

Half Circle



Number 167 - November 2020

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 – ROBERT REID. It is with regret that we advise that Robert Reid – son of our late mate and 7PL member Jim Reid, passed away on Thursday 1st October 2020. Rob was very proud of his father's Vietnam service, and he also served in our Military Forces. Rob and Jim's memories will live on, as Rob's wife Lisa has indicated that she wishes to continue receiving Half Circle. This is to show her 11-year-old son James his father and grandfather's service to Australia. We all send our condolences to Lisa – a very brave lady.



AT THE RAP: Vince Feenstra, John Hellyer. We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be.



A Caribou, Luscombe Field, 1969

FROM DAVID WILKINS – THE C COMPANY 5RAR (2nd Tour) BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTOS

I have sent the final photo project to Ted Harrison who will place it on the 5RAR website, hopefully by the time the next HC is published.

A few stats:

While a Rifle Company established strength was about 120 all ranks, we rarely had that number and certainly not in the field. And with casualties, reinforcements and transfers over our 12 months there, we had 243 blokes serve in C Coy.

We had 7 killed in action and 41 wounded including two soldiers twice wounded.

In sending out the idea of our photo project we now have pictures of 142 men, most before and after shots, while some just have a single photo.

Some interesting pictures have come to light which may be of interest:

The first is of a radio operator whose photo I wanted to include in the revised (3rd) edition of *The Year of the Tigers* but we were (then) unable to identify him. Through the photo project, however, it turns out to be Pte Ray Weston (attached).

Two other photos that are attached came from Blue Schafer. They are of the Mushroom Club, empty, so must have been taken while we were on ops.



Pte Ray Weston



The Mushroom Club (1) (named by C Coy 1st tour)



The Mushroom Club (2) – Photo courtesy Blue Schafer

Ed's note 1: David Wilkins has spent countless hours in compiling our "Before and After" photos of us in Vietnam, and in later years. On behalf of every man who served in C Company 5RAR in Vietnam during 1969/70, we offer Dave our sincere thanks for such a tremendous job.

Ed's note 2: The photos to be posted on the 5RAR website have been slightly delayed. Please keep watching for the project to make our piece of history part of the public record.

FROM AN ARTICLE IN "THE BULLETIN", A PUBLICATION FROM LEGACY (VICTORIA). The introduction is by Legatee Peter Jenke:

I mentioned in a previous edition of The Bulletin that I was keen to run pieces on our Legatees, simply because there are just so many stories out there which never see the light of day. And that's a pity because we see each other on Tuesdays (or at least we used to) and chat to our fellow Legatees, most of whom are getting on in years, without any real idea of the person behind the chats. In this edition, the Legatee in the spotlight is Legatee Ken Leggett, from my Oakleigh/Waverley Branch. Ken is not well known to many Legatees outside our Branch, simply because he is not a regular visitor to Legacy House – unless it's to accompany visiting Waverley Widows, which he does religiously – but those same ladies absolutely love him, largely because he attends their monthly meetings without fail, sells the raffle tickets, conducts The Remembrance and does the afternoon tea - and has done so for many, many years.

Legatee Ken Leggett (O/W Branch)



Ken was a National Serviceman who, when allocated to the Infantry, was posted to the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) and sent to Vietnam. That's probably all that most fellow Legatees would know about Ken – if they even know that much. But, as we move into the Spring horse

racing season, you might be surprised that prior to being called up, Ken was a jockey. Now those who have seen me would not be surprised to hear that I am not a jockey. But, I have owned and ridden horses for decades – as well as fallen off them and done myself serious injury. I say that because unless you have ridden and been around horses, the average punter has absolutely no idea of how dangerous horse riding can be. But Ken wasn't just a horse rider – he was a race jockey and I reckon that would have prepared him extremely well for his time as a rifleman in Vietnam. If you do ride race horses (over jumps as Ken did, what's more), I'm thinking that Vietnam would have held little fear for Ken. Anyone who can sit on a 500kg animal with a mind of its own travelling at around 60+km/hr with just a couple of toes in the stirrups and no contact with the saddle, is seriously brave. **This is his story:**

My days in the horse-racing stables started on weekends when I was 14 years old. When I was 16, I got a job in the Railways in an office just behind Spencer Street. By that time I had gone to the Phil Burke Stables in Crown Street Newmarket, at the top of the straight six, next to Flemington Racecourse. I learned to ride the ponies before progressing to the quieter racehorses. I was too heavy to become a professional jockey, so I set my sights on the world of horse racing as an amateur. I had my first race ride on the 27th January 1964. Altogether in Australia, I had 18 rides for 3 firsts – 2 of which were on the same horse on the same day in the first and last races - at

