

Thanks to Reg, a Forward Scout.

I was deeply saddened to hear of Reg Smith's death. In 1969-70 Reg was an Infantry forward scout in C Company 5RAR during the Vietnam War. And a highly successful scout at that; and one who saved the lives of many.

For the uninitiated, I will describe the job of a forward scout in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam.

He was the forward or point soldier of a Rifle Section during patrolling operations. As such he was usually closest to the enemy. He and his number 2 scout, working as a team, were the ears and eyes of the patrol. They provided early warning of enemy signs or sightings, and their objective was to see the enemy before being seen themselves, and thereby give us the advantage. Hence the scout's stealth, his cat-like vision, his acute sense of smell and hearing, and in fact all his highly-attuned senses, instincts and reflexes were so alert that he was like a jungle animal hunting prey. In close country, where vision was at times restricted to just 5 to 10 metres, the job was particularly demanding both physically and mentally, as the scouts had to avoid leading their section into enemy ambushes, booby traps, anti-personnel mines, panji traps and bunker systems. Theirs was the most dangerous and respected task, but they were very proud of it and retained their position with honour. Of course they referred to everyone further back in the section as "Pogos", so it was clearly a relative term.

Returning to Reg Smith, in particular. He was the forward scout for his section in 9 Platoon and was instrumental in providing that early warning throughout our 1969-70 tour of duty in the Vietnam War. I am sure there are many stories about Reg but, from my own experiences with him, one instance comes to mind. It was on 10th February 1970 during our final operation, and although Reg had been promoted to Lance Corporal by that stage, he was still working as a forward scout because C Company was operating on vastly reduced numbers (for an explanation of this, see the 5RAR website article "*Final Days of the Second Tour*" in the "*Once We Were Soldiers*" section).

I made the following entry in my field notebook for that day:

"Lady Luck smiled upon us today! And some good soldiering.

"Three enemy contacts without casualties, 8 booby-trapped grenades and an M16 mine, all discovered without casualty.

"CHQ moving with 9 Platoon. Lcpl Reg Smith, who was acting as forward scout for us, discovered an enemy camp in thick scrub. As Reg carefully approached it, as if from intuition or by instinct, he stepped high over something. He looked back and saw that he had stepped over a trip wire attached to an instantaneous fragmentation grenade."

My note detailed the clearing of the camp and discovery of the booby traps and M16 anti-personnel mine as well as the clashes with the enemy before returning to comment on Reg, as follows:

“One can only imagine what may have happened if Smithy had tripped the wire or stepped on the M16 mine. It would have killed or wounded anybody within 30-40 metres.”

For this and many other instances over there Reg, our thanks and great respect.

Dave Wilkins

Captain

C Company Commander (December 1969 – March 1970)