

# Half Circle



Number 52 - April 2011

**(Please increase picture size to 150% for a better read!)**

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.

## **WARNING ORDER - ANZAC DAY 2011, SYDNEY**

**Numbers of 5RAR diggers attending the Sydney march have been dwindling in recent years. Geoff Pearson has advised that our CO, Brig Colin Khan DSO AM (Retd) will be in Sydney this year, and will lead 5RAR. PLEASE do your best to be there, participate in the March, and say G'day to the CO.**

**DIANNE MANHOOD.** I am very sorry to have to report the passing of Dianne Manhood, wife of Dennis, of 9PI. Dianne had been battling serious illness for some time, and put up a wonderful fight. Dianne will be remembered as being full of life, enjoying company, and was a great supporter of the 9PI group, and she will be sadly missed. Our sincere condolences are extended to Dennis and family.

**AT THE RAP:** Ian Cooper, Barry Morgan, Susan Lake

**RAILWAY TICKETING FOR TPI's IN QLD:** Jim Lowry advises that the existing system has been replaced with a voucher system. For those concerned, please contact Qld Railways, make your application, have two passport photographs available, and ensure that you are covered. You only have until 14<sup>th</sup> April.

I was going to get a job as a historian, found that there was no future in it.

**DIRECT FROM AFGHANISTAN – The OC of Combat Team Charlie, Major David French (OC C Coy) has furnished this outstanding report. Thanks**

**David, and our sincere best wishes and support for the remainder of the tour.**

**Combat Team – Charlie, Battle Group Tiger.  
Mentoring Task Force – 2.  
The First Half Of The Tour.**

G'Day to all the C Coy 5 RAR Old and Bolds, both First and Second tours, On behalf of the men of Combat Team – Charlie I would like to thank you all for the support, prayers and thoughts which have been sent our way during the first half of Operation HERBERT, The Combat Team – Charlie contribution to mentoring operations in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan. More than one of you has also taken the time and spent the money to send the boys a care package and these are greatly appreciated and well received. Thank you.

I thought I would take this moment to provide you all with an update on how the current crop of Charlie Boys are doing. In a surprise to no one, they are doing very well and have achieved great things thus far. As I am sure many of you are aware we are working in Deh Rawud District, located to the West of Tarn Kowt by about 40 kilometers as the crow flies or 60 as the road winds. What you may not know is that we are working to an American unit on a day to day basis. That unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment or 1/2 SCR, have been brilliant at looking after us and the soldiers and officers from both Armies have forged close bonds that will last many years. Out in Forward Operating Base HADRIAN we have had the pleasure of living and working with the soldiers from Apache Company as they mentor the Afghan National Police. On a number of occasions we've combined forces with them and achieved some pretty good results. This has included one memorable patrol which saw a bunch of Americans, Aussies, Afghan soldiers and police crossing the Helmand River in a local boat to intercept an IED Cell. After successfully finding the IED and detaining a couple of suspicious types, the next step was to disarm the device and destroy it. As it was approaching dark and the Explosive Ordnance Team was a fair way away we prepared to bed down for a cold night in the fields surrounding the IED. The ANA and ANP had a better idea, and while OC Apache Coy and I discussed the sleeping in the fields option with the Afghan commanders, an intrepid ANA soldier walked over to the IED, pulled out the wires and then dumped the IED at the feet of CAPT Matt Piosa and I. IED disarmed, and we all slept in our beds that night. Suffice to say we've discouraged this practice!!

Just recently the Apache Boys and the rest of the Strykers have moved AOs to Dand District, just south of Kandahar. The prior unit in this AO has taken some heavy losses in their tour and our best wishes go with our brothers-in-arms as they close out the last months of their tour in a deadly district. They have been replaced by a Company from the 4<sup>th</sup>/70<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment. A unit much smaller in size but lacking nothing in enthusiasm.

Deh Rahwud has proven to be an interesting area to work in. On one side we have a terribly violent and oppressive enemy conducting an almost conventional style defence, on another a more classic insurgent enemy and in another a relatively benign environment where the soldiers are made to feel most welcome. The whole Combat Team has been able to adjust to this variety of challenges very well, showing that the hard work and training that we have done has paid off. Anyone who has peddled the line of 'the dumb grunt' has clearly not seen this generation of soldiers in action. They are able to combine their natural Aussie charm and friendliness on the locals (particularly as the Dutch girls are now gone), with their healthy distrust of authority and observation skills to make repeatedly shrewd judgments on the Afghan locals around them and who is who in the zoo.

