

# Half Circle



Number 146 – February 2019

This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (2<sup>nd</sup> 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.



**AT THE RAP:** Peter Commerford, Barrie Taylor, Barry Morgan. Advice has recently been received that Colin Summerfield had a fall and broke his hip. We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be.

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## **50 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH:**

5RAR was in Vietnam for its second tour of duty. After disembarking HMAS Sydney onto landing craft, we were ferried ashore and into Chinook helicopters for the trip to Nui Dat. Upon landing, we became aware of what dust is all about when the choppers landed. We were then trucked a short distance to our new 5 star accommodation at Ap An Phu (part of Nui Dat). Home was now a stinking, mouldy, leaking four-man tent surrounded by sandbags and duckboards for floors. We found out why when the wet season started. Each tent had four beds, a communal table, ammo boxes for furniture, a fold up chair courtesy of our 1RAR predecessors, and a single light globe. The method for turning these on and off was to stand on a chair and twist the globe in or out.

Jack Lake, in his usual caring, friendly and compassionate style, showed us around our base – “You’ve been shown your tents, that’s the mess over there, that’s the boozier and you won’t be spending much time in there, there are the picquet points, showers and drop toilets are in those “screened-in huts”, those half 44 gallon drums standing up in the ground are “pissaphones”, and the practice range is just outside the wire”. Introduction complete.

More next issue.....

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**TRAVELLING ABOUT:** Bryan and Arleen Schafer taking a trip from Sydney to the Barossa Valley. Blue told your editor that the time of writing they had only visited one winery, but one wonders for how long?

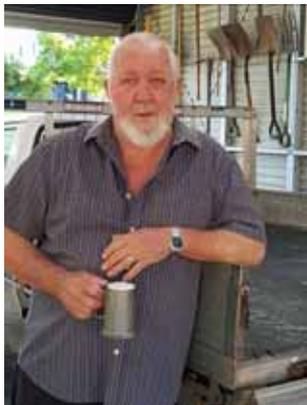
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**FROM RUSSELL (Kiwi) HILL:** Like everyone else, I was saddened to hear of Hippie Locke's passing. When I moved into the PL SGTs position of 8PL in August 1969 Hippie was one of those people who really stood out. When he was given a job to do, I knew I didn't have to worry as it was always done properly. On the other hand, when Hippie decided to tie one on, he let all and sundry know! Somehow, he managed to stay out of Jack Lake's sight, and consequently eluded the "Sand Bag Brigade".

In hindsight, being seconded to 5RAR and 8PL by Claude Ducker and Genghis, was in fact the highlight of my military career as I met some of the finest soldiers the Army has ever produced and it doesn't get any better than that.

To all of my mates, enjoy every day as it comes. You deserve it. *Kiwi.*

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**MUG SHOTS** – we have only had a small response for anyone still having their pewter from Vietnam in their possession and use. Ben Oram still has his (see picture).

The pewters originated when all those present during a stage of our tour of Vietnam ordered a pewter from a local supplier. The quality wasn't that good, and the pewters got a flogging, but almost 50 years later, they still do the job!



March 1970 – the Battalion arrived home after 13 months in Vietnam. Pictured are some rogues from 8PL who headed straight for the Rex Hotel in Kings Cross. Pictured are Matt Smith, Greg Parish, Geoff Pearson, John Yabsley and John Gardiner.



**FROM JOHN YABSLEY:** Here are three photos that I “acquired” from a sailor, showing the departure of HMAS Sydney to Vietnam from Garden Island, Sydney on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1969. The “Vung Tau Ferry” was of course laden with 5RAR troops, and all the Battalion’s equipment.

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**FROM YOUR EDITOR:** *The following is the first of a two-part article by Dennis (Digger) Nevins, outlining his service prior to, and in Namibia, Africa. Dennis was the only former 5RAR soldier to undertake service there. The second part – in which Dennis describes a terrifying situation – will be featured in next month’s Half Circle. Thanks, Dennis.*

The Jackaroo Part 2.

The Namibia Diary by 1201632 Corporal Dennis Brian Nevins.

