

Half Circle



Number 120 - December 2016

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.

VALE – 2790124 CPL GEOFFREY MERVYN FORD. We regret to advise that Geoff Ford passed away in the early hours of 18th November 2016. He had been suffering poor health for some time, but in his usual manner, did not complain. You would remember that Geoff was our CPL Stretcher Bearer in Vietnam, and was highly regarded by all. Pre-Vietnam training included service at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, and those who can remember the Kings Cross area in the late 1960's would appreciate that he received a good grounding in the treatment of trauma. When Geoff returned from Vietnam, he married his fiancée, and they had three girls and a boy. Sadly, Geoff's wife passed away when the children were young, and he took it upon himself to raise them as a single parent. Anyone who has met Geoff's children can only admire what a magnificent job he did. He was our mate, a fellow digger, and a gentleman. Rest in Peace, Fordy.



2790124 CPL Geoff Ford – 23-03-1947 to 18-11-2016



AT THE RAP:

Colin Summerfield -

medical

Barrie Taylor -

ongoing oncology treatment

John Hellyer -

broken leg

Barry and Kathleen Morgan – On a recent trip to North America and Alaska, Kathleen suffered a hand injury which required surgery, and six months of rehabilitation. Barry, being a good husband, assumed the extra load and aggravated his crook shoulder. He now has this new illness called “triple-itis” – bursitis, tendonitis and arthritis – a fancy medical name for getting old! Barry can’t even play golf! Anyway, on the bright side, Barry’s culinary skills have improved, and Kathleen has fitted into her supervisory role without any difficulty.



TRAVELLING ABOUT:

Phil and Marion Greenhalgh – just returned from a trip to Europe.

Bill (Blue) Douglas – now living in northern Thailand.

Aussie Biele – Aussie and Ally have just returned from a trip to Tasmania, and were hosted by Kevin and Lynette Mulligan.



Aussie Biele and Kevin Mulligan at the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Wall, Devonport, Tas.

Ed’s Note: Wherever you are going this Christmas, please take it easy, and allow for rest stops. We are no longer 21 years old and bullet-proof!

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID WILKINS: We now must face the reality that we are fast approaching the age of seventy, and in fact many of us have already breasted the tape! If your service organisation has not already notified you, you should be aware that if you don’t already have one, you will be issued a Department of Veterans’ Affairs Gold Card. This entitles you to free medical services. As such, you will no longer need to be a member of a Health Fund, and NO LONGER have to pay the Medicare Levy if you still pay tax. However, your spouse will still need private health insurance if desired. For further information, please contact Veterans Affairs or your local Ex-Service organisation.

CHRISTMAS 1969. As it is now 47 years since we spent Christmas at our Nui Dat, Vietnam base, we can probably reflect on how we spent it. Our OC, David Wilkins did his best to make it a memorable time for our diggers, knowing that they only had a two-day break, then back to the scrub for a long operation. Here are some of the highlights of Christmas 1969:

DAVE'S DIARY:

Continued from Half Circle Number 16.

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:

25 Dec 1969

Xmas day back at the Dat and a suitable amount of booze is consumed by all. We began the day with the company officers and sergeants serving Coffee Royale to the diggers IN BED (strong coffee, sugar, cream and laced with a healthy dose of brandy- not sure if we used rum instead). Later, we continued our duties and served the diggers their Xmas dinner, much to their delight. This is an old Army custom and one the Diggers enjoy immensely. It was terrific day for the Diggers, sergeants and officers alike.

I invited the CO and the RSM to join the Company for a beer and dinner. It was during the Christmas drink when spirits were high that "Doc" Mulligan produced his white rabbit, (illegally smuggled from Vung Tau and secreted in the lines away from the prying eyes of officers and SNCOs) and handed it to "Genghis". "Bunny-san" was well received as shown in the photo at the following website address:

<http://www.5rar.asn.au/gallery/bunny-san.htm>

We were all relaxed, the VC were kind enough to leave us in peace, and people were able to unwind for a day. I also made a quick trip to visit my wounded soldiers in the Field Hospital at Vung Tau.