Our main role out here is to improve the capabilities of the Afghan National Army (ANA) so that they have the skills and nous to defend their country against their own enemies. Many things have been written and said about the ANA and what they can and can not do, but at the end of the day they are just like our boys, young men who have signed on to defend their country, for better or worse, and in terribly difficult conditions and for that alone they deserve our respect. For the soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 205<sup>th</sup> Hero Corps, this means serving in isolation from families and friends for very long periods of time. They are a mixture of the old and the new. The old being the ex-mujahedeen, many of whom are in their first 'real job' in their lives with the ANA. They serve side-by-side with soldiers and officers who were trained by and worked with the Soviet Army or in the post-Soviet Communist era Afghan Army. These guys may well have exchanged shots against one and other in the 'old

days' and are now required to work together. Some of them get it, some not, and it always makes for interesting planning sessions if nothing else.

The new are the young officers, soldiers and sergeants who have joined the ANA post-2003. Their motivations are different to the older generation and they are mostly terribly keen to learn. After working through or around the language barrier the boys have found that in many ways they are very similar to the ANA lads. In fact, the ANA can often display as crass a sense of humour as the worst (or best depending on how you look at it) Digger. Much chai (tea) has been downed in efforts to work together and while it is not always perfect, the improvements in the capabilities of the ANA are proof enough of the efforts the Diggers have made.

Most of the Combat Team mentors live with their ANA counterpart companies in outlying patrol bases. Here they can live and work by day and night, side by side, each day bringing a little improvement and a new challenge. The Diggers have taught the ANA guys how to improve their shooting, patrol techniques, searching for IEDs and mines. The ANA 'Askars' have taught our mob how to work with the Afghan people, how you can live your life without 24/7 access to Facebook (Simple – Have a mobile phone that plays videos!!) and a host of other cultural lessons which, although they may not appreciate it yet, will serve them well in later years.

Of course, every soldier wants to test themselves on the field of battle. For the majority of the Combat Team this test has been well and truly taken, and passed, in the Tangi Valley.

On 04 December, just days after a major incursion into the Valley had drawn nil insurgent response, the members of O33D, a Mentor Team of about 20, with their ANA counterparts from Patrol Base Ana Juy moved into Derapet, the scene of the engagement in which Lance Corporal Jared Mackinley had been killed three months before. The team split into two elements, north and south of the river, each side having a sniper pair in tow with a patrol from V32, our Cav element, providing support by fire from the aptly named IED Hill. The ANA patrolled with their mentors, and as the southern element moved through DERAPET, the boys started to pick up signs that the Taliban were around and up for a scrap. Fields quickly emptied of workers, kids disappeared and while the temperature remained warm, the atmospherics or 'The Mabo' as the boys call it (Because it's all about 'The Vibe') plummeted.

Just as quickly reports came in from the sniper pair on the North side of the river that they were tracking a couple of large groups of men. Then the groups of men disappeared into qualas and aqueducts and re-emerged as large armed groups of men lugging AK47's, PKMs and bandoliers of ammunition. As soon as they made the mistake of wandering within range the snipers gave them the good news and the job was on.

What followed was thirty minutes of maneuvering forces as each side attempted to get the drop on the other. O33D utilized both the high ground and the low ground on the South side, bounding forces forward to support each other with the ANA moving well. Of course it isn't wasn't all one way traffic and at one stage a group of ANA and a couple of Australians, including one Major who should have known better, were pinned on top of a feature admiring the accurate fire of the Taliban. They were good enough to be bloody close, but not good enough to get a hit.

The Diggers continued to move forward, bounding through aqueducts in scenes eerily similar to the 6 RAR engagement from August. Accurate and relentless fire was poured at them and the soldiers were really putting into practice all the elements of fire and manoeuvre as they went. Covering each other, drawing fire to allow their mates to move. Eventually, about an hour into the contact, a small element reached an area near a feature known as the 'Sphinx' a feature, which like so many 'Sphinx' features before, was the dominating terrain in the area. Just in front of the Sphinx was a wall blocking further advances and behind that a series of qualas which the boys were keen to occupy and get some fire back on the enemy. Unfortunately the Talibs had the same idea.

