

# Half Circle



Number 78 - June 2013

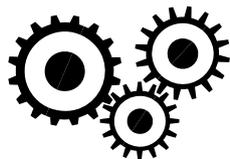
**(If this is hard to read, try increasing the picture size to 150%!!)**

This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (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:

Max Postle - knee surgery  
Bob (Tex) Cunningham - Oncology treatment - going well  
Kim Locke - medical (see story on page 2)  
Colin Summerfield - medical



## "COGS IN THE WHEEL"

### 215732 LCPL JOHN HELLYER - THE TWO-TOUR VETERAN



1964 was the year I joined the army and after recruit training, CORPS TRAINING AT THE OLD Infantry Centre, I was posted to B Coy 1RAR. At the end of 1964, I was posted into the new battalion - the Fifth. I was allotted to Anti Tank PL with some really good men - Norm Womal, Dick Bartley, Dave Fazackerley and Blue Millham - all regs who had also been in 1RAR.

It was here that I met Abe Brown S/SGT Med Corps who was after volunteers to be Hygiene Dutyman for the various Companies. Being young and keen I became the C Coy Blowfly.

Fast forward to April 1966. Boarding the HMAS Sydney for some place called South Vietnam was a mix of excitement and fear, however we settled into a 10 day voyage filled with various training and some social activities crossing the equator and a mixed

boxing match with the navy boys, all good fun. Upon arrival at Vung Tau harbour and disembarking from Landing Craft was when that very infamous call...“Fix bayonets!”, and our shock as the craft opened up. We saw a very large Negro standing there who said “Get those god damned pig stabbers off.....this was very amusing to those Americans but for us it was total embarrassment! Then, onto trucks and off to the beach at Vung Tau. After some weeks of training, on 23<sup>rd</sup> May we took off by chopper on Operation Hardihood. We patrolled, conducted Search and Destroy missions, and were involved in contacts. We were then allocated to Company areas (during this time we lost PTE Noack, KIA during a water resupply). C Coy was put at the most northern point. What followed was a time of digging in, living in small hutchies, the kitchen was under canvas, ablutions were primitive and hessian was being used all around. Each night was taken up with stand to's and then night picquet. As the hygiene guy my role with assistance of others was to oversee the building of latrines, showers etc and maintain same. We always made sure there was clean and ample hot water available for the men of C Coy. It was a time of patrol - work - patrol, with a respite in Vung Tau for 2 to 3 days. The muddy roads in the wet were hard at times to navigate and made life a little uncomfortable, but as the time passed improvements were made as tents finally got floorboards. The boozier became a real boozier and patrols etc continued. October saw me posted to 9platoon for the remainder of tour, until we returned to Australia.

1969...so it was back to Vietnam this time with D Coy. After a period I was posted back to C Coy as the Pay Rep. This job meant I was to record all pays in pay books, prepare payrolls, generate and act on Pay Variation Authorities (PVAs), and ensure all pays were correct and issued to the soldiers. I also assisted the Company Clerk in all facets of the Company's administration. 1969 was different - I returned to a city-like place with fencing, completed huts, buildings all over a swimming pool at bottom of Admin Coy near the airstrip, which had been completed and sealed. Whilst a lot of work was done and still needed to be done, this second trip seemed longer for what ever reason. We were able to fly home on five days R&R leave. For some reason Charlie company was still the same - different personnel on each tour bar a few but always had the characters and same level of playing up. To this day I have remained close to a lot of C Coy men and enjoy our little ANZAC weekends, and for that I am grateful.

*Ed's Note: as a person who worked very closely with John during the second tour, I am proud to say that he remains a lifelong friend. What many don't know is that John and his wife Hazel have fostered over 250 children over the past 44 years, and continue to do so. Don*

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**FOUND - 5715691 PTE KIM LOCKE (LOCKIE, HIPPIE)** Kim's daughter has made contact with our Association reps in Perth, and advised that he is now in care at the RSL Care Meadow Springs, 82 Oakmont Street, Mandurah, WA 6210.

Terry Major, within a day or two of being notified, has visited Kim, and his report is as follows:

“I went and visited Kim this afternoon with Rod McLennan (we all went through recruit training together at Pucka). Kim is in a very fragile condition; he's very emotional and very difficult to understand. His memory seems OK though, and he seemed to remember a lot of the names I mentioned to him. When I mentioned one particular bloke, he launched into a tirade of expletives! The unit in which Kim is staying is very comfortable. He has his own room with an ensuite.