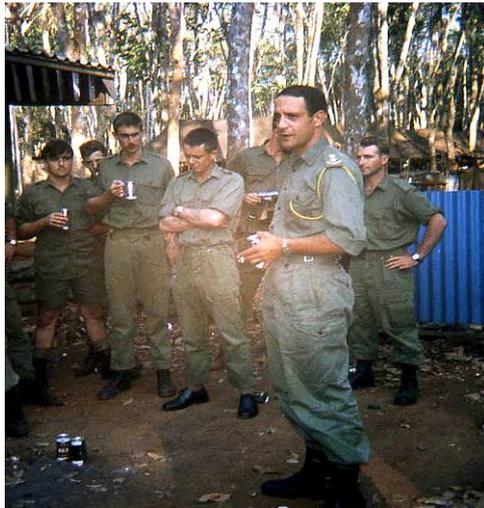
I am now occupying "Yarralumla", which is OC C Coy's "mansion" at Nui Dat. It has an office and a bedroom, neon lighting in both rooms, sofa, fridge, fan etc. Very comfortable, compared with other quarters up here. The small wooden building was painted green and snuggled amongst the rubber trees of C Company lines, with the Coy Command Post dug in below it. The extra space was good for planning and holding my orders group before each operation.

(To be continued)

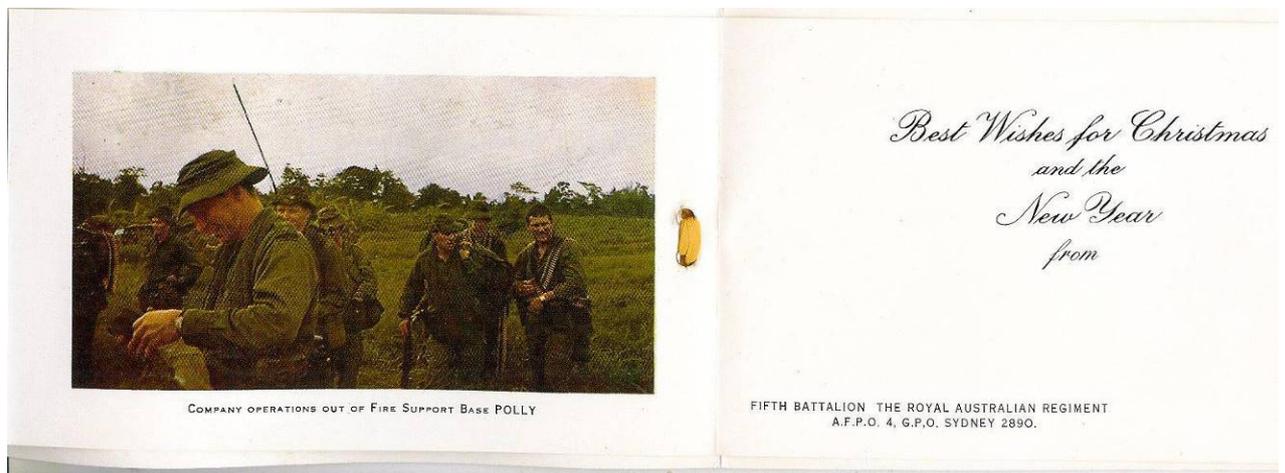


Lt Ian Hosie serving Christmas Dinner to Harry Kallergis and Ken Leggett

Ed's note: This article is part of a series of extracts from the War Diary of Captain David Wilkins, OC C Company 5RAR from December 1969 to March 1970. C Company soldiers will remember Christmas 1969, being served by the Officers and senior NCOs, and Kevin Mulligan's "Bunny San". I also recall a 9PI soldier being cheeky enough to offer the CO a dirty dixie mug with a strange substance in it. Genghis' reaction? - He took a swig, looked at the digger and said "I think this brandy is St Agnes!" Ben Oram may know just WHO that soldier was! Dave probably doesn't know how much of a morale booster his move to invite the CO and RSM to C Company on Christmas Day was.