While it would have been nice for everyone to meet in the middle, shake hands and have a bit of a chuckle about great minds thinking alike etc etc, the reality was a bit more 'sporting'.

The lead element of 6 Australians, some engineers, Infantry and Mentors, were preparing to break into the qualas across the wall and were waiting for the ANA to link up. In a true case of seconds counting the Taliban got there first and began to assault and flank the lead group in numbers. The boys returned fire but caught up against a wall on one side and open ground on the other, with the Sphinx sitting above them, it quickly became apparent that the position was not tenable. Footage from the day shows a barrage of fire surrounding the lead engineers as they crawl backwards under the cover of their infantry mates who were firing

over their heads. As the Taliban force of some twenty fighters assaulted forward the Diggers were forced to conduct a 'Tunnel of Love' to the rear. As one American Operator was heard to murmur later when viewing the video "That's the first time I've seen Australians doing the Australian Peel'.

The boys plunged back into the aqueduct and began bounding rearwards, now under heavy fire from three sides. LCPL Avery and CPL Lang doing a great job at controlling the forward element with CAPT Scott Stort ensuring the ANA remained cool and calm and didn't get lost in the 'Fog of War'. The Taliban, knowing that shortly Artillery or Helicopter Gunship fire would soon be raining down on them, chose to get in close and fight from the inside. A tactic that I am sure all of you would be familiar with.

With O33D restricted to the aqueduct, unable to get sufficient fire forward to stop the assaulting Taliban and in order to avoid getting rolled from the flank, they continued to bound back to the eastern edge of Derapet to try and get some ground they could fight from. The move was conducted in good order with all personnel and Armies putting in their two bobs worth. When the 'safety' (ahem) of the qualas was reached the next decision was to try and get the ANA into a formation to assault. Unfortunately at this stage the Taliban again proved how tenacious and determined they are and closed to within twenty metres of the force. A few grenades convinced them this was a bad idea but also seemed to confirm to the ANA that today was not their day and they informed the O33D elements that it was time to go home. After a torrid two hours there weren't too many complaints. The fight was not yet over though. The combined force continued to move rearwards, still receiving effective fire and pumping a fair bit back the other way as well. Finally the team was able to get the space to bring in some of the big weapons systems and a few bursts from an Apache gunship put pay to the Taliban for the day.

We have engaged the Taliban on a number of occasions including one memorable day of seven and a half hours. While these contacts are, thankfully, not common, what they lack in frequency they make up for in intensity.

On the other side of the COIN, the soldiers have been equally effective in conducting Shuras with the locals, talking with them and gaining an understanding of their wants, needs and issues. The cultural differences between us are as stark as the mountains surrounding us are high and it takes some getting used too in order to understand what people are really saying. An unfailing politeness of the part of most Afghans means that the spoken word may not contain the meaning. As best as we can figure, below are some examples of Afghan Lingo:

- No = No.
- Maybe = No or maybe.
- Maybe we can do this. = No.
- Yes = Maybe or No.
- We will do this = Maybe we will do this.
- Okay, no problem. = I really don't want to talk about this now and hopefully this answer will put you off for a couple of days.
- Let's go now = Let's go now.

It's a code to crack and can be a frustrating experience, but ultimately, as guests in their country, we do what we need to in order to understand.

Of course with operational service in a warzone comes loss. And no element serving here has been immune. On 02 Feb 2011, as they have done so often during this tour, the brothers of Combat Team – Charlie lived up to their chosen motto 'Never Alone, Fight Together'.

Corporal Richard Atkinson and his boys were where they could usually be found, at the front of a patrol of Australian and Afghan Infantry, searching ground as the patrol moved into the village of Kakrak E-Sharqi. This team of engineers was good, having just days before uncovered the biggest cache find in the Tangi Valley in a cave system just west of where they were currently located. Just one of many finds they had made, one of many routes they had cleared.

They moved forward under the cover of their Infantry mates who watched their flanks and their front, letting them get on with the job of searching the ground. As I had come to expect so often of Akker and his crew, they found an IED and proceeded to secure the area.

As the search commander, Akker could have sat back and directed from the rear. But he wasn't that type of guy. He pulled his junior blokes back behind him, and with his best mate Rosey, went forward to confirm the location of the device. Then the explosion.

