



**106 FIELD WORKSHOP**  
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**SOUTH VIETNAM AND ONWARDS**

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At the beginning of this year, 7 Combat Service Support Battalion (7 CSSB) changed structure from the multiple standing Combat Service Support Teams of the past into corps specific subunits. This was a major organisational change to the Battalion, and it gave rise to the opportunity to re-raise an organisation with a brief but distinguished deployment history, and an ongoing legacy – 106 Field Workshop.

The original 106 Field Workshop unit was raised in Oct 1968 at Nui Dat South Vietnam and, after returning to Bonegilla Victoria in a low strength trade training role in conjunction with the RAEME Training Centre, it was disbanded in Oct 1971.

106 Field Workshop was re-formed for the first time in the early-1980s at Coopers Plains, and in 1993 moved to Enoggera as part of 6 Brigade Administrative Support Battalion. In Mar 1993, 106 Field Workshop disbanded for the second time.

While the spirit of 106 Field Workshop has since been kept alive in 7 Combat Service Support Battalion over the last 20 years through the retention of 106 Field Workshop customs and traditions and the naming of the Battalion recreational facility “the Borlace Club” (after CFN Douglas Borlace, the only RAEME casualty in Vietnam).

Over the intervening years, the 2013 re-raising of 106 Field Workshop has allowed an important element of RAEME history to be brought back to life.

This article will go through some history of 106 Field Workshop and touch upon the current activities 106 Field Workshop are involved in on behalf of 7 Combat Service Support Battalion in support of 7 Brigade.

106 Field Workshop was officially added to the Australian Army Orbat located at Nui Dat South Vietnam on 14 October 1968 and became operational on 1 November 1968. The unit was regarded as a reinforcement for the 1st Australian Task Force (1 ATF) whose primary Tactical Area of Responsibility was Phuoc Tuy Province.



106 Field Workshop was to provide:

- 2nd line EME services, recovery and repair support at the 1ATF base and throughout the Tactical Area of Responsibility with Forward Repair and Recovery detachments as ordered, and
- in-theatre support for Armoured, Cavalry and Artillery equipment.

The workshop executed this role from 14 Oct 1968 through to 07 Oct 1971. It often carried out other third line tasks as the operational situation demanded.

In addition, 106 Field Workshop was expected to act as a 'combat service unit' and be prepared to fight for its own protection, hold ground and secure its equipment and all equipment undergoing repair. The workshop was required to contribute to base security and to active defence from standing patrols to fighting patrols.

This culture of performing above and beyond expectations was evident in the command journals kept from the Vietnam deployment; it is indicative of a mentality both found throughout RAEME and espoused by the current leadership of the re-raised 106 Field Workshop .

106 Field Workshop was raised as a response to improve battle worthiness and equipment recovery for the ATF's equipment, most notably armoured vehicles, including the Centurion Tanks. The 1st Independent Armoured Squadron Workshop initially had the task to maintain the tanks (first and second line) but had limited capacity for general repair and recovery of other A and B vehicles, armaments and other general equipment.

This workshop originally deployed at the beginning of 1968 in support of an Armoured Squadron; the workshop was itself disbanded providing most of the initial manpower for the new 106 Field Workshop and for a reconstituted first line Light Aid Detachment (LAD) supporting the Armoured Squadron. Other 106 Field Workshop manpower came from Australia, from 1ATF RAEME elements and from 102 Fd Wksp located in the Australian Logistic area at Vung Tau.

106 Field Workshop was under the initial command of Major W. Hicks-Hall, and the unit was based at Nui Dat where it deployed forward repair and recovery teams with, and in close support of, the fighting echelons wherever required. The unit was manned by regular and national service soldiers.

106 Field Workshop started life as a cobbled together organization but very quickly found its feet under the guidance of experienced officers, its senior NCOs and willing men as the repair and maintenance tasks rolled in. The unit lived up to its adopted motto of "The Punch behind the Task Force Fist".



Manning was maintained by individual replacement; this at times caused some problems of continuity and maintenance of disciplinary standards but did not appear to affect performance – production was maintained at a high level throughout the entire deployment.

