

# Half Circle



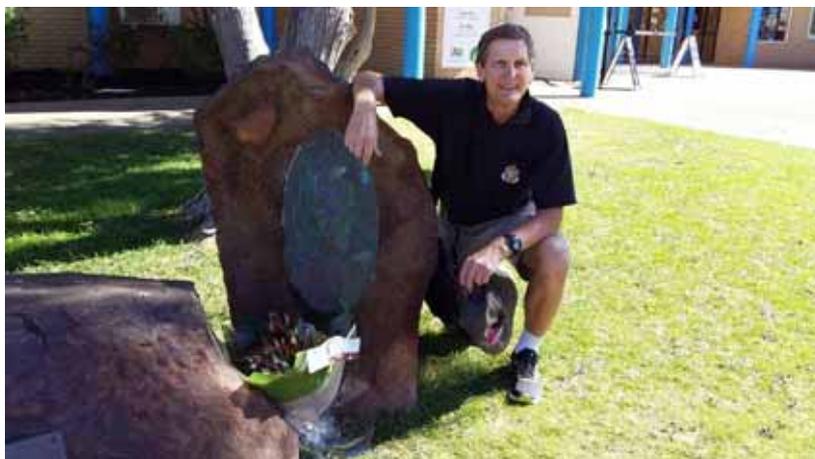
Number 152 – August 2019

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.



**AT THE RAP:** Peter Commerford, Barrie Taylor. ~~we~~ We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be.

---



**FROM ALAN McNULTY DCM, the 5RAR WA Representative:** Wayne Herbert travels to Carnarvon WA each year, visits Andy Drummond's (B Coy) memorial, and gives it a clean-up. Wayne emailed Alan with these words: Hi Alan, in Carnarvon this morning I laid a wreath in remembrance of Andy Drummond...on behalf of his 5RAR comrades. Card says, not forgotten after 50 years. An all native plant wreath seemed right. Wayne.

*Ed's note: Thanks Herbie, all your 5RAR colleagues thank you for what you do on behalf of us.*

---

**FROM PHIL WINNEY:**

I've been reading about the 50th anniversary of the moon landing in 1969. My wife Julie was shopping the other day at Coles and the checkout attendant was talking about it and asked her where she was. "At school" was her reply. Julie then said that her husband was in the jungle in Vietnam at the time. The attendant asked if he saw it. Julie replied that I had good eyes but not that good! Does anybody remember where we were? *Phil*

---

**IAN LEIS – My Story (Part 3)**

(Parts 1 and 2 have been published in Half Circles number 150 and 151)

As I have stated, when I look back on my time in the 1<sup>st</sup> Base Military Hospital the treatment I received was strange. Electric current was used to stimulate nerves! I had very invasive physiotherapy – "No pain, no gain".

However, the treatment did get me mobile and I was able to move and walk without assistance. I was to receive medical treatment until my discharge from the army in November 1970. I was then in the Repatriation System and my rehabilitation continued at "Rosemount" Repatriation Hospital at Windsor, or at Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital at Greenslopes, Brisbane.

The Commonwealth gave me a job as a public servant, working for the Department of Supply as an audit clerk. This was at the 1<sup>st</sup> Base Ordnance Depot at Meeandah, Brisbane. My medical treatment was able to continue in this job. My boss was a Major Graham McLerie – Service Corps. This gentleman was very kind to me and ensured I was always able to attend all my medical sessions required.

By now I felt I was very much recovered from my injuries physically. Mentally I was not in a good place. During all this time – from the jungle dust-off until now – I felt that I had let my mates down – I was safe. Cpl. Ted Suttor's death was always foremost in my mind. I was not sleeping – dreams and flashbacks haunted my mind day and especially nights. I could no longer be around the military, yet my job was working for and with the military – so I resigned and began working for myself as a private contractor working for an aluminium fabrication company. I could not work for a boss any more – I was my own boss. This was in 1972. I completely severed ties with the military. The only contact was occasionally a card or call from "MK" Smith or "Blue" Newberry – usually after alcohol consumption.

I did visit John Faint after receiving a pleading letter from him sometime in 1972-73. He was not in a good way – prescription medication and alcohol – he was out of control.

I became a workaholic. My working day would start at 2am and finish at night. Most days were sixteen plus hours – six days a week. Sundays would start at 1am till 6am. This was a home day. Mow the lawn, wash vehicles, clean and sharpen tools. Maybe a little family time in the afternoon. Only for it to start again at 2 am Monday morning.

"WORK – EAT – and try to sleep."

Physical exhaustion and alcohol helped me sleep – sometimes. I was not a very good family man, having very little time to spend with or give to them. We now had two children, my daughter Leonie arrived in 1973. Another son in 1977 made us a family of five. Glen miscarried another child between 73 – 77.

