

reached my Section. Now finally, with a Battalion on ops and with experienced diggers who had already been here for a few months I felt that I had finally arrived.

But my first experiences of being on operations were not as I expected. Within a couple of days I was seriously wondering what the hell I had landed in.

The next afternoon I think it was, the Platoon went out on patrol. This was my first experience of being shot at but not by the enemy. This was apparently some Americans in a jeep having a yippee shoot and their bullets headed our way. I can recall the crack of the bullets going over us. Then that night a "friendly" mortar round came in and unfortunately wounded one of the Company who had to be choppered out. Our Section moved out with others to secure the LZ. Seriously, I couldn't believe I was walking into the scrub in pitch dark. Didn't the Army know I can't see anything in the dark? My eyes were bigger than soup dishes but it didn't help I couldn't see a thing! But my new mates in the Section - well, none of them batted an eyelid. I think then I realised that training and playing games was over and that this was for real - this - and I hadn't even run into the enemy yet!

I knew I was going to get to my next birthday because it happened to be the next day. Wasn't sure about reaching the one after that though, if this is what the friendlies do to you what is it going to be like when you meet the opposition.....

THE REO (Alan Riley)

FROM BARRIE TAYLOR: FOND MEMORIES

I joined 5RAR as reo originating out of Puckapunyal after 10 weeks of punishing induction. Those were the days of bastardry which normally ended up with me missing lunch due to a forced run up Tit Hill (many will remember) with 3 bricks in a WWII 2 backpack made of strong calico, the only material known to hold that weight. (Tit Hill was a conical monument on a 50 metre hill dedicated to the Queens first visit, Yep looked like exactly like its name). Trouble seemed to follow me. March out day ended up AWOL in the clink Seymour then off to Singleton a warmer part of Oz. Great place, more trouble with a few AWOLs to Sydney, great memories of Muswellbrook, some lovely sheilas lived in that town keeping me out late, yep more AWOLs.

Finished Infantry training then off to Holsworthy Reo waiting for despatch to Vietnam. Travel to Vietnam was surreal, Took off from Sydney in a Qantas 707, my thoughts at the time were "How good is this", (but it was all downhill from here!) changed plans at Singapore, then off to Saigon. Into a Caribou, this was back to reality. No seats, no safety belts, sitting on the floor, with a rope across from one side of the plane to the other side. Plane takes off we all slide backwards, plan lands we all slide forward whilst hanging on for dear life.

Into the reo camp for 2 weeks, sitting on the wire all night looking for noggies crawling thru the wire, first night I reckon I saw 200!! First induction into 5RAR, jumped out of a Chopper about 3 meters into the jungle on top of the Warbies. Carry the radio for first 4 days as Snow was on R&R, then into a section under John Faint. So my induction is fairly clinical, don't know anyone, can't sit down and have chat or wander around

meeting people and get to know you , but Fainter was a great guy, I clicked with him straight away and had great friendship albeit for a short period.

So this is about Fainter. I recall both of us being AWOL first R&C at Vungers. We sleep out and I know we have to be back by 7-00 for roll call. I'm running along the back beach about 6-30am, suddenly a short whistle from a clump of bush's, I dive in , who's sitting there "Fainter "he immediately tells me to stay where we are , with "watch this" just as 2 guys run along the beach and start to climb over the back fence of the Badcoe Club. They are half way up the fence when 2 MP's come from nowhere, straight into the wagon , off they go to the clink. Fainter gives me thumbs up , over the fence we go , made Roll call easy.

John Faint was a natural soldier and real Aussie mate, I miss him, I am sure many of you would have similar tales to tell of this true Blue Aussie.

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:

5 Jan 1970

8 Platoon located a large unoccupied bunker system measuring 150 metres x 150 metres, recovering weapons, ammo and webbing. We destroyed the bunkers manually.

6 Jan

CHQ and 8 PI contacted one enemy, wounding him and capturing his AK47 assault rifle. This was on a small pad running beside the Suoi Nhoc (creek).

7 Jan

CHQ is with 8 Platoon occupying an ambush on a well-used track. We are just inside Long Khanh Province (to the north of Phuoc Tuy Province).

Later:

I have just had an ambush stuffed up by a soldier who can't follow a bloody order. Too often I have seen an ambush sprung too early by a nervous bloke or by a sentry armed only with a rifle.

As a result of today I have given specific orders that whenever there is a requirement to post sentries (eg: during the occupation of the ambush, or at meal times, or during the relief of the killer group) he is to have a claymore sited to hit anyone coming down the track.

This was not done today and the sentry only winged the approaching enemy. One AK47 assault rifle was recovered though.

I am convinced that with the constant change-over of personnel occurring as a result of reinforcements replacing casualties and soldiers being rotated when their 12 months' tour of duty is up, you struggle to maintain the required standard of professional soldiering. Too many times inexperience and lack of training have caused cock-ups. Unfortunately it is one of the necessary evils connected with a National Service system. The Nashos themselves are, on the whole, terrific diggers, keen and aggressive, but complete training takes time; and time is one thing that is against a NS system.

