

Half Circle



Number 74 - February 2013

(If this is hard to read, try increasing the picture size to 150%!!)

This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (2nd tour), South Vietnam, 1969/70, and for the families of those who are no longer with us. It is non-political, and is designed for us to have a laugh at ourselves, re-live our memories, and maintain camaraderie. Formal advice, when needed, should be sourced from Veterans' Organisations.

VALE - 2791197 PTE DAVID NICHOLLS (7 Platoon). We regret to advise that Dave passed away on 9th December 2012. Dave served with 7PL from August 1969 to February 1970. He was also wounded in action. We will remember Dave as being a young National Serviceman who took his service seriously, did his job well, and was a good reliable team member. We extend our condolences to Dave's family, including his son Daniel, who has kept us informed. Farewell Dave, you have served your Country well.



AT THE RAP:

Dave Wilkins - replacement of worn-out parts (hip).

Ross Bourke - medical.

Colin Summerfield - hospitalisation (dental)

Eddie Moon - ongoing treatment. *Ed, Wanda and family wish to sincerely thank all their friends in their "military" family for all their good wishes and support.*



**FOUR ROGUES
FROM 7 PLATOON,
1969**

John "Buddah" Martini
Ken "Legs" Leggett
Andy MacDougal
Bill Hartley

DAVE'S DIARY:

Continued from the previous edition of Half Circle.

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional data from Battalion and Task Force logs, as well as explanatory or descriptive commentary, are in plain text:

28 January 1970

I arrived in Vietnam a year ago today; and am still in the bush. But it is only another 16 days till the end of this last op. And thirty days before we head home for the land of Oz.

It is very difficult not to think of Australia and some leave. The obvious problem of preventing the diggers from switching off is a big one. People are getting a bit nervous with such a short time to go. On the whole however, they are still performing bloody well. These soldiers were the salt of the earth. They made you proud.

2 Feb

Two most unfortunate accidents occurred over the past couple of days. Pte Barry Thompson who went out on a resupply chopper and was a having a spell from scouting in 8 Pl, was back at the Dat for a few days. Apparently he was killed by an exploding hand grenade yesterday. It appears you are safe nowhere. One of his many good friends Cpl Don Harrod was with him at the time and described the situation immediately after the explosion as follows:

As he grabbed his chest, he dropped to the ground, and I grabbed him as he fell. I applied pressure to his chest as I held him, but it was too late. He had died instantly. I can't even remember who else was there that day. I do remember SGT George Bullock arriving from the RAP pretty quickly, but Thommo had gone.

Barry, a likeable larrikin Nasho, was a shearer and shed hand from Gunning in southern NSW. He had served in Vietnam since 11 February 1969, initially in 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit (Nui Dat) then in HQ ALSG (Vung Tau) and again in 1 ARU at Nui Dat before joining C Coy 5RAR on 30 June 1969. He was the last of our battalion to lose his life in Vietnam.



The CO holding "Bunny San" on Christmas Day 1969, with Pte Barry Thompson at right.

Secondly, 7 Platoon, whilst in ambush, had two members accidentally shot at night when a machine gunner lost his bearings in the pitch black and fired at movement, that movement being along his own track plan. Both persons were badly wounded and were dusted off within an hour of it happening (midnight). The Dustoff chopper couldn't land because of the dense bush so vertical Stokes litters were used on the hoist.

There were methods for the machine gun sentry to maintain his bearings at night, such as having small pegs stuck in the ground at strategic positions of the weapon pit to identify his arc of fire, so something clearly went wrong.

I don't know if nervousness because of RTA being imminent is the reason for this uncontrolled shooting, but I DO know that "being short" is causing people to become more nervous than normal. This very long and exhausting operation at the end of our 12 months' tour of duty may also have been a cause.

Post Script: Some years later it was my honour to sponsor a plaque in memory of 2789920 Private Barry John Thompson as part of the Royal Australian Regiment National Memorial Walk at Enoggera, Brisbane.