Above: A quiet one with the CO: Pte Ray Fitzpatrick, Pte Blue Newberry (obscured), Cpl Don Harrod, CSM Jack Lake, Lt Col Colin Khan (CO), and Capt David Wilkins (Company Commander)



Here is a copy of the 5RAR 1969 Christmas Card. Clearly shown are Bill Titley and Buddah Martini - who are the others?

CHRISTMAS 1969 – NUI DAT
(or How I learned to love the war and stop worrying – for a day)
From Roger Lambert, Platoon Commander 9 PL

With military precision (well, what else would you expect from the Tigers), plans were put in place for the traditional start to Christmas Day, Thursday 25 December 1969. At the appointed hour (something like zero dark 30 hours as I recall), the officers of C Company assembled at “Yarralumla” for a final briefing before proceeding to the company kitchen. “Yarralumla”, for those of us whose memories are fading (like mine), was the name of the Officer Commanding Charlie Company’s ‘hootchie’ (I guess by comparison to our humble sand-bagged abodes, the OC’s digs probably did resemble the Governor General’s official residence in some ways!)

Aluminium cooking pots containing coffee were decanted for ease of handling (handy things those hot-boxes with their inner containers) and armed with a suitable quantity of rum, we proceeded to our respective lines to serve up the Coffee Royale to our troops. I suspect that our diggers were very pleased to see us on two counts:

1. their officers were serving them instead of vice versa; and

2. we were serving alcohol in the lines.

Now of course we all know that no self-respecting Aussie digger would disobey Standing or Routine Orders and consume alcohol in the lines. Not in such a professional outfit as Charlie Company. Those buried "Trunks, Metal, Troops for the Use Of" were only there to store goffas and to prevent chocolate from melting in the tropical heat. Right? Yeah right!

With the Coffee Royale duly served, the officers retired to "Yarralumla" to finalise plans for the rest of Christmas Day including the Army tradition of serving lunch to our troops. This was the first misjudgement of the day. No, not the planning but rather gathering in the OC's ante room.

One Captain David Wilkins produced a bottle of rum that he'd been sent from Australia. It was white rum. Not to my individual taste but, heck, beggars can't be choosers. David proceeded to extol the virtues of this fine Australian rum as healthy portions were poured into our "Cups, Canteen, Troops for the Use Of".

Cheers, Happy Christmas and all that and down the hatch. Bottoms up.

What the heck is going on here? My lips have gone numb, my eyes are watering and now I can't feel my tongue! There's an acute burning sensation in my throat that's proceeding down my windpipe! There's a gurgling in my stomach that would do a volcano about to erupt proud! I'm now getting concerned about how quickly this rum is going about its business dissolving my intestines and what was going to happen by the time it hit the outlet valve of my bowels (or what was left of them).

"Another?" asked David. By now the initial impact of the first healthy dose of Inner Circle had settled. Either that or I was so severely injured by that first hit, the equivalent of a napalm strike, my body and mind had no idea what was going on and that same foreign voice that seemed to come from me says "Yes, please." Idiot! Who said that?! I'm bloody well possessed!!

I didn't dare light a cigarette while the top was off that bottle for fear that there would be an instant detonation and the entire officer group of Charlie Company would be incinerated. Come to think of it, had we sprayed this stuff over the jungle and lit it up with WP, we could have obliterated the entire Province and have been home by New Year's Day!

Holy Dooley! Now my legs have developed an inability to keep me upright, so it's a case of get into the "Chairs, Canvas, Folding, Troops for the Use Of" lest I end up a heap on the floor and having to leopard crawl my way around! "What the hell is that?" some guttural, almost spectre-like voice that didn't seem to be my own croaked.

David proceeded to extol the virtues of CSR Inner Circle Rum. Man, that stuff was 100 Proof if it was a day.

Fair dinkum, I reckon if a Huey ran out of fuel, you could pour this in the tank and the turbine would happily run as it would on Aviation Turpentine. But I don't think you could put it in the trusty Zippo though as one spark and it would probably blow your head off.

And so started Christmas Day in Nui Dat, 1969.