During the deployment in Vietnam, it was quickly identified during repairs of armoured vehicles that rocket propelled grenades and anti-tank mines were causing significant damages and injuries to Australian forces, at times without good cause.

As early as Mar 1969, 106 Field Workshop identified that the weapon damage was not as significant as had been briefed to them and began providing technical advice leading to the development and fitment of up-armour kits within the 106 Field Workshop facilities.

These up-armour kits proved so effective that they were installed as a universal modification to Australian APCs in South Vietnam and later throughout the Australian Army. These modifications were credited with saving many lives.

On a lighter note, during the unit's tenure at Nui Dat, 106 Field Workshop adopted a unit mascot, LCPL Charlie Goloski. Charlie was by all accounts a very inquisitive and mischievous monkey. He spent the majority of his days in familiar company at the recovery platoon area, and would often go on recovery missions (and later evenings at the boozier!). Sadly, he passed away and was replaced with another monkey, Susie Goloski, who remained with the unit until its withdrawal to Australia in 1971.

106 Field Workshop was withdrawn from Vietnam to Bonegilla, Australia, to take up a role as a training unit supporting the RAEME Training Centre. On 07 Oct 1971 the workshop was disbanded. The majority of its documentation and files were destroyed or misplaced, and only limited official evidence of their core functions and operational reporting remain. However, the commander's war journals are telling in their pride and attitude towards the work the unit conducted in Vietnam

In the final commander's report for the unit prior to disbanding, the OC, Major J.S. Sinclair, made the following comments:

*It would have been appropriate to have included in this last report a short history of 106 Fd Wksp...and some comment on what the unit achieved. This has however not been possible. I think it is beyond question that this unit has been very successful throughout the almost three years of its existence. This is the measure of the men who have served with it. It is with some degree of regret that this final report is concluded.*

106 Field Workshop was re-formed for the first time in the early-1980s at Coopers Plains, and in 1993 moved to Enoggera as part of 6 Brigade Administrative Support Battalion. In Mar 1993, with F88 Austeyr's issued to the unit for the first time, 106 Field Workshop disbanded for the second time.



Of note, the current Artificer Sergeant Major of 106 Field Workshop was present at that parade. Throughout the period 1993 to today, the 106 designation has been intermittently maintained throughout the tumultuous times surrounding the disbanding of 6 Brigade and the integration of 6 and 7 Brigade Administrative Support Battalion to generate a legacy for the workshop.

It has achieved this, with the 7 Brigade Administrative Support Battalion/7 Combat Service Support Battalion canteen and club being named the Borlace club from 1993. In line with this, the newly re-raised 106 Field Workshop has tried to continue the legacy of the original unit, utilising the unit motto, mascot and tactical sign in our correspondence and on subunit PT uniforms.

Although now a sub-unit, the newly raised 106 Field Workshop has demonstrated from the beginning in 2013 that it can punch well above its weight, in spite of a manning state far below the standard for a Brigade workshop. 106 Field Workshop was immediately made the Battalion's main focus with the task of remediating all Brigade equipment to fully functional in preparation for the Brigade readying cycle.

106 Field Workshop is continuing to complete this task while concurrently raising a Forward Repair Group and Combat Service Support Team Headquarters to support the opposing force on Exercise Talisman Sabre 2013. The recovery element is tasked particularly above its capability and performing admirably, providing a full section to the Forward Repair Group while maintaining responsibility for the national recovery plan for South East Queensland and support to the rest of the Brigade.

Both retention and recruitment is excellent, with members withdrawing discharge and the workshop expanding as a disproportionate number of new craftsmen requesting it as their first posting choice.

As with our legacy unit, success in these undertakings is not a result of the equipment or organisation, but instead is a measure of the men currently serving in the unit. Their drive and professionalism lives up to the legacy which they are now part of, and allows them to perform above and beyond the expectations placed on them.

106 Field Workshop is an exciting organisation to be part of and, as it grows in the future it can only become an even more desired place to be.