

Half Circle



Number 50 - February 2011

(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.

WE MADE IT!!! 50 editions of "Half Circle". What started out to be a simple means of communicating with each other has now been going for over four years. Here's the challenge to other sub-units of 5RAR - past and present - how about trying something similar? The number of blokes that we have found and re-established contact with has been most rewarding, and more are being found each month. Last month, we were able to make contact with Alex Ilyin and John Winter.

THE QUEENSLAND AND NORTHERN NSW FLOODS: We have put out the call for any of our C Coy mates who have done it tough during this disaster to contact us. Ian Cooper has been isolated at Ingham, and Kiwi and Cheryl Hill's home suffered some damage. If you need help, **CALL**. Thanks to Andy MacDougal for getting the ball rolling; and to Barrie Taylor and Colin Summerfield for their quick responses.



Pictured is the water rushing through Russell and Cheryl Hill's laundry. We hope that the beer fridge was high and dry.

FROM JACK BRADD: Happiness is a belt-fed weapon.

Dave's Diary (From the Diary of Captain David Wilkins, C Coy 5RAR, 1969-70)

Continued from last edition of Half Circle

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional explanatory or descriptive commentary is in plain text:

2 Nov 1969. *A good day for the Tigers!*

Bravo Coy had a bunker contact in the same area (of the Hat Dich) as yesterday but this time caught the enemy by surprise, resulting in 9 enemy KIA and one PW.

At 1000 hours we, C Coy, still mounted in APCs, were moving towards Route 15 from our night ambush positions, when we contacted a squad of VC moving from a clearing into a grass swamp area (see photo of C Coy on APCs). The APCs immediately fired and assaulted as far as possible, but the going was too muddy for them, so 9 Platoon (commanded by 2Lt Roger Lambert) dismounted and assaulted from the left flank. During this assault they contacted the enemy, killing one and wounding two.

They followed the blood trails but without result. 8 Pl then did a more detailed search of the contact area and surprised further enemy hiding in the long grass and swamp; one was killed and one was taken prisoner. Weapons, equipment and documents were also captured.

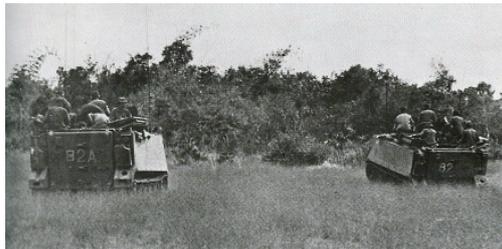
This VC prisoner (pictured) was immediately searched and after being carried to drier ground by (left to right) Cpl Kevin Mulligan (medic), Cpl Eddie Kime with Sgt 'Kiwi' Hill directing, he was patched up (gunshot wound to the ankle). I then arranged for him to be evacuated by a Dustoff helicopter.

So far in two days of this op, the battalion has had all Companies involved in contacts, resulting in 13 enemy KIA, two PWs, several enemy WIA, and only two minor casualties to our own troops. The intelligence reports had proved to be accurate.

3 Nov

A further search of our C Coy contact area has revealed another five enemy dead plus weapons: AK47s, SKS and a brand new K54 pistol. This last weapon would have belonged to an officer.

4 Nov (to be continued)



C Company on tracks, assaulting the enemy caught in the open.



Wounded VC prisoner being carried by Cpl Kevin Mulligan and Cpl Eddie Kime, while Sgt "Kiwi" Hill directs.

Ian Leis (Leisy) remembers and profiles another 8PI digger - 4720018 Pte Michael STRUHLAK "Strooky"



In 1950 at the age of 4 years Strooky arrived in Australia, disembarking in Melbourne. His German parents had come to start a new life in Australia (Strooky has 2 brothers and 1 sister). This was a big adventure that Strooky remembers all too well. He would grow to love Australia and all that is Australian. The Struchlak family were settled in the fruit growing district around Mildura, many different towns were home depending on where employment was found. Renmark finally became home.

After completing his schooling Strooky followed in his fathers footsteps, trying his hands at many different jobs especially fruit picking. Finally he obtained a permanent job with the South Australian Railways as a porter. The Struchlak family gained Australian Citizenship in 1956. "This was the first adventure of Strooky's life".

The second adventure started when the marbles fell and he was called up for Military Service. He was in the 12th intake, completing his basic training at Puckapunyal. He was then posted to 5RAR Holdsworthy where his infantry training was completed. Allocated to 8 Platoon C Company Strooky was soon making friends - friendships that continue today. He was a happy person, had a great outlook on life and performed all that was asked of him.