Thank God my children had a good, loving, capable mother, because as a father I wasn't much good. I was following in my parents' footsteps as the dollars were my main concern.

My eldest son born in 1967 was very good to his mother, sister and brother – he had very advanced maturity for his years. He has continued this care and responsibility he held for them all his life. We are a tight family unit – supportive of each other. We have 10 grandchildren, who adore their grandmother and put up with their grandfather.

My working life from 1972 until 1994 was nothing special. My wife Glenys worked most of these years to assist financially. I earned good money but wasted most of it, on material assets rather than family.

However – we survived!

In 1988 I could no longer work physically hard. I was getting old and lazy at 40 years of age. When I worked in the building industry it was a time when all aspects of building homes were done on site. Very seldom were cranes used it was all done manually. From erecting profiles to the finished product everything involved - footings, slab preparation, laying and tying steel – pouring and finishing concrete slabs (Ready-Mix concrete) was all done on site. All the frame, roof etc all cut, assembled and put in place on site. All the finishing work and supervision done by hand, on site.

All very hard physical days. I enjoyed going to work and seeing a finished home that came out of the ground – still standing and serving a purpose today.

I was still working two jobs (2am to 6am, 6am to 6pm) most days. My ability to continue in this manner was difficult, my back/spine had become a hindrance to my working day.

We decided a long holiday might help. I had some consultation through Repat-DVA with a pain anaesthetist, also an orthopaedic surgeon. Surgery would possibly be needed soon. Medication for the discomfort was prescribed.

We set off to have 12 months travelling Australia by caravan, taking our two youngest children with us. Leonie had just finished high school and we took our youngest son, Joe, out of school. (He was in Grade 6.) This trip was good for us as a family. I enjoyed spending 24 hours a day with them and sharing many good relaxing times together. We visited many towns and areas of interest, we travelled along the coast – even went inland to western towns. I learnt to “relax” – something I had never done. Couldn't do.

I had a chance meeting with John Yabsley (“Skippy”) in Kempsey NSW. Skippy organised for Geoff Pearson to contact me at the caravan park office (by phone), Geoff speaking with me regarding a C Company reunion being held at Tamworth the following weekend.

I was reluctant to attend, not having had any contact with those I served with, but I was persuaded to attend – Glenys, my wife, being the one most involved in this decision.

We packed our gear up and headed to Tamworth. The friendship offered to my family and myself was outstanding.

Seeing and hearing Sandy McKinnon who had vision problems at this time (he was legally blind) – it was a very emotional moment for me when he recognised my voice. “That’s Leisy!”

I had not seen or spoken to Sandy since 1969 when I had visited Concord Hospital whilst awaiting my return to SVN when on R & R, contacting many injured in the mine incident on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1969, who were patients at Concord.

The reunion at Tamworth was most rewarding – enjoyable – I was again in the military circle (family). Good genuine friendships. Note: In my civilian life I have a few good friends who are like military mates but mostly those encountered have been just acquaintances.

From the reunion we were invited to many places. We travelled to Warren and spent a week at “Rousters”, the home of Wayne and Ngaire Stephens. “Barney”, Neil Simpson and wife Carole assisted the Stephens family in looking after us.

My wife and children learnt more about my service in SVN in those few days than they had over the previous 19 years.

We were also invited to spend time at the Pearson residence in Sydney, which we did.

Sandy McKinnon needed a builder to carry out an extension to his home in the Wee Jasper Valley. We set our caravan up on the banks of a beautiful river flowing through “Coodravale”, the McKinnon farm. With the help of Sandy, his step-brother Ken and my daughter Leonie we were able to build a very large extension onto their home. From our military service Sandy and I are “blood brothers”. To have spent this time with him, assisting with the project, was a wonderful experience, rewarding and enjoyable. The military experiences we endured has bonded us for life.

We also spent time with the Newberry family in Albury NSW. Blue was still his happy-grumbling self! The hospitality and friendship from the families who invited us into their homes – amazing! The 19-year gap since I had shared their company just didn’t exist. Wonderful!

My contact with my military family was good for me. I now knew I wasn’t alone with my doubts regarding my involvement in SVN. Especially the worry (re health) regarding our exposure to chemicals sprayed by the Americans. What ill-health was in our future?

Blue Newberry had huge skin problems. He could not get assistance from DVA. He did suffer from skin problems in SVN – it just wasn’t recorded in his medical health records. He attended the RAP daily to be sprayed for “prickly heat rash” etc. This rash covered his body. It was a very sad day in 1992 when Blue took his own life. He just gave up on life – it was all too hard.

