

Half Circle



Number 68 - August 2012

(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:

1. Claude Ducker - knee replacement. Claude reports all is going well.
 2. Colin Summerfield - broken leg. Now at home, Col reports that things are slowly improving, but a long way to go. If anyone would like to contact him, his home number is (02) 6762 8061. Col also has information on help the DVA can provide to those confined at home.
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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.

15 Jan 1970

7 Pl located a tunnel in the foothills of Nui Mây Tào and 8 Pl found signs of 6 enemy a bit under a click further to the north-west of 7 Pl. A few hours later 8 Pl located a bunker with 2 ½ feet of overhead protection and recovered a quantity of clothing from inside. This was all pretty tame stuff really as no enemy was actually contacted.

16 Jan

About 0900 hours 7 Pl located fresh footprints of about 6 enemy.

C Coy was reacted here as a result of a contact an SAS patrol had with a “platoon of enemy who pursued them for 1,500 metres”. It seems strange how the SAS patrols always seem to strike the most aggressive enemy in an area. We then came into that “contact area” and found very little sign of enemy movement and no enemy for 4 days. Call me a cynic if you like, but I believe these small SAS patrols exaggerated a trifle. When we eventually made contact with the enemy on 16 January it was with a couple of them and certainly nothing substantial.

17 January

A good find today on the lower southwest slopes of the Mây Tào Mountain. We (CHQ and 9 Platoon) discovered a camp defensive position concealed in caves and rocks. It turned out to be a ‘hospital’ containing surgical equipment, drugs and about 12 treatment beds and an operating table hidden in the caves. Some caves extended over 50 feet, with the main caves being used as an operating theatre. This had a subterranean stream flowing through it.

In this caved area we also found:

1 x 75 mm recoilless rifle complete with round and tripod;

2 x 60 mm mortars;

2 x SKS rifles (one new);

4 x AN/PRC 10-set radios, complete with accessories;

2 x other VHF transmitter/receivers;

a quantity of flares;

approx. 10,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammo;

40 x fragmentation grenades;

a number of chooks in a cage;

60 lb of barley and

60 lb of rice.

Of note, a month earlier during 6RAR’s Operation *Marsden* they combed the slopes and caves of the Mây Tào Mountains and finally planted the Australian flag on the mountain peak. Amongst the many finds made by 6RAR were a VC hospital located deep in caves and another major complex known as K76A Hospital.

It seems that CHQ and 9 Pl C Coy 5RAR had now located a smaller version of K76A.

In the early evening 7 Pl fired upon some enemy, with unknown results but thought to have wounded one enemy.

(To be continued)

We are still missing quite a lot of our old mates. If you know of someone who is not receiving Half Circle, please send their name and email details to your editor. We estimate that about 50 blokes are still yet to be found.

“THERE’S A TRACK WINDING BACK ... “

REVISITING SCHEYVILLE 43 YEARS ON – 8 SEPTEMBER 2009

It’s hard to believe that 43 years have elapsed since I was driven up that entrance road as a young 20 year old to begin a life changing experience as an officer cadet at the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville. The memories that came flooding back as we walked around the former training unit facilities were, at times, a little overwhelming. I must say however that as we explored my old ‘stomping ground’, my overall feeling was one of pride and a real sense of achievement in having attended and graduated from OTU as a 2nd Lieutenant.

Scheyville for me was a unique and life-changing experience. At the time of my call-up for National Service (20 April 1966), I was a trainee manager with Waltons based in Newcastle. As I’ve told many people over the ensuing years though, besides being the only lottery I’ve ever won in my life, being called up was the best thing that ever happened to me. Isn’t hindsight a wonderful thing?

At the time, I was an angry young man whose life was being disrupted for two years by National Service. In camp at Singleton however, I quickly resolved to make the best of what I saw then as an adverse situation that I had little control over. When the opportunity arose to undergo officer training selection and front the Selection Board, I saw an avenue to make the best of my situation and was very pleased with myself in succeeding in the selection process.

Arrival at Scheyville at the commencement of the six month training course however caused me to have very serious doubts about my ‘chosen career path’. Talk about a shock to the system. Even though the daily routine at Singleton seemed tough to adjust to, the initial ‘welcome’ to OTU and the daily routine for we officer cadets was tougher – in the extreme. I could not for the life of me see how allotted tasks could be achieved in the time allocated. To my mind, we were being set an impossible mission.