His attitude "Don't worry about it - just do it and move on" was helpful to the rest of the platoon as it had a settling down effect on us. Strooky was always ready to assist in any way he could, often helping out when not required to do so. He was always ready to have a chat - this continues today as many of us are aware - receiving the unexpected phone call from him "just to have a chat, check up if all is okay". These calls are appreciated by all.

The second adventure was really just getting started when in January 1969 Strooky married Libby and his third adventure (marriage) started, but put on hold until his military commitment was finished.

As the second adventure continued Strooky sailed on SVN on the Sydney with the rest of us. He was a rifleman for most of his tour, in the latter part he carried the platoon radio. He remembers many good times shared with Greg Dick (Hickory), Matt Smith (MK) and Barry Thompson (BJ) with whom he shared a tent in NuiDat. Strooky is especially proud of his war service for his adopted country.

Like myself Strooky had a family to return to and support after the military. He had a number of different jobs anything to support his growing family (3 sons and 1 daughter). He gained permanent employment with the South Australian Electricity Authority as a linesman. This continued for the next 29 years until retirement. This job was to see Strooky spend many hours flying in helicopters - above the high voltage

supply lines along the Victorian border down to Mt Gambier and in the Renmark area. His love and respect for helicopters continued.

Today Pop and Nana Struchlak enjoy their 11 grandchildren. They are very proud and supportive of their extended family. Age and some issues from military service have slowed him down. He is retired and lives in Barmera SA. He is still the happy person we knew, he loves his food and Libby's cooking looks after him in that respect, their 40+ years of marriage has been good. Family, caravanning and fishing when possible fill their days.

Michael Struchlak - to me you have been one of life's silent achievers. I respect you and value your friendship as do all that have been privileged to have known you and shared time with you.

Note: Strooky would like to make contact with "Stretch" who was the 8 Platoon medic. Anyone with any information regarding who he was or where he is now can be passed on to him on Ph(08) 85882714

FOUND.....

The 'Shadow' has resurfaced!

Don Frohmuller, a member of Company HQ Support Section, and former batman to both Bill Titley and Dave Wilkins, recently made contact with the editor.

The following is an overview of his last 40 years - After being discharged in July 1970 he married his long time girlfriend Carolin in July '71 (You may remember, she was the blonde holding the 'D' of the black & gold, tiger 'D O N' sign as we docked at Garden Island on the HMAS Sydney on 12 March 1970). Don and Carolin still live on the Central Coast. They have 2 sons in their early 30s and 3 fantastic grandsons. Don has had several jobs in sales & marketing with companies involved in earthmoving and mining. He is currently working at Weir Minerals, Artarmon having reduced down to 4 days a week and looking forward to retirement this July. He has supported his sons in their interests, holding key positions on committees involving scouting, soccer & basketball. Don still supports, with passion, the NRL West Tigers - once a Tiger, always a Tiger. Over the last 3 years Don has appreciated catching up with Davie Wilkins on a couple of occasions and enjoyed the news from *Half Circle & Tiger Tales*. His New Year's Resolution is to reconnect with the members of C Company and is looking forward to attending any possible reunions.



Dave Wilkins and Don Frohmuller at a recent meeting on the Central Coast, NSW

From Bob Hooper: If you want to know all the things you didn't know when you were in

Vietnam, the Commanders' War Diaries for the Australian Army during the Vietnam War have been scanned and are now accessible via a direct link to the Australian War Memorial at <http://www.awm.gov.au/diaries/seasia/index.asp>



THE POST-CHRISTMAS DEBRIEF:

Blue Schafer met up with Wally Magalas and Don Teichelman at the Greensborough RSL (Melbourne). From all accounts, these three blokes sorted out all the World's problems (except cricket, that is). Don also caught up with Alex Ilyin at the Club on another occasion.

MORE WORDS OF WISDOM FROM JACK BRADD:

- HAPPINESS** - getting on well with the machine gunner
 - SADNESS** - When the CSM knows your name and your platoon
 - HAPPINESS** - Having a box of HE grenades
 - SADNESS** - Upsetting the cook or storeman (either way you're RS)
 - HAPPINESS** - A south-bound trip on a converted aircraft carrier
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Our three surviving VC winners - Mark Donaldson, Ben Roberts-Smith, and Keith Payne.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod, donharrod@bigpond.com, (02) 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with thanks to John Martini, Jack Bradd, Blue Schafer, Bob Hooper, Andy MacDougal, Don Teichelman, David Wilkins, Ian Leis, and you can expect another year of crook humour.