(To be continued)

Found at Mitchell Plateau, Kimberly region, Western Australia

Neville Hayne and Frank Moore were installing solar systems at Mitchell Plateau. A chopper pilot asked Frank if they wanted a ride – Frank said that he had had his fair share of chopper rides in Vietnam. The pilot asked him when he was there, and within a few minutes they established a link with 7PL 5RAR, 2nd tour in 1969. The chopper pilot was Andy MacDougal's son Hamish. Given that communications are not exactly easy in the Kimberly, it took two months for Andy, Neville and Frank to make contact. At the time Neville and Frank were in western Queensland. Andy recalls the last time he saw Neville "Neville was a machine gunner with 7 PL, and Frank his number 2. Neville contracted what we were told was Scrub Typhus and casevac'd out. After the operation finished, I visited him in hospital in Vung Tau - he was looking almost dead and lost a lot of weight. He didn't say a lot! That was the last time I saw him". Neville was flown back to Australia where he was diagnosed with Leptospirosis – a disease passed onto humans by animals via open wounds.
Andy MacDougal

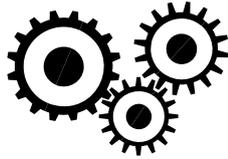
THANKS. To everyone – Australia wide - who conveyed their best wishes and support to those affected by bushfires in many states, your wishes are most appreciated.

Paddy took 2 stuffed dogs to Antiques Roadshow.

Oh!" said the presenter, "This is a very rare set, produced by the celebrated Johns Brothers taxidermists who operated in London at the turn of last century.

Do you have any idea what they would fetch if they were in good condition?"

"Sticks?" Paddy said.



COGS IN THE WHEEL": THE MACHINE GUNNER



MY SLOUCH HAT - MY STORY

By Dennis "Digger" Nevins
7 Platoon

If I hadn't kept a diary in the Funny Farm I would have remembered very little. I read it some years ago, and you know it's a pretty good yarn. I couldn't get over the amount of detail I put in, amazing when I think that at times I didn't want to put in the effort. I'm sure glad I did now. Jack Bradd wrote a yarn in Tiger Tales about me and my slouch hat. Here's my story:

I wore the slouchie in honour of the ragged bloody diggers of Kokoda, and I was pleased I was never told to remove it. I'm sure all our diggers knew it meant a lot to me to carry on the tradition. When I moved from Tracker PL to 7PL the slouchie came as well and everyone there accepted it. I was put into Jack Bradd's section - how lucky was I? Jack was the finest leader I served with in my 24 years as a digger. It was because of Jack that I became a better machine gunner. The slouchie that I transferred in with from Trackers was pretty buggered, so on my first op with 7PL, we were following up a noggie track. It was a pretty good one from memory, so I decided to leave our enemy friends a gift from Australia. I hung the slouchie from a tree at the side of a track with this message: "*Dear Nog, look behind you, I've got you covered*". After that op, it was back to the trunk and to drag out another slouchie. It had to be given the Kokoda character, so it was sat on, kicked, slept on and generally beaten in every possible way. By the start of Operation Kings Cross, any old digger would have been proud to have been the wearer of it.

That hat saw the remainder of our Vietnam tour, and on our return to Australia aboard the HMAS Sydney I made sure that Customs never got to see it, as it was covered in red clay and a dry green slime. Once home, I hung it on my bedroom door to pass on to future family generations. After a couple of months I noticed that it was missing, so I asked my mother if she had seen it. She then told me that she had thrown it in the garbage as she wasn't going to have that disgusting hat hanging around her house any longer. My mother was a great lady who was brought up on hard yakka in the outback, but it did take a couple of days to warm to her again.



A reunion of two very old mates. Kevin (Doc) Mulligan and Wayne (Herbie) Herbert met for lunch in Perth in mid-January, whilst Kevin and Lynette were visiting family.

THE 2013 AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS LIST. We are very pleased to advise that the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) has been awarded to three of our colleagues - Father Tom Shanahan (our Catholic Padre in Vietnam), Sig Jablonski (A Company), and Geoff Grimish, RAA (a veteran of FSB Coral) and a great supporter of Half Circle. We congratulate each of these recipients on being recognised for their work.



In Sydney and want to hit the little white ball? Then head for the Georges River Golf Course, Henry Lawson Drive Georges Hall. Geoff Grimish OAM and his team will make you most welcome. Geoff is a Vietnam vet (RAA), and is a great supporter of this newsletter. Phone (02) 9724 1615

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. Dennis Nevins considers starting a hat bashing business in the same building as Jack Bradd's exploding doorbell factory.
2. Your editor will consider offering a fully-paid holiday to Mukinbudin for anyone who takes the time to contribute to this newsletter. You won't get it, but it will be considered.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com
(02) 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with help from Daniel Nicholls, Dennis "Digger" Nevins, Dave Wilkins, Andy MacDougal, and Kevin Mulligan.