Surprisingly, one adjusted very quickly to the daily routine and it was very satisfying to see what could be achieved in the allotted timeframes. They were very long weekdays with reveille at 0600 hrs and a day packed with drill, field craft, physical training, weapons handling, map reading, wireless communications, minor tactics and other infantry oriented training. Last lessons ended at 2130 hrs and lights out was at 2200 hrs. On Saturday, reveille remained at 0600 hrs with the morning devoted to more drill and training while Saturday afternoons were taken up with organised sport. On Sundays, reveille was at 0700 hrs so one got a whole hour’s sleep in.

For the first three months, we were literally confined to barracks. In the latter three months, subject to having no black marks against one’s name, local leave passes were granted after Saturday afternoon sport and we had to be back in camp before lights out on Sunday evening. Cadets with motor cars were in popular demand and it’s surprising just how far we could get and return safely in the time available.

There were field exercises conducted at Gospers, Singleton and Holsworthy. What a wonderful way to break the monotony of camp life – being cold, wet and/or miserable in the bush, digging weapon pits for protection against any enemy that wasn’t there or having live ammunition fired over your heads on the Holsworthy range. In reality, it was hard but enjoyable yakka. We were well trained by some of the best in the business.

At graduation, we felt ten foot tall and bullet-proof. We were mentally and physically tough and we were ready to take on the world and then some. Probably the greatest accolade for the Scheyville graduate was that it is now a well-documented fact that we were indistinguishable from our Portsea trained counterparts (12 month course) and our Duntroon counterparts (4 year course with a degree), especially in the field and on active service.

For me, on graduation, I was elated to get my chosen corps of Infantry but deflated when I was posted to 1 RTB at Kapooka to train recruits. In hindsight (there’s that word again), it

was the best thing that could have happened as it enabled me to hone my skills as a leader and to help young men transform from ill-disciplined civilians to partially trained soldiers. Unbeknown to me at the time, the months I spent at Kapooka were to stand me in good stead later on as an Infantry Platoon Commander in South Vietnam.

From Kapooka, I was posted to the 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment ostensibly to position me close to my place of enlistment, Newcastle, in preparation for the end of my National Service commitment. 5 RAR had returned to Holsworthy from their first tour of South Vietnam. As the time neared for my discharge, it became common knowledge that 5 RAR was to return to South Vietnam for a second tour in 1969.

Like any typical and adventurous young man, and because I had a point to prove to myself, I sought and obtained a Short Service Commission (5 years) to enable me to go overseas with the Battalion on its second tour of duty. I commanded 9 Platoon, C Company throughout 5 RAR's tour during 1969/70. My Scheyville training stood me in good stead on active service. I had a great team of soldiers under my command and to this day, we still hold regular reunions around the country to reminisce and to remember the comrades for whom the 'Last Post' has already been played.

On my return to Australia in 1970 after a 13 month tour of duty, I made the decision to apply for and was granted a permanent commission in the Regular Army. From a National Service 2nd Lieutenant, I had a succession of administrative, training, instructional and command postings that saw me promoted to Lieutenant, Captain, Major and finally Lieutenant Colonel. I had the opportunity to participate in exchange exercises in New Zealand, Canada and Papua New Guinea, and served on posting in every state of Australia except Western Australia.

I retired from the Army in 1992 after 26 years service. I might add that they were 26 very enjoyable and rewarding years where I was not only responsible for forging the careers of future soldiers and leaders but also where I made life-long friendships. Camaraderie is something that is difficult to explain. One needs to experience it in both peace and combat to understand what people often refer to as the brotherhood of the Army.

Now 43 years have passed since I entered the gates of OTU Scheyville and some 15 years since I joined the Environment Protection Authority which has now become the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water. Little did I know that the National Parks and Wildlife Service would one day become part of my department and they in turn become responsible for the Scheyville site as a National Park. They say it's a small world and that every thing happens for a reason, but never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that the Scheyville influence would remain with me throughout the years and that I would one day get the opportunity to revisit the training unit and to see it in such capable hands.

For me, I was pleased that I had the opportunity to return to Scheyville to retrace some old steps from the past. I was also pleased that I was able to identify my old room (albeit just a concrete slab today) and to reminisce about the good times (and some bad times). Even more pleasing for me was the thorough grasp that the NPWS staff have of the area's history, and for me, the Scheyville OTU era.

My thanks to Jonathan Sanders, Area Manager, Cumberland North, Park Management Division, NPWS for acting as my guide and historian on what was a nostalgic trip down memory lane.

While sitting in the old Commandant's office (now the Area Manager's office) looking at a slide show of previous Scheyville classes, I could have sworn that I heard the band strike up the Regimental Quick March of OTU – "The Road to Gundagai".