He follows the Dockers and has Foxtel TV. He still enjoys a smoke and the occasional beer. He has suffered three strokes in the past and finds it difficult to move around with a walker. Fortunately, the staff told him we were coming, and greeting him after 40 odd years was extremely emotional for us both. I will keep in regular contact with Kim. Next time I go hopefully it will be a sunny day so I can take him for a walk in his wheelchair. He doesn't want for anything.  
Regards, Terry"

Ed's note: Allan (Bluey Austin) has also visited Hippiie, and underlines exactly what Terry has said. Thanks to both these men for making the effort to visit another one of our own.

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### **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:

11 Feb 1970 (continued)

C Company had established an area ambush when 8 Platoon became embroiled in a heavy contact. It was pinned down in thick jungle by heavy and accurate enemy fire from a platoon bunker complex as four relieving Centurion tanks from 4 Troop A Squadron 1 Armoured Regiment were approaching from the south west.

*At 1700 hours the enemy were still holding, and it appeared they were waiting for darkness. By this time however, the tanks from the Horseshoe had arrived. They had left about an hour after contact was initiated and when it was realised the enemy were intending to stay. As a further precaution they brought an engineer splinter team with them.*

Marrying up with 8 Platoon was a potential problem as the troop of tanks crashed through the scrub towards the contact area, but communications were maintained between the two groups and no friendly-force clashes occurred. The tanks came in directly behind 8 Platoon, making initial contact with Platoon Sergeant Kiwi Hill. Once he explained the layout to the Troop commander, the Centurions, observant not to run over our men lying in the undergrowth (but coming perilously close to some), systematically manoeuvred to the forward elements where they hooked up with 2Lt Pete Commerford.

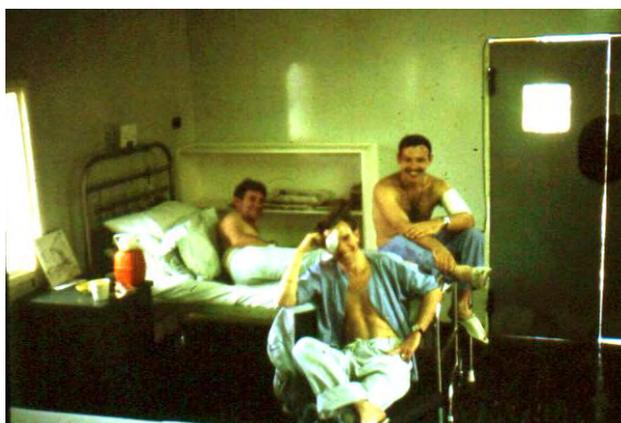
The tanks warned that canister rounds (containing hundreds of small steel pieces like cylindrical ball bearings) would be fired ahead through the scrub towards the bunkers (a bit like Napoleon's famous "whiff of grapeshot"). As Wally Magalis warned the badly wounded but calm Tex Cunningham of what was to happen Tex's body lifted off the ground several inches from the percussion of the first blast. With 8 Platoon in support, the tanks moved through and over the bunkers, swivelling their tracks when on top so as to crush and collapse them.

However as the tanks began the assault with 8 Platoon, the enemy pulled back and withdrew in a northerly direction. I continued to direct mortars at the enemy withdrawal routes.



**Privates Wally Magalis & Tex Cunningham after the battle and awaiting evacuation.**

Meanwhile, CSM Jack Lake had arranged for the Dustoff choppers to remain on standby until all was clear for evacuation of the wounded, but by now their fuel was running low. An LZ was secured with the assistance of the tank troop in the open area to the south of the battleground. Tex was stretchered out, but Dave and Wally walked to the chopper, which flew them to 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau. From there Tex was immediately transferred to an American hospital (at Long Binh?) for surgery but they were unable to save his right eye.



**Dave, Tex & Wally at 1 Field Hospital, Vung Tau**

There were no further casualties during the assault phase of the action.

*As is quite often the case with these types of contacts, the physical results are unknown as the enemy has time to organise the evacuation of their dead and wounded. Several packs were captured, an RPD (a good trophy) and a couple of blood trails sighted.*

*Once the enemy had withdrawn and our wounded were dusted off, I had hopes that my depth ambushes set by 7 and 9 Platoons would get some joy, but I began to lose hope by 1900 hours.*

But there was more to come; it wasn't over yet... (To be continued)

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**IAN LEIS REMEMBERS: 3793336 PTE SANDY McKINNON, 7PL.**

Wounded in action 4<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July 1969.

Sandy's life was just looking good when National Service interrupted a promising career/future. Sandy had not had an easy life growing up. His early childhood was very unsettled until at 4 years of age his grandparents took control of him. They gave him the love, attention and care that all young children deserve. Schooling was organised and Sandy was settled into the enjoyment of country life in Western NSW. Being a bush kid suited Sandy. He soon became capable of completing what was asked of him in helping out on the farm. He also became a good shot using an old .22 rifle to reduce the feral wild-life.

