

Half Circle



Number 76 - April 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 (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.



AT THE RAP:

Eddie Moon - oncology treatment
Bob (Tex) Cunningham - oncology treatment
Wally Magalas - oncology treatment (completed)
Andy MacDougal - on light duties

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:

10 Feb 1970

Lady Luck smiled upon us today!

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

9 Platoon was moving with CHQ. *Lcpl Reg Smith, who was acting as forward scout for us, discovered in thick scrub a bush house about 12' x 12' with thatched roof, the floor 5 feet from the ground, and walls of chicken wire. As he approached it, as if from intuition or 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.* Silent field signals had brought me forward for a look, after which I ordered the front sections to secure the area without entering the clearing around the hut.

After we secured the area around the hut, the Engineer Splinter Team attached to the company carefully prodded and checked the surrounds, discovering 8 booby-trapped grenades and an M16 anti-personnel mine on the approach track. The last was discovered by their prodding with bayonets just under the surface of the dirt. All were deloused and the cache checked: a few hundred pounds of rice & dried peas. There were dozens of empty bags in the house, which seemed to indicate that their rations were getting a bit short from what they had been previously.



An M26 Grenade connected to a trip wire.

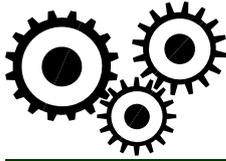
*One can only imagine what may have happened if, for instance, Smithy had called up the section commander and possibly the platoon commander, and then had stepped on the M16 mine killing or wounding anybody within 30-40 metres. **Shudder at the thought.***

A bit before midday 8 Pl called in an arty fire mission to assist clearance of a suspected enemy bunker system but it turned out to be bush huts with no bunkers. *The contact occurred at the cache found by 9 Pl and CHQ when some unsuspecting enemy approached the cache area, obviously coming to increase or reduce their larder.* They were dressed in greens, the front man with a sweat cloth around his forehead. The contact occurred just as we were moving from the area so our silence was the crucial factor here in surprising the enemy.

At the same time, 8 Pl, two clicks to the north, made contact with enemy near yet another rice cache, this cache holding nearly 1,500 lbs of rice (for some reason the battalion log only recorded 700 lbs- confusion with kilos? Don't know). 8 Pl also found an M16 mine on an approach track.

That evening at 2115 hours 8 Pl had a further contact in front of its ambush position when movement was heard but nothing was found during the sweep at first light the next morning.

(To be continued)



"COGS IN THE WHEEL" - THE CSM
213825 WARRANT OFFICER CLASS II - JACK WILLIAM LAKE



FROM CLAUDE DUCKER, OC C COMPANY 21st April to 23rd December 1969: I have been asked to write about Jack Lake, our CSM in Vietnam. Rather than perhaps repeating what others may have covered, I thought it might be useful to include something about Jack's significant previous overseas operational service, which many readers may not know about. It was valuable experience for a CSM in Vietnam.

Firstly Jack served as a junior NCO with A Coy 3 RAR in Sarawak for nearly six months in 1965. He was based at Stass almost on the Indonesian border. (Incidentally, it was the same company base where I served in 1966 as a company commander with 4 RAR.) Although contacts with the enemy were less frequent in Borneo than in Vietnam, there were considerable hardships and stresses in Borneo. It was kept secret for many years that Australian and other Commonwealth forces were operating up to 10,000 metres across the Indonesian border where the enemy had their forward bases. Patrols had to carry from 7 to 14 days rations in arduous terrain, much of it swampy, or steep hills. We were often out of radio communications. A demoralising aspect could be that, when across the Indonesian border, we were not allowed to use helicopters for casevac or ammunition resupply except perhaps in extreme circumstances. Similarly it was difficult to gain approval for artillery or air support because our operations were clandestine, not known to other units, families or news media. Casualties incurred across the border in Indonesia had to be carried for thousands of metres by stretchers, reducing the chances of survival considerably. This was in contrast to the relatively quick pick-ups by helicopter back to hospital in most cases in Vietnam.

Jack's sub-unit in Borneo experienced two mine/booby trap incidents involving fatal casualties including two sergeants (acting platoon commanders). Knowing that Jack had this experience with mines was a major factor in choosing him to go to 7 Platoon in July 1969 in the wake of their horrific mine incident of 4 July 1969, and of tasking him to organise the search for any additional mines and the evacuation of the remainder of the platoon. I have written previously about this incident (see Half Circle No. 43). Jack

never hesitated when asked to take on a difficult or hazardous role and I believe he had the knowledge and the courage to do so.

Jack also had served in the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam from September 1966 to August 1967. This was also invaluable experience for his second tour.

