

# Half Circle



Number 116 - August 2016

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.

## **VALE – 44558 Private Matthew Kevin SMITH – 8PL C Coy 5RAR 1969/70**

It is with deep regret that we advise the passing of Matt Smith – MK or Smithy, in mid-July. Greg Dick and Ian Leis – two of MK's closest friends, offer the following tributes:

**From Ian:** *"MK" left us as he lived. Quietly and with dignity. Also very much in control. Over the last 20 months, Matt suffered from a very AGGRESSIVE cancer. The medical treatment he endured did not extend or improve the quality of life for him.*

*During his time in the military and later in civilian life "MK" was a very successful quiet achiever. A good supportive, caring person and extra special mate to many of us. He was always very good at remaining in the background. I'm sure our leaders in S.V.N. will remember "MK" as a digger who did his job well - often even before being asked to do so.*

*"MK" and I remained good mates over the last 47+ years. A card, a call or a 1 and a 1/2 paragraph letter (a man of a few words) ensured the respect held for each other continued. When I walked away from my visit with "MK" last year (2015) I knew it would be our last. He was not well.*

*"MK" you will not be forgotten by those who journeyed and served with you through your life. R.I.P. "MK" YOUR DUTY'S DONE".*

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**From Greg:** *"Smithy and I met at Kapooka, and completed our recruit and corps training together. It somehow seemed appropriate that we would be*

*posted to 8PL, C Coy together. We then trained for Vietnam, and spent our thirteen months in that country together. Later in life, we found ourselves living only about an hour apart in South Australia.*

*Smithy was a true mate – as solid as a rock, totally dependable, and a bloke who could be completely trusted and relied upon. I know that after 5RAR returned to Australia, he made a point of finding out where Barry Thompson’s family were, and travelled to Gunning (NSW) to pay his respects.*

*Smith was a very quiet bloke, and when he was living in the Holsworthy Barracks, he would disappear every Saturday night. The C Coy sleuths tracked him on one occasion, and followed him to Auburn (Sydney) Town Hall, where an old time was held each week. There was Smithy, having the time of his life with the older generation! The same bloke was also known to enjoy a beverage, but we’ll leave that alone.*

*Goodbye old mate, thanks for your friendship, Rest in Peace”.*



Matt Smith



### **AT THE RAP:**

**John Hellyer** – John writes: Hazel and I left home in south-west Sydney, with two friends for a six-week trip to Qld. We stopped at Hawks Nest, then on to South West Rocks on the NSW Mid-north coast for four days doing the tourist type things – coffee shops, etc. Before leaving, I decided to go for a walk around the headland to look at the millions of bait fish, when I tripped and fell on rocks.

I managed to break my right femur from the hip to the knee, shattering the whole leg bone. Needless to say I met personnel from Ambulance, Police, Fire and Rescue – the whole bit! The next stage of the holiday was to Kempsey Hospital for emergency treatment, then to Port Macquarie for surgery involving pins and plates, followed by a trip in an Air Ambulance to Bowral Private Hospital for a month’s rest, then home. No driving for three months, no standing for three months. Hazel’s brother drove her home from Newcastle, and your old Pay Clerk has been planning next year’s holiday to Qld – from my wheelchair.

**Barrie Taylor** – ongoing oncology treatment.

**Jack Lake** – Major ankle surgery. Jack is now (almost) out of the wheelchair, the moon boot is off, and he is getting about using crutches and other aids. All going well.

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### **TRAVELLING ABOUT:**

John Hellyer – grounded! See above.

Dennis Nevins – gone AWOL – scrub bashing again.

9PL group, leaving on 11<sup>th</sup> August for a trip to Vietnam. This will include attendance at the Long Tan Memorial to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that battle.

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### **FROM DAVID WILKINS:** Close Encounters:

Digger Nevins' unnerving tale of deadly snakes reminded me of my own close encounter just outside the Nui Dat wire on 18 August 1969 when I was still Adjutant. I had returned early from Operation Camden with an initial task of sussing out another rifle range just to the north of C Company wire before heading off on R&R. Having warned the sentry and armed with a 9mm Browning revolver in my side holster, a compass, a map, some star picket stakes and a sledgehammer, I ventured outside the wire and after about 70-100 metres into the waist high kunai grass. The sentry kept an eye on me as I went about my task in the long grass, which in places got to chest high (that's waist high for most of you blokes). I laid out the firing points, and staked the safety arcs to ensure that any firing on the range would be directed away from Nui Dat base and avoid any civilian populated areas. Suddenly a huge King Cobra reared up out of the grass in front of me, its hood flared the size of two cupped hands held side by side. Its head was just below my chin height and just a metre and a half in front of me. I don't know who was more surprised, but as I staggered backwards drawing my revolver, the monster slid back into the long grass and disappeared. Fortunately, it didn't spit its venom at me, as they are prone to do.

Many years later when visiting Worrell's Reptile Park at Gosford with my family, I spoke with the boss Eric Worrell and described my encounter. He told me a King Cobra's venom can kill an elephant, and after assessing my vertically challenged size, he estimated the snake's length to be about 13-14 feet, as it can raise itself one-third of its total length.

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## **DO YOU REMEMBER?**

Living in the Barracks at Holsworthy prior to Vietnam in 1968, and post-Vietnam in 1970: Here are some highlights:

- All soldiers except married personnel lived in. Accommodation was free, and if a digger had a good reason to live out, he was paid \$1.12 per day.
- Diggers had a card to signify that they lived in the barracks.
- Breakfast was at 0630, then the ablutions were cleaned, bed spaces tidied, rooms swept ready for inspection (if conducted) prior to 0715.
- There were four men to a room, and each bed space consisted of a locker, small metal desk, chair, bed, and a small floor mat. There was no heating or cooling. Although highly illegal, most lockers contained a bottle of something to ward off winter chills. We thought that officers didn't know about these.
- Barrack blocks were three-storey, with approximately ten rooms per floor. Showers and toilets occupied one room per floor, and the ground floor provided a laundry and drying room.
- The laundries were equipped with huge dinosaur-style Lightburn washing machines, more like cement mixers than anything else. As mentioned above, bottles of "tonic" were kept by most diggers – the cork from a bottle of port made a perfect bung for the washing machine, as these were always missing.
- Company Parades were held at 0730, 1330 and 1630 daily, and night training was held on Tuesday and some Thursday nights. Weekends were generally free. Field exercises overrode all of these times and periods of leave.
- After the final parade each weekday, the boozier (The Maxwell VC Club) quickly filled up with diggers. No person was ever left on their own in the lines. Sometimes, personnel made it back to the ORs Mess for dinner, but on most occasions, the evening meal took a liquid form.
- Our camaraderie was first class. We looked after our own. There was no time for any digger to become homesick or dwell on personal issues. We were brothers.
- Computers, mobile phones, faxes, photocopiers, and in many cases, private motor vehicles did not exist. The local haunts of Liverpool were only a \$1 cab fare away.
- The average take-home pay for a digger was approximately \$35-\$40 per week. Beer was 18 cents a middy, and smokes 38 cents a packet.

***More in another edition!***

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**Notice in a health food shop window:**  
CLOSED DUE TO ILLNESS

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Then there was the farmer who was doing it a bit tough, so he supplemented his cattle interests with a marijuana crop. His livestock escaped one day, but returned that evening. It was as though the pot was calling the cattle back.

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