The Namibia story starts years before we deployed, from 15 September 1980 until 6 November 1980 I was involved in Exercise Droughtmaster at Bourke NSW, at the time it was the largest exercise for Australian soldiers since World War 2. While on this exercise word got around about a peace keeping mission in Namibia SW Africa under the control of the United Nations and I was asked if I would like to go, so I accepted. Australia was asked to send an Engineer Construction Squadron the task was given to 17 Construction Squadron which was based at Holsworthy Barracks Sydney.

Returning home from Exercise Droughtmaster, I told Margie I had accepted the offer to go to Namibia, she thought it would be a great experience for me and was supportive of the posting. I Reported back to 2 Field Engineer Regiment after taking

some leave after Droughtmaster, once reporting in 20 members of our unit were mustered to go through medical checks, dental and wills amongst other things before going to 17 Construction Squadron. At this stage there was no certainty about whether the mission was going ahead because there was very little coming out of the United Nations.

Going by my home diary our detachment must have left Brisbane around the end of November by 2<sup>nd</sup> class rail, I well remember those hard- wooden seats, it was an overnight trip and I had no sleep. Once at the Barracks we married up with 17 Construction Squadron along with other Diggers who had arrived from other units. We carried out 2 weeks of training, my diary states it was 2 weeks of boredom but it gave me an idea what the unit was like. During the two weeks one of the requirements was to set up a mock wharf at the back of Holsworthy and then move all the unit equipment to the site, this was to give us an idea of the complexities involved when we would have to move the equipment to the wharfs in Sydney and despite the messing about the objective was achieved. Our unit members returned to 2 Field Engineer Regiment at Enoggera flying TAA, we still had no idea whether the deployment was going ahead and were placed on a 42-day Stand-by to move. We were to find out what other soldiers had told us, that the United Nations was frustrating, nothing seemed to move along.

The years passed, nothing seemed to be happening about Namibia, there was idle talk but we all thought it wasn't going to happen. In February 1989 I was posted at Canungra and orders came through that I would be going to Namibia between 11-18<sup>th</sup> of March, I was to travel to 17 Construction Squadron on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February to carry out training and administration then return home for pre-embarkation leave from the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. It was hard to believe that the deployment would go ahead as we had been waiting 9 years, I wondered at the time how many blokes were left from our first muster in 1980.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of March I left for Sydney to carry out more training, I had a sense of guilt as Margie was pregnant, I didn't like leaving her and the girls for 6 months but duty required me elsewhere. We carried out 1 week of training then proceeded to move all our Squadron equipment down to Sydney wharfs this included things right down to dunny paper and biro's, the unit once in country had to be self-sufficient for the first 2 months. I then returned home to Canungra for 2 weeks leave then returned to 17 Construction Squadron on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April. I left a pregnant Margie showing her baby bump but she glowed and looked beautiful as well as our beautiful girls.

The unit had its farewell parade on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, my birthday, the Prime Minister Bob Hawke was present, I was surprised how small he was. At this point the advance party was already in Namibia, we the main body left by RAAF on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April. We landed in Adelaide to re-fuel, then onto Perth, upon landing in Perth the aircraft had a fault so we had to sleep on the floor in the terminal for the night. The next morning after breakfast we had to spend the day killing time, I chose to go to Karrakatta camp with many others, it was a long day, we just wanted to get on with the job. That evening the aircraft left for Namibia, I had waited 9 years.

My Namibia diary now starts, for the first month of my diary a lot of my writing is missing as it had been partly chewed by mice at our rental home upon my discharge

from the Army in 1993, where I can remember I will add those words in to the best of my memory, otherwise the writing will remain as the mice left it.

The last bit to add to this introduction is, out of a contingent of 300 personal only 4 were ex Vietnam Veterans, 3 had served in Vietnam with the Royal Australian Engineers and myself who had served with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment, in fact I would say I was the only 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion soldier to serve in Namibia and that is counting the members of the second rotation who replaced us.

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From Roger Lambert:

The Iroquois Helicopter on duty in Phuoc Tuoy Province, Vietnam

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I was reading a book about the history of glue. I couldn't put it down.

Definition of a missing parrot – a polygon.

At the club last week, a mate said to me “Your glass is empty, would you like another one?” I said “What would I want two empty glasses for?”

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