

Half Circle



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

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: Geoff Pearson advises that, in case you are not aware, Maurie Shiels is doing it pretty tough at Manning Base Hospital, and will soon be moved to the Mayo Clinic in Taree, NSW. Maurie is quite ill, and if any members are in a position to visit him, it would be most appreciated. Maurie's wife Jennifer can be contacted on (02) 6550 2692.

Maurie was part of the "heart" of 7PL, and apart from being an excellent soldier, is also considered to be a great mate of all of us.

From Adam Ross (son of Bill): I just wanted to let you know that on June 20th, my wife Samantha gave birth to our first child. We named him William (after his grandfather). I wanted Dad's mates to know that he has a namesake who will hopefully keep people in line! ***Ed's note: congratulations Adam and Sam, from all of us!***

A word from Jack Bradd: August 1st to 8th is ***MISSING PERSONS WEEK***, so everyone's gotta hide for the duration.



A follow-up to the ANZAC Day articles in Half Circle No 42 - here is Bluey Austin at the memorial to Australian servicemen at the Oakdale Workers Club, NSW. A great club with a great atmosphere. I know - Blue took me there for a few ales many years ago! Don



Pictured - Vince Feenstra, Russell (Kiwi) Hill and Ellis (Bunny) Hyde, in Toowoomba July 2010. Kiwi has just undergone a hip replacement, and Vince arranged for a visit from Bunny. Kiwi and Bunny had not seen each other for over 40 years. *Ed's note: I seem to remember having to prop Kiwi up on other occasions too. Sergeants always did enjoy being invited into the Diggers' Boozer! See next article.*

Roger Lambert recalls: CLOSING "THE MUSHROOM CLUB" (AKA THE CHARLIE COMPANY BOOZER)

During our tour of South Vietnam (1969/70), each Company had its own 'wet canteen' or 'boozer' as we commonly called it. While we Rifle Company (and Support Company) blokes were on operations, there was no booze allowed to be served in these 'wet canteens'. Goffers were OK but alcohol was strictly prohibited. This was with good reason of course as the LOBs (left out of battle or as some used to say, left on base) were required to defend the 'fort' while we bush-bashed our way around the Province.

Now as I recall, when we came in off operations, the boozer was open but only between 1630 hrs and 1730 hrs. Thereafter came dinner and the 'wet canteens' re-opened at 1930 hrs and traded to 2130 hrs. I can't recall whether there was any distinction between weekdays and weekends but I suspect not. Routine Orders stated that trading ceased at 2130 hrs (time, gentlemen please) and the boozer had to be cleared by 2145 hrs. Now if memory serves me correctly (and it quite often doesn't these days), all troops, irrespective of rank, had to be back in their lines by 2200 hrs (unless on duty manning the gun pits) and 'lights out' was at 2215 hrs. The exception to the rule was that if the movie was still going at 2200 hrs, you were allowed to stay to the end and then take your 'chair, folding, troops for the use of' and return to your lines.

Like all young subalterns, the platoon commanders were rostered at Company level as Duty Officers. Not only were we required inspecting the Company kitchen and checking with the diggers about the standard of the meals, we were also required to check the perimeter and its defensive GPMG bunkers. Less hazardous (or so I thought) was the

requirement to close the Company boozier and to ensure that Routine Orders were upheld when it came to such closures, return to the lines and lights out.

On one particular evening, in the latter half of the tour, as Duty Officer, I arrived at the C Company 'wet canteen' at 2130 hrs and directed that trading cease and all troops finish their drinks prior to me closing the 'boozier'. I very quickly learnt why we were taught during officer training to keep all our buttons done up as, before I could say "last drinks", I was upside down, suspended from the rafter by toggle rope. While my Field Message Note Book and wallet stayed in place in my shirt pockets, and my trusty 9mm Browning pistol and spare magazine remained firmly in the holster and side pouch, I had absolutely no idea what was going on around me other than a sea of faces in JGs raucously laughing and hurling good-humoured jibes.