Jack was not one to shirk an unpleasant task while on operations. I recall the day, 19th June 1969 when C Company was ordered to go into the Long Hais to retrieve the bodies of two United States flyers who had been shot down by their own naval gun fire that they were directing. Readers may recall C Company went initially in APCs supported by a troop of tanks. A dicey operation as the enemy would have seen us coming during our obvious movement over a very open approach. When the leading elements (9PL) arrived at the crash scene they found the aircraft and bodies were almost completely burnt. Retrieval of the bodies from the plane was a difficult and unpleasant task. With the help of some of 9PL and the medics, Jack took charge of extricating the bodies before carry parties took the remains back to the AFVs, which could not go the whole distance to the aircraft crash site.

You would recall that Jack also organised the casevacs from often improvised landing zones for our wounded. The distribution of ammunition was another key task for a CSM and I don't recall us having problems with this vital aspect.

By the way Jack Lake, Roger Lambert and Paddy Cahill were the only personnel of the rank of sergeant or above, to serve the whole tour with C Company in Vietnam. Jack being the CSM made him a vital cog and continuity man in the company.

Finally I should remind you of the vast amount of valuable work that Jack has done for Veterans in the Blue Mountains area. He has been their mainstay for many years, with long spells as President.

FROM JACK BRADD, a veteran of Malaya and Vietnam, Section Commander:

Contrary to popular belief CSMs were not made by God but by a hard slog from baggy arse Private through the ranks to the impressive WO2 - the Company Sergeant Major of the Australian Infantry. He is the top soldier in a Rifle Company - addressed as 'Sir' by the ranks and either as 'CSM' or 'Sar Major' by Officers, he is responsible to the Officer Commanding and the Company 2IC for many things including drill, discipline, ammo and rations. He is well versed in the evil doings of diggers and can spot evil doers from a click away; many a digger has spoken in quiet whispers about the powers of the CSM. When fronting the OC Orderly Room many a digger would firstly wonder how the CSM had detected the crime then wonder if the story he made up would get him off but as soon as he heard the words 'March the guilty bastard in CSM' he knew there was no beating the CSM. In WW1 the British had a parody of a song called 'When this bloody war is over' following is one of the verses;

"No more Sergeant Majors warning 'Pick it up or put it down'

If I see the ugly bastard I'll kick his arse all over town". Not really because most diggers speak with respect and admiration of the CSM and I like to think that there are more of us old soldiers around because of our CSM.

FROM BILL TITLEY, 2IC C COMPANY January 1968 to October 1969: CSMs were men of many parts - disciplinarian, drill expert, administrator, weapons expert, advisor, navigator, tactician - Jack Lake, as CSM C Coy 5RAR, was all of those and more. When the chips were down he was there to help boost morale and to get the job done. Beneath that rough and tough exterior was a heart of gold - the diggers' mentor, the OC's "sounding board".

In my time as C Coy 2IC, I was thrown into the breach as Acting OC on two occasions. The first was on Operation Overlander in March - April 1969, after Major Graham departed with medical problems. The very next day (30 March) we began to locate booby traps and signs of an enemy presence and shortly after, 9 Pl, under Roger Lambert, became involved in a medium contact. Throughout the day there were further contacts ending in the wounding of Cpl Jack Loader from 7 Pl.

As I had my hands full, Jack stepped right up to handle the role of Coy 2IC - organising the Dustoff, preparing the extraction site from which to winch the casualty etc, while still carrying out his primary task of CSM. The significant experience he had gained from his tour with AATTV was evident and it was a godsend to be able to leave him to it, confident in the knowledge that the job would be well done.

I may be wrong (the memory plays tricks, doesn't it?), but I believe that was the first series of contacts for C Coy, since arriving in SVN. The fact that it was quite significant in terms of documents and equipment located and well executed by the platoons involved was a tremendous morale boost for the Company. Over 24 hours the company hacked a helicopter LZ out of the vegetation so we could extract the considerable "booty" and receive a visit from Niner and the Task Force Commander, Brig Sandy Pearson. Much of that task was overseen by Jack Lake. He didn't wait for directions, he KNEW what to do!

I think it was on our return to The Dat, that there was an incident in the Company Boozer. I recall a digger who had been on Rear Detail and liked a cold beer on a hot day, fronting up to the Boozer on our first night back. Anyway, the CSM became aware of his presence, and, as CSMs do, reminded him "nicely" that his place was not in the Boozer, but down on the gun picquet. "Old mate" made the unfortunate mistake of wanting to "discuss" this with the CSM, who promptly detailed two corporals (I think one was Taffy Cheeseman) as escorts and marched him towards the Bn lockup. The "discussion" continued over the first fifty metres and past Paddy's Kitchen, then, as the discussion reached a crescendo, something happened and suddenly there was no more "discussion". After the miscreant had been deposited in the care of "the Sherriff" for the night, the CSM returned and worriedly said to me "Sir, I think I've done my warrant." to which I replied - "We didn't hear a thing, CSM, have another beer!" Jack's Justice!!