With regards contacts with those with whom I served – in 1972 whilst I was working as a Public Servant, I was visited by the then Captain Ian Hosie – “Hoss”. A very surprising visit. He had tracked me down somehow, found out where I was working and made it his business to catch up with me, to check up on me. How was I physically and mentally? Was I being looked after? Was I in the Repat-DVA system etc? We enjoyed a liquid lunch and a good chat. A most rewarding visit for me – to think he took the time to do that for me. I wasn’t forgotten!

Our long journey/holiday of nearly 12 months came to an end. It was back to work for Glen and for me. Leonie also started work and Joe went back to school. I did give up my early morning job of wrapping and delivering papers to homes and shops. However, I returned to it 6 months later. It was a way of handling my inability to sleep, rather than wandering around the house or watching TV etc, annoying family still trying to sleep.

In the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1994, I handed over the keys of a completed house. In the afternoon I had a medical appointment at Greenslopes Repat Hospital with an orthopaedic surgeon who had been monitoring my back/spinal problems. He was concerned about the increased loss of feeling in my legs and numbness to my lower back.

An MRI was organised. I was not allowed to leave the hospital as it was feared my spinal cord was compressed and possibly leaking fluid at L5-S1 level. My SVN injuries and hard physical life had caught up with me.

I had a five-hour spinal operation the following morning. Evidence of previous trauma was apparent, and a spur had grown – this was compressing my spinal cord. I spent the next 28 days in hospital, only to have to return a few days later with infection – another week in hospital. The surgeon was amazed I had been able to walk, let alone work.

The next 18 months was spent getting mobile again. Using a walking frame – then crutches – and then a walking stick, and hydrotherapy three days a week were all part of the process. But it worked – I recovered.

In 1997 I had another invasive operation at C6-7 level in my neck. This involved inter-body bone fusion. I was advised not to return to physical work, and thus began my appeal – fight – with DVA. I applied for an increase in my pension entitlement. This was initially rejected.

DVA did and always had looked after me medically – nothing was spared with my treatment or recovery needs. However, it would take further involvement of an ex-politician (who had been the Minister for Veterans Affairs), three surgeons and a psychiatrist before I was granted TPI in 1995. From the time of my first operation I had access to my superannuation – this, and our savings, gave us the funds to live on while fighting DVA.

Retirement – nothing to do – and being unable to do many of the physical things needed around the house was a strange experience for me.

Some days instead of aging one day I feel I age three! It takes three days to do what once I could do in one.

Accept life as it is. Live with it. Make the best of each day. (The Army taught me this.)

I am more than lucky - not the best word to express the gratitude and love I have for Glenys, beside me, supporting and assisting me through our 52+ years together, and for my family whose support and understanding has made my journey all worthwhile. Grandchildren who adore their “Nana” and who put up with “Pop”. All part of life today. Now at 70 years – I would not change the path life has taken me. I am content. I enjoy the quiet life, I do what I can, assist those in need, and step around what I can no longer do. I intend to enjoy the future and care for loved ones. Especially Glenys. The military family members mean a lot to me, I enjoy contact with them. Support both ways.

I thank you for taking the time to read my story. I encourage others to record and share their journey with those interested. I am sure many would have an interesting story to tell.

Ian F. Leis

***Ed’s note – Thank you Leisy for your article. You have given a warts and all account of your life, both civilian and military, given your family the accolades which they deserve, and more importantly, have recognised the woman who has given everything to love and support you – Glenys. Anyone who knows Glenys knows a lady who is an absolute champion. Don***

---



The mural on the old water tower at Gunnedah, NSW, 2019

---

**VALE – 216956 SGT David Lenard WILLIS.** Dave Willis BEM will be remembered by us as the original 7RAR pig! Dave served in Vietnam with 6RAR, and two tours with 7RAR. He was also a foundation member of 5/7RAR. Post-Vietnam, the pig mascot in 7RAR was appropriately named “Willis”. Dave was awarded the British Empire Medal for his service to the RAR as Transport NCO. He passed away on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019. He was a lifelong mate of Blue Schafer, and a true friend of all of us that knew him. Stand down Dave, your duty is done.

---



### **TRAVELLING ABOUT:**

Bob and Margaret Hooper – Europe and the UK until 15<sup>th</sup> August.

Jack and Susan Lake, back home in the Blue Mountains following their catch-up trip to visit old mates in northern NSW and Qld.

---

The next issue of Half Circle will contain further details of the commemoration service for PTE Barry Thompson, who died in Vietnam on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1970. This will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thommo's death. The service will be held at Thommo's gravesite at Gunning, NSW on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020, followed by a wake.

---

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – [donharrod@bigpond.com](mailto:donharrod@bigpond.com), 0418 423 313, with help from Alan McNulty, Phil Winney and Ian Leis, behind-the-scenes assistance from Gary Townsend (the Tiger Tales Editor), Ted Harrison (the 5RAR Association Webmaster), **supported by The RB Co, and powered by the Lambs Valley Wine Company, Hunter Valley, NSW.**