

# The Men Who Persevered: The AATTV – the Most Highly Decorated Australian Unit of the Viet Nam War.

**Bruce Davies and Gary McKay**

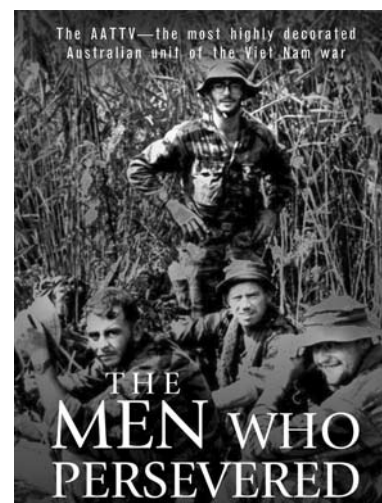
**Reviewed by Ian Kuring**

*The Men Who Persevered* by Bruce Davies and Gary McKay covers the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) members who served as military advisers throughout South Vietnam from July 1962 to December 1972. As individuals or in small groups they worked with American and New Zealand advisers in trying to improve the military capabilities of South Vietnamese and Cambodian ground-force units. The AATTV was the first Australian unit to go to Vietnam and the last unit to leave. In the process it became the most highly decorated Australian unit of the Vietnam War. The title of the book reflects the AATTV motto, 'Persevere', which itself emphasised the grim reality that any success as a military adviser in South Vietnam required great perseverance.

The authors, Bruce Davies and Gary McKay, are decorated veterans of the Vietnam War and both retired from the Australian Army after lengthy and distinguished service as infantrymen. Bruce Davies served three tours of duty in South Vietnam between 1965 and 1970 (two of them with the AATTV and one with 1RAR). Gary McKay served one tour in South Vietnam as a platoon commander with 4RAR in 1971. While this is Bruce Davies' first book, it is the ninth book about the Vietnam War that Gary McKay has been involved with.

Bruce Davies did the bulk of the research for the book utilising Australian and American records together with extensive personal correspondence. Between them the authors have melded their research with their own military knowledge and experience to create an intensely interesting, and easy to read book. The first 216 pages tell the story of the AATTV – highlighting the effects on the team's development of the constantly changing military and political parameters of the Vietnam War – as well as providing an insight into many of the diverse activities team members were involved in. While the name AATTV includes the word 'training', this was only one of the many roles actually carried out. AATTV tours for most involved varying levels of combat and danger as personnel lived among, and went on operations with, South Vietnamese units based throughout the country. Training in the broadest sense included the provision of on-the-ground advice to South Vietnamese commanders, and in some cases command of South Vietnamese units, during combat operations.

The authors have cleverly incorporated into the text selected extracts from the personal thoughts, memories and reports of team members. These provide a valuable human element that adds to the general descriptions of events. In all



the wars in which Australia has participated the Army has rarely, if ever, employed such a diverse group of men - and expected them to undertake such a wide range of military activities - in such an ever-changing political, operational and cross-cultural situation.

Following the eleven chapters plus prologue and epilogue telling the general history of the AATTV, the next 152 pages contain what many readers and researchers may consider the most valuable part of the book – an appendix containing a revised and very detailed nominal roll of all members of the team. This listing includes the full name; Army number, first rank worn with the AATTV, dates and areas of service with the team, honours awarded for service, the member's Corps specialisation, the unit(s) and dates of other service in South Vietnam and, if the member is deceased, his date of death. General readers and researchers are able to utilise the nominal roll for many purposes. As an example, it reveals that only 1009 men (998 Australians and 11 New Zealanders) served with the AATTV over the ten years and six months of the unit's existence – and only ten of them were private soldiers. Appendix 2 contains a revised list of foreign awards to AATTV members, including the qualifying dates for a number of foreign unit commendations and citations.

*The Men Who Persevered* is an excellent stand-alone general history of the AATTV. It also makes a great companion volume for the late Ian McNeill's more detailed historical account *The Team: Australian Army Advisers in Vietnam 1962-1972* published by the Australian War Memorial in 1984, and Robert Guest's book *The Team In Pictures 1962-1972* published by Canberra Printing Services in 1992. All three books together provide a magnificent historical record of the AATTV and a wealth of information about the men who served with the unit. Both aspects assist those team members or their families who wish to remember, and those general readers who would like to know more about, a truly unique Australian Army unit. ♦

*Bruce Davies and Gary McKay, 'The Men Who Persevered: The AATTV – the Most Highly Decorated Australian Unit of the Viet Nam War', Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2005, Softback, 418pp., RRP \$435.00.*