Akker was mortally wounded. He was gone within seconds. But his mates didn't stop fighting for him. Sappers Windyana and Tennick searched straight up to the wounded soldiers. Our medic, Corporal Howes assisted by Corporal Archer-O'Leary and Private O'Shea, showed blatant disregard for their own safety in rushing to Akker and beginning to care for him.

His mate, Rosey, although dazed and confused, bleeding from his own wounds, started compiling reports to send up the chain of command. The American AME pilots willed their helicopter through rapidly deteriorating conditions, flying blind, essentially crash landing to get the blokes out. Heroes each one, although they themselves would deny any such accolade as appropriate.

Akker was never alone. We fought for him together.

When Akker reached Tarin Kowt Hospital and his passing was confirmed I witnessed one of the more moving scenes in my military career. Two American soldiers, who never knew or met Akker, climbed an unsteady wall, jumped across onto the roof of the hospital in driving rain and moved to the Hospital flag pole of their own accord. There they lowered the American flag that was flying there to half mast, saluted for a good thirty seconds, before returning to earth via a drain pipe.

Since that day we have met the Taliban on the field of battle on a number of occasions, and continued to make great progress working with the ANA. The ANA know, as we do, that when the going gets tough we can count on each other and our other allied friends. I could fill pages with what Combat Team – Charlie has done well, but of course, sitting on top of the ladder and looking down I see smiling faces. The blokes a bit further down have a different view, and I will get them to provide their version of events in the coming months. No one likes to hear a Major ramble for too long.

I wish you and your families all the best, and thank you for your support.

Take care.

Dave French

Major

Officer Commanding

Combat Team – Charlie

Mentoring Task Force – 2

*“Never Alone, Fight Together”*

#### **Deh Rahwud Roll of Honour**

Private First Class Corey Broad (Apache Coy, 1/2 SCR) KIA – 04 Oct 2010

Sergeant Qarib Ullah (Afghan National Army) KIA – 20 Nov 2010

Corporal Richard Atkinson (Combat Team - Charlie) KIA – 02 Feb 2011

*‘Gone, Not Forgotten’*



033C and Apache Coy crossing  
the HELMAND River



Members of 033A at HESAR CP



Shura in the Tangi Valley after a clearance operation.

**Please note that Operation HERBERT, was named in honour of the outstanding courage shown by our own Wayne Herbert on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1969, when 7PI was decimated by land mines.**

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### Dave's Diary

Continued from last edition of Half Circle.

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional explanatory or descriptive commentary is in plain text:

**6 Nov 1969** (continued)

*Much of the area of today's movement (about 2½ clicks) was completely defoliated and devoid of recent enemy sign. This was a previously well-used enemy area so this defoliation by "crop dusting" obviously works well. We were unaware at the time that defoliant sprays such as Agent Orange were toxic to humans who came in contact with the foliage or drank from streams previously contaminated by the spraying.*

C Company had been methodically patrolling and searching for tracks and other sign of enemy occupation. Streams and rivers as well as thick bush were also likely locations for enemy camps.

**7 Nov**

*No defoliation here so the scrub is very dense and sure enough, we have subsequently bumped some enemy and discovered currently-used bunker systems. Most of these bunkers are about 4' x 8' with 2 to*

3 feet overhead protection of logs and dirt. As usual, tables and chairs are made from local timber, bamboo and vines. They are primitive but well-constructed.

Cookhouses are in most cases individually-sited near a bunker with one or two cooking stoves and long, covered flues leading away to dissipate the smoke. In all cases, bush and leaves are used to camouflage the construction from both air & ground observation.

With C Coy at present we have a Chieu Hoi VC (or Hoi Chanh) from this area, and an interpreter. At first he was unwilling to give information but when he realised what "good chaps" we are, he loosened his tongue a bit but not sufficiently. He never disclosed any locations of units, although he spoke freely about particular units working in the area.

The prefixes for unit names and the size of units evidently vary from time to time for security reasons but it appears at present (according to THANG, the Hoi Chanh) that the present prefixes are: -

Platoon: B (as in B2)

Company: C, K, or A (most commonly C as in C41 or the Chau Duc Coy)

Battalion: D (as in D445)

Regiment: K (as in KF4 or K4 which is also SR4)

Division: T (as in T7 which is the same as MR7)

Hospitals also appear to have the prefix K as in K7 and K10. K10 is evidently situated in the May Tao Mountains.

(to be continued)



Examining captured documents



Agent Orange Spraying

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