Must be getting old

- **Lieutenant Colonel Roger Lambert** (retired)
Director Administration and Facilities
Corporate Services Division

HOW I ENDED UP IN 7 PLATOON, by 5715880 Pte Alex (Hippie) Koppen

Jack Bradd asked me how I got into 7Pl. Here's my story:

When I joined 5RAR, I was in 3 Pl, A Coy. I seem to recall that I wasn't very welcome there, and was transferred to Trackers. Trackers seemed at first to be an odd-ball platoon – guys from everywhere in 5RAR seemed to be transferred there. What I didn't like about it was that we always seemed to be with BnHQ during our operations in Australia. Our skipper, Lt Ian (Hoss) Hosie left for Vietnam two weeks before the rest of us. I'm told that he had a big night out in Saigon, or "lash-out" as we say here in the UK, and nearly came back to the Dat escorted!

When we were established in Vietnam, we still seemed to be stuck in Fire Support Bases, arguing with Digger (Dennis Nevins) about world affairs and the merits of HP Sauce. Then, one day back at the Dat, 3 Section were choppered to the top of a hill, to provide protection for a wireless line. The next thing we heard was that Brownie (Mick Browne, 7Pl) had shot a NVA Operations Officer. The rest of 7Pl were sent there too, as a counter attack seemed likely.

A few days later, and still on the hill, the radio blared away in the middle of the night, and Genghis was on the line. We knew something was up. After a considerable time on the radio, everything went quiet. All sorts of rumours were going around. Then we heard a chopper coming, and 2Lt Jim Paterson was dropped off, and our skipper (Ian Hosie) was hauled up. Not a goodbye, nothing. Still, it was war time. We found out later what had happened in 7Pl in the Long Hais. If I remember correctly, in the next night or two, one of the sections let rip with a yippee shoot, just to warm 2Lt Paterson up. No prizes for guessing which section was involved.

Digger Nevins and I were really pi**ed off about Hoss being moved. There was something about him that we all liked. He seemed to let you just get on with it, had a lovely smiley way about him, and was always up for it. Back at Nui Dat, I decided to try and transfer to 7Pl. I asked Digger to transfer with me, and he agreed (I think mainly because he loved my brew and curried rice). Mick Browne, with whom I served at Pucka was keen too.

The fear that the rest of the tour could have been spent at Fire Support Bases was also one of the reasons. The transfer took a while, and one of the hardest things to do was to front 2Lt Paterson and tell him why I wanted out. He thought we were leaving because he was new, but we told him we wanted to serve with Hoss. Jim Paterson was a good officer.

I was then called up to front the OC, who explained in words that were very easy to understand, that he was unhappy about losing one of his best gun teams.

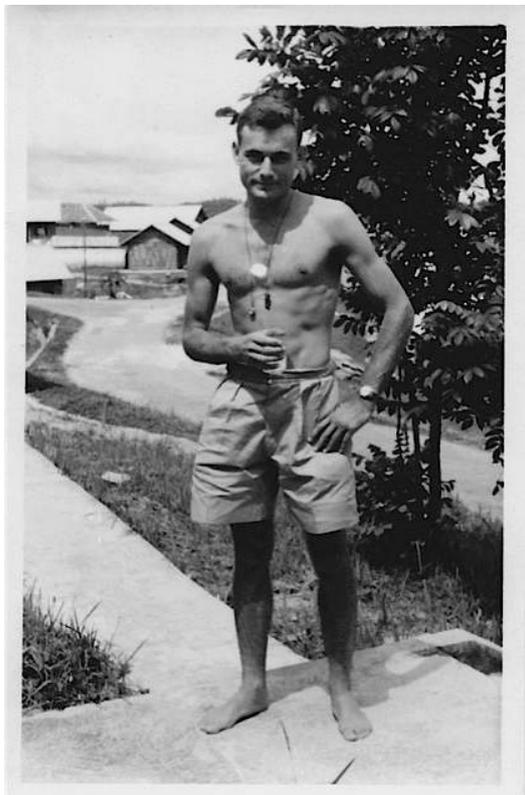
Digger Nevins and I then transferred in to 7Pl to join Mick Browne. What a motley bunch of vagabonds, and led by that Jack Bradd bloke, who was clearly the ringleader.

Anyway, off to have a nice, warm Sussex ale, and to raise my glass to my skipper, Ian Hosie.



You never know when,
you never know where,
but our sources will find
you:

Gentlemen as usual:
Here we have Terry
Bates and Peter Guyatt
“sharing” the ham bone
at a reunion in Perth.



Who said Claude Ducker
doesn't smile? Here is a
photo of a young and fit
platoon commander in
Malaya.

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. Jack Lake abandons his list of people he really liked (the page was empty) - now he has started on a list of people who liked him.
2. Dennis (Digger) Nevins plans to re-bash his slouch hat
3. The location of our spies - looking for your old photographs.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com

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