Merton - on January 1st 1966. In March 1966 I boarded a ship, the Greek flagged *Ellinis*, bound for England via the Panama Canal before landing in Southampton and finding work in Toby Balding's Stables in Fyfield, a little village near Andover in Hampshire. Toby was a well-known UK trainer and ran a great stable. I rode trackwork and took horses to many racecourses, including in 1967 when, as a strapper, I took a horse, **Scottish Final**, to the Grand National at Aintree, Liverpool. That



particular Grand National is famous (infamous?) for the win by **Foinavon** (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foinavon>) when most of the riders came off or stopped their horses in a huge pile up. (For those interested, check out the You-Tube clip of the race <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tls18p0AYjM> – it truly is quite incredible - Ed). **Foinaven** came from being 200 yards behind as horses fell in front of him. Earlier that day I had ridden track work on the course. **Scottish Final** finished 8th. 18 horses finished that race, 26 didn't.

In the end I had 3 race rides in England for a 3rd at Newton Abbot, a 6th at Windsor and a 6th at Wetherby. Returning to Australia in November 1967, I had 3 more rides

for a 5th, a 6th and a 1st at Merton. On the 17th July 1968, as a 21-year-old, I commenced my National Service. So ended my riding career.

My recruit training was done at 2RTB at Puckapunyal, where my time was spent making new mates and taking cold showers, all whilst having to adjust to Army routine and discipline. But, after 3 months, it was starting to get easier and civilian life was a distant memory. March-out was marked by the issue of our new Army gear and visits by our parents and families. Then, on to Singleton to the Infantry Centre and warmer weather. Here we were taught battle positions, map reading, how to follow compass bearings and become proficient in weapons handling, as well as being sent on firing and field exercises – both day and night. We were now 6 months into our Army service and the next step was to Ingleburn, NSW, 40km from Sydney.

Here we were issued our GP boots – this was significant because it meant we were going to Vietnam. No more boots AB and gaiters (for those that remember) which gave us licence to rubbish those who didn't have the new issue.



A few months later, we were off to Vietnam. We flew from Sydney to Darwin and from there after a few hours wait, onto Singapore. Another wait of a few hours and then onto Saigon. The final leg was from there in a RAAF Caribou to Nui Dat. For



the first four weeks we were held in the Reinforcement Wing before being divided up into Battalion lots. My mates and I were allocated to Charlie Company, the 5th Bn, RAR, - but into different Platoons. I went to 7 PI, others to 8 & 9 Platoons. We were issued our gear and rifles and whatever else we might be required to carry, be it the M60 machine gun, radio, hand grenades or whatever and we were off on our first

mission lasting 6 weeks. The noises all these weapons could make when used in anger were truly frightening to all of us.

When the fighting began, the reality well and truly set in. We lost mates, one in particular, Jim McMillan (https://www.5rar.asn.au/honour_roll/mcmillan.htm - Ed)

was a good mate. Others were wounded and sent home. Other operations followed, as did more casualties.

When 5RAR's tour ended, we were sent home on the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney via Perth where many of the boys from WA were allowed off. Then on to Adelaide where others departed and finally to Sydney. It was a good trip. From Sydney I went on leave and back home to Ashburton where my mother was ever so pleased to see me. She had lost a brother in WW2.

After I was discharged, I returned to my old job with the Railways but struggled to settle and ended up moving up to Mt Tom Price in WA in 1971 to work in the mines. Not long afterwards I left but returned in 1973, working in Tom Price, Paraburdoo and Dampier and stayed for another 20years. I joined Legacy in 1995."

NB. When corresponding with Ken to prepare this story, by chance he mentioned a Dave Wilkins who had been Ken's Company Commander in 5RAR with Ken and someone who is very active in the Unit Association and still in close contact with Ken. I was completely blown away because in my final year at Duntroon, then Major David Wilkins was the Regular Army OC of the RMC Company of which I was the Cadet in charge. I worked very closely with Dave that year. Dave was subsequently posted



to PNG where he became quite ill, was medically down-graded and Corps transferred from Infantry to Legal, having qualified as a lawyer. He

subsequently became a successful barrister in Sydney and someone whom I see every year at a luncheon I attend at Vic Barracks in Sydney. Needless to say, it really is a very small world.

Ken Leggett, front left at the table, David Wilkins, second left, standing.



Remember? And what about the contents of the ration packs?



Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from David Wilkins, Paul McQueen, Roger Lambert, Ken Leggett, behind-the-scenes assistance from Gary Townsend (the Tiger Tales Editor), Ted Harrison (the 5RAR Association Webmaster), *supported by The RB Co, and powered by the Lambs Valley Wine Company, Hunter Valley, NSW.*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF HALF CIRCLE – Dennis (Digger) Nevins submits the final entries from his diary, detailing his tour with 5RAR in Vietnam, 1969/70. This also includes the final words to 5RAR from the CO, Lt Col Colin Khan, as HMAS Sydney brought us home through the Sydney Heads.