To this day, I have no idea what additional, after-hours bar transactions may have taken place while I was upended but I suspect quite a few. After what seemed an eternity but in reality was but a few minutes, I was lowered to the ground. Regaining my composure and in my best parade ground voice, I ordered the assembled CHQ, 7 PI, 8 PI and 9 PI soldiers to clear the boozier and to return to their lines.

I could still hear the muffled laughter as the diggers trudged off to their respective tent lines, no doubt with pockets stuffed with their 'illegal' after-hours tinnies. (And in case you ask, yes we did know about your pseudo eskies dug into the ground under the duck boards of your tents.) As I headed for my tent, I couldn't help but chuckle at the episode and the precision with which the plot to suspend the Duty Officer from the rafters was executed.

Does the incident appear in any official reports? **No.** Do the ringleaders know who they are? **Yes.** **And do I know? I do now.**

The moral of the story? There are two really: (1) Never underestimate the ingenuity of the Aussie Digger; and (2) always keep your buttons and holsters/pouches securely fastened.

You simply never know when you may be seeing the world from a different perspective!

MEMBER PROFILE: Ian Leis writes on another of his close mates in C Coy:
39679 Private Robert Lyle Newberry. Nickname: Blue

Blue was another member of 5RAR who did Rookie-Corps-Battalion training together with a very special group of mates. Blue wasn't really military material. His physical build and skin complexion were against him. However Blue was determined as the rest of us. He did his jobs to the best of his ability, keeping to himself and not being one to voice his opinions- maybe grumbling to himself on the odd occasion. Blue in general was not a happy person - smiles were very rare. Alcohol changed his disposition, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

Five Section 8 Platoon - *Rifleman* was his first job at 5RAR. The section 2IC, L/CPL Barry Morgan (didn't he make a career of the military) saw very early that Blue wasn't really suitable as a bush soldier. He nominated Blue to do a Q course and this eventually put Blue into the Q Store with SSGT "Mouse" McLeod. Blue was good at his job however if you were his mate, didn't give him a hard time, you got what you asked for. If not, well, it took longer - sometimes **much** longer to get what you were after. After resupply many sand bags went back to Nui-Dat, some tied with bows. Blue knew these bags contained goodies i.e. cakes of soap etc. - good merchandise to barter for favours with when on R&C in Vung Tau. These items Blue kept aside for his mates.

Blue liked his job in the Q Store. I believe he worked quite hard preparing, organising, loading and unloading the supplies that made our existence in the scrub a little better. As Blue was continually around trucks and choppers he was always in strife for having a dirty weapon. He once made a request for a pistol, but this request was knocked back as only the officers had access to pistols.

After this, Blue on many occasions mostly when the company was out on operations, started a habit of wearing a holster with the trigger mechanism of an M60 in it. It looked the part but he ceased this habit after one of the battalion vehicles going to Baria with laundry, was fired upon. Blue was regularly involved with this task.

Eventually Blue left the Q Store job and went back to 8 Platoon as a rifleman for the rest of his tour. He was severely troubled by skin problems during his military service and for the rest of his life. He was unable to gain medical assistance for this problem/condition. He became very bitter with the military. He spoke very little of his service.

He married Shirley and they had a daughter, Donna. Both loved and supported and did their best to understand "Blue". He made a successful career with the railways, V-lines at Albury becoming a senior head conductor.

Blue and I were good mates from day one of rookie training. Our friendship continued post military service. Sadly Blue took his own life in 1992.



Blue Newberry (l) with
John Roberts, C Company
Driver



Remember? The Flags and Mi Mi Bar, Vung Tau? Enough said.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod (donharrod@bigpond.com), (02)6842 4913, 0418 423 313), with help from Geoff Pearson, Blue Austin, Vince Feenstra, Roger Lambert, Ian Leis, Adam Ross, Jack Bradd and some awful humour.