Sandy enjoyed these early childhood years and later his teenage years which were spent on another property in North Queensland with his mother and step father. He gained a good knowledge of farming practices. These years also gave Sandy a sound platform for his adult life ahead. He had a good understanding of life's values especially discipline and respect of his elders. By this time in Sandy's life his size and strength were an asset.

After completing his schooling he returned to Canberra where he commenced a 4 year apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. The last two years of his trade/training was completed in Melbourne. During these 4 years Sandy lived alone most of the time. He became very self sufficient, capable of living alone and managing his affairs. On completion of his trade/training he was given a leading hands position and paid above award wages. He was in control of his life and the future held good prospects.

I have already stated that his early life was not easy. He had to grow up fast. Little did Sandy realise just how his military service would imprint on his life both physically and mentally.

Sandy was WIA (wounded in action) twice (1) 4 July 1969 and (2) 31 July 1969.

In May 1968 Sandy commenced his rookie training at Puckapunyal. He was happy to be doing what his country asked of him. The army wanted him in RAEME Corps but Sandy wanted and volunteered for the Infantry Corps. Training for which he completed after joining 5RAR at Holsworthy. Sandy was very physically fit, a big boy, he enjoyed the military lifestyle. Many of us would remember his capabilities doing P.T. (physical training) with the M60 (machine gun). His stamina and strength made it all look easy. During our sea voyage to SVN he enjoyed a few boxing bouts against the navy and battalion personnel. He was able to win most of these.

Sandy was a machine gunner in 7 Platoon, a job he performed for all his tour except when he carried the SLR (self loading rifle) whilst being a forward scout.

Early in his tour Sandy wore the brunt of the responsibility regarding the loss of a SLR. This occurred when No1 and No2 machine gunners swapped weapons during a break whilst patrolling in APCs (Armoured Personnel Carriers). Sandy accepts some responsibility for this occurrence - but not all. He did two weeks on the hill in Vung Tau doing daily sand bag exercises and enduring the routine of life in a military jail. Not easy!! These two weeks were added to his enlistment time. Also the cost of the weapon and loss of two weeks pay were deducted from his pay book. At this time he was branded by his peers in a very negative manner. Rumour has it that the weapon was eventually found in the Armoured Compound.

Back in Australia contact was made to the Army Minister by Sandy's family (step father). The minister ordered an investigation into the incident. This investigation resulted in Sandy being reimbursed for the loss of pay but the records still show the incident in a very negative manner. The injustice of this incident has never been corrected or apologised for in an acceptable manner to Sandy. Today this incident is PAST - BUT NOT FORGOTTEN.

Sandy was part of 7 Platoon devastated by mines on 4 July 1969. He received multiple shrapnel wounds (approx 20) to his back, buttocks and legs. He spent ten days in hospital then returned to the company to resume duties. At this time he was placed on light duties because he was still recovering from his wounds. He was unable to carry a pack - let alone a pack fully loaded.

Whilst he was recuperating he assisted in the training and re-manning of the new 7 Platoon. He took on the job of forward scout for my section (2 Section). Members of the section assisted Sandy by carrying his gear for him. He carried no pack just basic webbing. He was a great forward scout - it was like following a D8 dozer blazing a path through the jungle.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1969 7 Platoon was involved in a day long contact with the N.V.A. (For a full story of this contact refer to "Anatomy of a Bunker Contact" written by Dave Wilkins) On this day Sandy and I became blood brothers, some actions we performed on this day have never been shared with others. When Sandy was shot whilst acting as my forward scout, we were lead section during a half platoon attack on a known N.V.A. bunker system. During this attack he actually lost another weapon (SLR). Before the bullets entered his chest they passed through the breach area (metal) and also the stock (timber) of his weapon. The wound hole in Sandy's chest was hideous, frightening. Many shrapnel fragments entered his chest lodging in and around his heart. Some of these fragments still remain there today.

Jimmy McMillan was KIA during this battle. I assisted/ half carried Sandy to the platoon headquarters group where he received initial medical care. At this time it was thought that I was also wounded as I was covered in Sandy's blood.

Our platoon commander Lt Ian Hosie (Hoss) asked where was Sandy's rifle. POLITELY, I told him where it was, the condition it was in and that if he wanted it, he could go get it. This weapon was never recovered. I assisted in Sandy's extraction; this in itself was

another hair-raising event. Sandy was strapped to a jungle penetrator and winched to the medivac chopper. This chopper whilst hovering to extract Sandy was shot at by a heavy N.V.A. machine gun. The winch wire above Sandy's head was hit and the chopper was also hit numerous times.