From the other perspective it was really tough for reinforcements of any kind to arrive in a new unit, probably not knowing anyone, not knowing the rifle company and platoon SOPs, and feeling like a complete stranger. And often he arrived on a resupply chopper in the middle of an operation so that one day he was in Nui Dat with the Reo Platoon, then the next they is in the midst of a battle with the enemy. At least during the battle it was comforting to feel he was with seasoned and experienced diggers in his new platoon.

(To be continued)

Ed's note: This is another excerpt from the diary of Captain David Wilkins, OC C Company from December 1969 to March 1970.

SUNRAY MINOR
FROM BILL TITLEY - MY ROLE IN C COMPANY:

Don has asked me to dig deep into the "cells" and dredge up some recollections of my time as 2IC of Charlie Company/. Tough ask mate, but here goes:

I joined the company from the Infantry Centre in May 1968. It was by chance that I ended up in 5RAR, as I had been haranguing the Infantry Directorate for a posting in Townsville in a battalion that was destined for SVN. I received that posting to 6RAR, but shortly after came a call that 5RAR needed a captain for a 2IC role. I was a bit disappointed as Townsville would have been pretty much a "home" posting, but then he added that 5RAR was heading off in advance of 6RAR, so that settled it!

Much of the preparation for our tour of SVN was training - getting our operational procedures and drills perfected; ensuring that we were at the peak of our physical fitness. I recall one occasion during our Shoalwater Bay exercise, when we were required to prepare an LZ for a UH1H. This needed to meet RAAF specs and to account for glide paths for landing and take-off. I can't recall how many hours we spent on the destruction of the vegetation, but the end result was something I think could have taken a caribou! I remember also, coming off Christmas leave in early January 1969, just prior to leaving Australia, to face another battalion exercise on Holsworthy Range to get our helicopter drills right! We all thought that with the training we had done, we were "simply the best" at heli drills - someone outside the battalion thought otherwise. Not only had we trained with the RAAF, we had the advantage of working with the RAN Helo guys on an exercise near Nowra. From a Company Headquarters viewpoint, that was an excellent exercise - cooperation between the two services was tops and the flexibility of the RAN pilots and crews made it all that much more realistic. But then we did have some RAAF crews who, when away from the pack, were prepared to be a bit innovative in training. Sadly one crew got a bit over-exuberant in their landing procedures while we were in a Company exercise in the mountains behind Newcastle and damaged their chopper - I heard it cost the pilots a severe kick in the pants and some seniority. On that same exercise, I was returning from Holsworthy on the same huey one afternoon when the Master Caution Light started flashing, accompanied by a klaxon to ensure that if the pilots had not seen the light, the noise in their headsets would leave them in no doubt. I recall that the problem was related to fuel - not enough? Nevertheless, we made it to the LZ.

I'm rambling, but as I write, these episodes come back in quite vivid ways.

The preparation and training also involved getting all in the company to DP1 standard - injections, medicals, wills, pay arrangements, etc, to cope with twelve months of absence, AB83s accurate and up-to-date, correct scales of equipment for individuals as well as for the company as a whole, ensuring our weapons were in top class condition. Our training ensured that we had solid procedures for resupplying the company in the field and that we could administer first aid to our battle casualties before our company medics were able to get to them - looking after our mates, as you did on so many occasions. So, as Company 2IC I worked closely with the likes of Don Harrod (Company Orderly Room Clerk), Mousey McLeod the CQMS, and Paddy Cahill, the chief company "bait-layer", to ensure that we could support the company on operations to the high

standard that you all deserved. Lists - we had lists for everything - ammo, clothing, rations, medical stores, defence stores, water, fuels - and we were constantly testing them to ensure that we had them right. Then in the Coy orderly room, Pirate was labouring away on personnel lists - nominal rolls for all contingencies.

Needless to say, Jack Lake, as CSM was a key "right-hand man" and we worked very closely. Not only was he an extremely competent CSM, his previous operational experience in AATTV often came to the fore.

Because we were using RAAF resources on a regular basis in training and that would in SVN, all the coy 2ICs and others were sent to RAAF Richmond for a three-week Unit Emplaning Officers Course. Lots of classroom work, learning the features of the aircraft with which we would be involved - UH1H, C130 and Caribou. That was interspersed with a considerable number of physical tasks, during which we put our classroom "Number-crunching" to the test, preparing loads and securing them in the aircraft. And then there were the "famil" flights in each type. The Blue Orchids loved the challenge of a plane load of "brown jobs" straight after lunch and introduced their own form of aerobatics - we weathered it well, until 2IC A Company (Bill Grassick) produced a clear plastic bag containing a greasy mix of the lunchtime stew. The visual effects, accompanied by the aroma, set up a chain reaction amongst a portion of the class. I'm pleased to say I kept my lunch down!

As a 2IC, I also needed to understudy the Company Commander, so that I could step up in the event that some contingency took him out of the equation (more on that one later). So off to war we went and shortly after arrival we set out to test our procedures while facing "the real thing". We never stopped learning and trying to improve our administration in support of those on the front line.

Ed's note: this is the first of a two-part article from Bill

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Carolyn and Don Frohmuller recently travelled through Coonabarabran (NSW), and were able to meet up with your editor and his wife, Roslyn. A good lunch, and a great reunion after not having seen each other for 42 years. The picture shows Don F on the left, with Don H (the slim one!)

Is Dons - is both good.

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