The nature of the fighting

The feelings expressed in the song 'Khe Sanh' were common among Vietnam War veterans. Of course, soldiers returning from the First and Second World Wars had many of the same feelings, but the Vietnam War soldiers did not return home as heroes. Also, the very nature of the war created huge difficulties for the soldiers both in Vietnam and upon their return. The fighting was difficult for several reasons:

- The terrain was difficult. It was made up of rice paddies with open areas that were difficult to cross quickly, with dense jungle and steep ranges. The countryside was littered with small villages that made it difficult to avoid inflicting casualties on civilians.

- The enemy were hard to identify. This was guerilla warfare, the most difficult type to fight. Many South Vietnamese were sympathetic to the communists and fought as guerilla soldiers. They were often impossible to pick out from ordinary civilians because many were ordinary civilians, who also took part in raids and attacks on American and Australian soldiers with ambushes and hit-and-run raids. They were often audacious, laying mines where our soldiers were likely to walk, or carrying out drive-by killings in the towns and cities. The attack might come from an old woman or a young boy, throwing a hand grenade into a group of soldiers or a car.

- It was as much a war of the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people as it was a war with weapons. Both sides were trying to convince the people that they had their best interests at heart. But many Vietnamese saw the Americans and Australians as invaders and thought they had no place there. They may not have been communists but they believed the Vietcong were more interested in the problems of their people at the village level. Also, the American style of warfare was seen as clumsy—shooting and bombing indiscriminately with terrible weapons, such as napalm bombs and defoliantsprays such as Agent Orange. Australia and the United States were also seen as supporting a corrupt regime in South Vietnam that did not have the backing of the ordinary people.

Some Vietnamese people did appreciate Australia's presence in their country. At the end of the war many soldiers felt they had let these people down. It became a tragedy for many Australian soldiers that many Vietnamese had to leave their country as refugees after the communist victory. The issues involved in the Vietnam War were never straightforward. This made the fighting even harder.