Whilst I was on R&R to Australia (August 1969) I caught up with Sandy and many other original members of 7 Platoon when I visited Concord Hospital, Sydney. They certainly were a handful for the hospital and nursing staff. Wanting to be together beds were often moved around in wards and many practical jokes were played on staff etc. The practice of shifting beds had to cease after a mix up with medication.

Sandy's recovery was not easy. He spent some time in the Concord and then received medical treatment as an out-patient. He was given convalescent leave during this time until his discharge from the military in 1970.

I was not to have contact with Sandy again until 1988 whilst attending a small Charlie Company reunion in Tamworth. Sandy recognised me by my voice - "That's Leisy", a very emotional reunion for me. Sandy had huge vision problems at this time.

Sandy married Shani, a nursing sister who cared for him at Concord. He has been assisted by her ever since. They have two children, Amber and Heath. The McKinnon family are a large extended family who have assisted Sandy and Shani and supported them. His medical recovery continued over many years and still affects his life today.

Post-Vietnam Sandy was determined to go forward in life. Assisted by Shani, together they established a life in Cairns, Qld. Shani returned to nursing and Sandy set up a successful mechanical business. He became a specialist with marine outboard motors and the service/maintenance of imported vehicles. During this period Sandy built "Honeychild" a sleek ocean going yacht which the McKinnon's - Sandy, Shani, Amber and Heath set off in to sail the world. They still have "Honeychild" today and enjoy the ocean as much as possible.

Their mechanical business back home was left in the care of a so called trusted partner who stripped the business of all its assets and left the McKinnon's without a business or an income.

It was whilst on this voyage that Sandy lost his sight. Shani, with two young children had to sail the boat back to Australia. Sandy was declared legally blind until the return of his sight some 15 years later - "a miracle in itself".

During the time of Sandy's blindness they lived on "Coodravale" the family property in the Wee Jasper Valley. Both Sandy and Shani were much respected residents. Shani assisted the residents with her nursing knowledge whilst Sandy was the odd job man. He was still capable of doing some mechanical repairs. He was also renowned for his removal of problem wombats. However, due to his vision problems he didn't always get the buck-shot pellets into the correct end - this caused a few hilarious problems - especially with the big buck wombats. With his limited vision it was amazing just what Sandy could achieve. Memory, feel and determination assisted.

I know that Sandy McKinnon is known and respected by the members of our Battalion. His journey in life has not been easy. He has survived. In all ways he has been very fortunate to have had his wife Shani standing behind him and both his children. (This occurrence has assisted many of us with wives and partners. Maybe more so than we like to admit).

When Sandy reflects back on his life's journey he feels some things are best forgotten - they are past, not all occurrences but some. He lives for today, his family and the future. He acknowledges the many valued friendships made during all walks of his life and enjoys contact with them.

Life today is on the South Coast of NSW. A new home and a lifestyle Shani and Sandy deserve. Most years on the 31<sup>st</sup> July I ring Sandy just to let him know that I still remember and acknowledge how our lives changed on this day in 1969.

Believe it or not! - This year Sandy had not remembered it was the Anniversary day.

"He's finally relaxed and enjoying life".

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ANZAC Day in Sydney, 2013.

Bill Hartley with his partner Margie, Andy MacDougal (standing), John Martini, Andy's wife Ginny, and John's partner Margie.

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**DENNIS (DIGGER) NEVINS'** answer to the duties of the Rifleman: There are only 4 things a rifleman needs to know. 1. In single file you follow the machine gunner. 2. On contact if the machine gunner goes right the rifleman go left. 3. rifleman do the night piquet so the machine gunner can have a good sleep. 4. At daybreak the rifleman wakes the machine gunner gives him a hot brew and tells what a good bloke he is. Dave's yarn is interesting when 8pl were in contact we were in ambush we felt maybe the nogs may withdraw out on our track. I remember the light shuffle of leaves they were very quiet and had no idea we were waiting. There were 4 diggers in control here - Lt Hosie, Jack Bradd, myself and Andy MacDougal. The nogs were right in front of the 4 of us. As always I have a diggers account in my diary plus a sketch; it's not a bad yarn.

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#### **SOME ACTUAL COMMENTS MADE ON EMPLOYEE FILES IN THE U.S.:**

- I would not allow this employee to breed.
- This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot.
- Donated his brain to science before he was through using it.
- Some drink from the fountain of knowledge. He only gargled.



How's this for a tattoo? Found on the internet and submitted by Bob Hooper.



**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 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.

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**IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:**

1. Not sure yet.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - [donharrod@bigpond.com](mailto:donharrod@bigpond.com) (02) 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with help from John Hellyer, Ian Leis, Dennis Nevins, Terry Major, Bob Hooper, Dave Wilkins, and Bluey Austin.