So how was Christmas Day so far? Well, let's say that the digger's lunch, with us serving, went off very well and things seemed to be going pretty much according to plan. A good feed, good company and perhaps a wee bit too much grog – a great Army tradition. But heck, I wasn't feeling any pain. The CSR anaesthetic was seeing to that. Now there's another thought – the Doc could have used Inner Circle during minor operations and one would not feel any pain.

Did the day get any better? Well, things started to go downhill somewhat when a Half-Ton Trailer appeared in the company lines. Not just any trailer – this one was full of beer. How on earth did that thing get here and where did it come from?

Hang on – that’s a US Army jeep (or Mutt as they referred to them). Where the heck did that come from?

“What do you mean you swapped it for a Slouch Hat complete with puggaree and badge?” There’s that guttural, foreign voice again but the diggers are looking at me.

“Take the bloody thing back” say the voice. “Ah, but Skipper” rings out the chorus.

“Don’t argue. Just take the thing back where you got it or you’re all on a fizzer!” That voice – who’s saying these words and why are they looking at me?

“And where did that trailer come from?” I am possessed; that trailer is full of cold beer and this voice keeps telling them to get rid of it. Pull yourself together man. There’s sure to be a logical explanation and after all, it is more beer.

“We brought it up from “X” Company, boss” says the chorus. Smart cookies these diggers. Don’t let one bloke be the spokesman and take the wrap, but all speak up together and it’s most unlikely everyone will be placed on an A4 - one for all and all for one.

““X” Company, you say” says the foreign voice seemingly coming from me. “That’s OK then. Just stash the beer and get rid of the evidence ...er ... trailer.” Did I say that?

And so Christmas Day 1969 in Nui Dat passed without further incident. Well, almost.

The trailer with the beer had been missed, reported stolen and the “Sheriff” and his trusty band of RP’s were on the trail. The OC hauled we platoon commanders in and demanded to know what we knew of the missing trailer.

I swore blind that my boys didn’t do it and would never do such a thing. In hindsight, how good was it that I was still affected by that dreaded CSR Inner Circle? I could have used the defence that I was possessed by the ‘spirit’ and that it was not me doing the talking.

To the best of my knowledge, at the end of the day, the US Army inventory had the correct tally of jeeps and the missing trailer mysteriously turned up with its rightful owners – albeit empty. I swear that I have no idea what happened to the contents although Southwark is not to my taste either ...

Some years later, as I thought back on my introduction to CSR Inner Circle Rum and Christmas Day 1969, a chill ran down my spine when I hypothesised what might have happened if D445 and whomever else was in the Province at the time had decided to launch an attack on Nui Dat that day. Nah! Had they even contemplated an assault and had they got through the wire and perimeter defences, the alcohol fumes and the frequent belching and farting would have completely disoriented them if not repelled them. ‘Chemical warfare’ would have saved the day!

Then of course we had our secret weapon to employ – CSR Inner Circle Rum. Thanks, David. To this day I still reckon that, among other things such as soldiering, the Army taught me how to drink and smoke – well, I’ve got to blame somebody.

PS. “X” Company is designed to protect the innocent after all these years. Let’s just say it was one of ours ‘down the hill’.

ON A HAPPY NOTE: We have been advised that Harry and Jean Storm – parents of Geoff Storm and his wife Liz have just celebrated **72** years of marriage. Harry and Jean have lived in Barham (NSW) all their lives, and are now aged 95 and 93 years respectively. Harry still manages all his affairs (with a small amount of help from Geoff). Arthritis plagues them somewhat, but they are well cared for in the local aged care facility. They have 2 children, 4 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren. Stormy invited your editor to Barham for a weekend in 1970, and Harry and Jean were most friendly and hospitable – typical country people. Congratulations on reaching a magnificent milestone!



MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from old memories of Christmas 1969, Phil Greenhalgh, Russell Hill, Geoff and Liz Storm, Barry Morgan, Robert Earl, David Wilkins, **and powered by the Lambs Valley Wine Company, Hunter Valley, NSW.**