Supply Council. A follow up led to the capture of the wounded member, who was identified as belonging to the political cadre from the village of Xuan Son and a member of the Quang Giao Village Guerrilla Unit, the first of many VC captured and detained during this operation.

When he was captured, Victor Company found a fresh pool of blood nearby. The prisoner revealed that the blood belonged to another VC who had wounded earlier that day (by 3 PI, Victor Four) and had been given medical treatment (by their medical staff) before hiding in the nearby B6 Post.

The Companies continued searching their areas until 23 January. In that period there were 14 contacts with the VC, resulting in three kills, 3 more wounded, 2 were captured and 26 people detained.

Operation Townsville was planned for the period 24 March-23 April 1970 before this battalion sized operation started Victor Four Company was tasked with Operation Waipounama – an operation in the mountains to the west of Nui Dat, the rocky and precipitous Nui Dinh.

Victor Four Company deployed by helicopter from Nui Dat on the 18th March to LZ's on top of the mountain, with the task of searching the Nui Dinh for the C41 Chau Doc LF Coy. The Company (less 1 PI) flew into a LZ on the western side of the mountain. 1 PI was inserted into a LZ on top of the Nui Ong Cau feature, on which an American radio relay site was established.

² "We too were ANZAC's" – Regimental History for 6RAR (ANZAC) Bn. Lt Col Brian Avery, pages 198/199.

The Company started its sweep operation towards the large re-entrant on the eastern side of the mountain, and by 1400 hours had the first contact with a group of three VC. That night, the Company was in position with its platoons deployed around the flat plateau near the summit of the mountain.

It was sometimes the practice that the Company's support personnel (cooks and storemen) who did not get out of Nui Dat very often, were given a chance to go on operations, resting some of the riflemen. This short operation probably provided them with enough excitement for the whole tour.

Additional Notes to the Citation **Tamati Henare Tuhiwai - continued**

On 19th March 1970³, 1 PI remained on the 470 metres contour line and established an observation post overlooking the area to the platoon's south. The other two platoons commenced checking out the fresh tracks they had found the previous day. 2 PI (Sgt SV Smith) left its night position, and about 1040 hours was investigating a well used track when a small party of enemy initiated an ambush at a range of 15 metres then withdrew. A command-detonated device wounded Pte JRM White and Pte PD Thomas; casualties were minimised as the platoon was well dispersed. A Dustoff helicopter evacuated the two wounded men and the platoon continued to follow the tracks that led them south and east along a ridge line towards the bottom of the hill.

3 PI, commanded by Sgt TH Tuhiwai, was following a circuit track, and when about 400 metres from the Company HQ base position, the leading section entered a well concealed VC camp adjacent to a stream. A fire fight immediately commenced.

In the initial burst of fire, Pte TW Paenga was killed by RPG fire; three others, Cpl TT Taukomo, Dvr RT Heke, and Pte WG Keatch, were wounded by shells and fragments. Pte RC Symons managed to get the section machine gun back behind a boulder in the stream bed and with the assistance of another machine gun, gave sufficient covering fire for the wounded to take cover in the stream bed.

The remainder of the platoon was now pinned down by enemy fire on an exposed slope, so they were unable to bring little effective fire to assist. The situation was most hazardous. About this time, Sgt Tuhiwai was wounded in the (left) leg by fragments from a tree burst of either a mortar round or an RPG.

³ "We too were ANZAC's" – Regimental History for 6RAR (ANZAC) Bn. Lt Col Brian Avery, pages 215/216.

The VC began to withdraw. His escape route took him back towards the Company HQ position. Finding himself blocked on two sides, the VC now began to fire his mortars to add to the fire from his machine guns and RPG's, to cover his withdrawal to the north. This firing lasted for 15-20 minutes until he finally broke contact, when the firing ceased. The enemy's mortar (base plate position) was quite close to the Company HQ, close enough to hear the firing orders and the thump of the primaries as the mortars fired.

At the 3 PI position, the two machine guns were effective in neutralising the enemy fire. They kept up a brisk fire thanks to the efforts of Pte Clark, who crawled forward three times to bring up ammunition for the guns. When the supply of machine gun ammunition ran low, he crawled the 25 metres over open ground to the rest of the platoon, collected all the linked belt ammunition available and returned once more over open ground to the guns.

On one of the trips, he asked the two Kiwi machine gunners, Pte RC Symons and Pte ARJ Young, if there was anything else they wanted? Pte Young, somewhat of a character, told Clark he was dying for a smoke. On his return trip, Clark called out "Here's your smoke" and handed him a smoke grenade.

By last light, 1 PI had arrived at the scene of the contact. At first light the next day (19th March) a sweep of the enemy position revealed pits for a company, plus sleeping areas and bunkers for a second company; 1 VC was killed in the action.

Victor Four Company continued its search towards the east, down the steep slopes and re-entrants to the base of the mountain. On 20th March, Victor Four Company rendezvoused with a troop of APC's and returned to Nui dat. They had killed one VC but had lost one soldier Killed in Action (KIA) and six others wounded (some seriously).

For his part in the action on the mountain, Sgt Tuhiwai was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM).