

Operation Hermit Park, Vietnam, June 1971

“...On the 25 June, following a series of contacts during the preceding few days C/S 11 (1 Pl, V6 Coy, 4RAR/NZ, ANZAC Battalion) was uplifted by the APC troop which then delivered it to an RV with C Squadron, 1st Australian Armoured Regiment. At around 1430hr the Squadron Commander issued a brief set of orders for an assault on an area which had been identified to contain an enemy occupied bunker system. The plan was simple, the tanks supported by the infantry would directly assault the objective.

C/S 11 had advanced about 70 meters towards the bunker system when the forward left tank to our immediate front received a direct hit from what appeared to be a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) round. The round hit the top of the turret around the area just in front of the tank commander's cupola. Both he and his operator were immediately wounded as both turret hatches were fully open. Once the contact was initiated 1 Platoon moved forward to cover the left flank of the assaulting tanks which was exposed to a position facing from where it was suspected the RPG was fired. The left forward tank was immobilised and it was obvious that the crew had been injured when communication could not be raised with them. Smoke was coming out of the turret with no sign of crew movement, indicating that the crew could be seriously wounded. Being an ex-tank commander the Commander C/S 11 instinctively jumped into the tank which had been hit to check the crew. At this stage it was found that both the tank commander and the operator were critically injured.

Pte William Papuni then joined Adams and the Platoon Commander on the vehicle. After making a quick assessment of the situation the wounded tankies were removed from the turret onto the tanks engine deck and then to the rear of the vehicle. This activity was conducted by Adams and Papuni under heavy direct enemy fire at great personal risk to both soldiers. It was certainly acts of gallantry in a most dangerous situation carried out by both Adams and Papuni. Once the wounded had been recovered they were placed on the ground and prepared for evacuation by the platoon medics, Pte John Galley and Pte Mike Williams. This activity was also conducted by the platoon medics under heavy incoming enemy fire. The remainder of C/S 11 continued to engage the enemy during the period tank crew were being rescued. The quick action under extreme circumstances by the platoon medics Pte Galley and Pte Williams had the wounded stabilised and made ready for evacuation. There is no doubt that gallant actions by Adams, Papuni, Galley and Williams saved the lives of the Australian tank crew. The assault onto the bunker system continued, it lasted a further day...”

- Extract from Recommendation for Gallantry Award (July 1971)