The next occasion was during Operation Camden in the Hat Dich, when the OC, Major Claude Ducker, was on R & R. It was 31 July 1969 and 7 Pl with Coy HQ had been tracking a couple of enemy most of the day. There had been a couple of contacts, leading up to the detection of an occupied bunker system. The ensuing bunker contact resulted in Ptes Sandy McKinnon and Buddah Martini being wounded and sadly, Pte Jim McMillan, KIA. Jack was again operating as Coy 2IC (no HDA)/CSM. As such he set up in an old B52 crater near Coy HQ to receive the casualties and prepare for the Dust-off. The enemy was very tenacious, following up the 7 Pl elements who were extracting the casualties. As Sandy was being winched up to the Dust-off helicopter, all hell broke loose - enemy firing at the Dust-off, Light fire Team employing suppressing fire, Dust-off gunner firing defensively at what he thought was the enemy, but was in fact 7 Pl. On the ground in the middle of it all was the CSM, directing operations. With

Sandy "safely" in the aircraft, he apparently turned to Buddah (I expect with a grin) and said: "OK, Buddah, you're next." "I don't bloody well think so." Was the response! * There he was again - Jack Lake, the CSM, man of many parts, not the least, a "team player" and a vital one at that. Thank you CSM!

(*Anatomy of a Bunker Contact - An Action Replay from the Hat Dich - by David Wilkins - July 2008)

FROM THE AVERAGE C COMPANY DIGGER IN VIETNAM, 1969 - 1970: The CSM that we knew was sub-human. He was made of steel, would be up and about ages before anyone else, have his gear totally in order, be organised, anticipate what the OC or 2IC would want next, have an eye on every digger. He did, however have shortcomings. He didn't know the names of his diggers very well. Many a man was referred to as "PRIVATE ****ING SMITH, PRIVATE ****JONES", etc. We knew who we were when singled out, but at the same time wondered why our parents had even bothered to have given us Christian names. He would look at you, his lips would turn into a savage sneer, he would bark like a Rottweiler, and remind you that your place in the Company was a lot lower than his. One digger spoke with him one ANZAC Day, and said "You were the hardest man I have ever known". He smiled and said "Yep, but I brought you buggers home". That particular CSM - Jack Lake, one of the finest men we have ever known.

FROM THE ORDERLY ROOM CORPORAL, C COMPANY VIETNAM 1969-70: The late Paul Monaghan, a National Serviceman, was renowned for his intense dislike of authority, and his military conduct record would attest to this. He did, however, have a genuine respect for Jack Lake, although each time he was charged, he demonstrated his resentment. Jack was about the only one who could handle "Mono". Many others tried Jack out, amongst them Harry Kallergis, Greg Dick, Geoff Pearson, Dartza Davis, Eddie Moon, Reg Smith, Ben Oram, Jack Bradd, John Yabsley, Guy Ansell, Bill Evans and others. All came off second best. I recall Company 2IC Bill Titley doing a lot of homework on one occasion, eventually coming up with a charge that "Mono" would have had trouble beating. Jack Lake - known as a soldier's soldier.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

1. How do you know when you run out of invisible ink?
2. If you think that nobody cares, try missing a few payments.
3. The professor's theory about earthquakes ended up on shaky ground.
4. The dentist and manicurist fought tooth and nail.



THE 48th BIRTHDAY OF 5RAR:

On Friday 1st March 2013, 5RAR celebrated its 48th Birthday. Pictured at the Moorebank Sports Club (right near the main gate into the Holsworthy Barracks), are Blue Schafer, Eddie Moon, Barney Ruttle, Paul McQueen, Zeke Mundine and Geoff Pearson. As you

would be aware, Eddie has been battling serious medical issues of late, so it was great to hear that he got to the birthday bash, and as Blue says, "He had a good time". Our spies tell us that all the other rogues in this picture also enjoyed a great day.

From Major Dave French (former OC C Coy Afghanistan), who is participating in this year's Ride for HeartKids bicycle ride:

The Kilometres are racking up and we are slowly but steadily increasing support numbers, up to just short of 100 as I write today and hoping to get a few more on board. Again if the Old and Bolds that are on Face book would like to follow us by looking up 'Ride for HeartKids' and clicking on the like button then that would be much appreciated. I know a couple have done so already.

We've just had Hydralyte Sports Drinks commit to supporting us which has been great news. It'll help with some recovery anyway! I'm still searching for a bike store and a car dealer to assist with the ride in Dec but we've got some promising things in the pipeline so hopefully they will come off alright.



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), a well-known and recognized charity worker and is a great supporter of this newsletter. Phone (02) 9724 1615.

A MAN was caught stealing from the kitchenware department of K Mart last week. He said it was a whisk he was prepared to take.

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. The Rifleman
 2. Vietnam Vets Commemorative Memorial, Seymour VIC
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(02) 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with help from Dave Wilkins, Claude Ducker, Jack Bradd, Bill Titley, Paul McQueen, and Dave French.