

Half Circle



Number 122 - February 2017

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.

THE 2017 AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS LIST: It is with great pride that we announce that Bryan John SCHAFER - our Blue Schafer from 9PL C Coy - has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in this year's list. Blue spent his working life as a soldier and officer, and after he retired, dedicated his efforts to working as a Legacy volunteer, including Branch presidency. In addition to that, he has been made a Life Member of the Wests Tigers Rugby League Football Club for his many years in team management. We all join in congratulating Blue on his OAM.



Bryan Schafer, OAM



Have a good look at this picture – it's C Coy 5RAR 2016. OC C Coy, MAJ Tom Green sent this in, depicting the troops at the Cultana Training Range, South Australia, before deploying to Iraq. The men are sitting in, around and on M113AS4s of A SQN 1 AR.

FROM THE OC - Some Issues in April 1969 and beyond.

Don Harrod has asked me to reflect on the time I was appointed as OC C Company in April 1969.

Readers will be aware that a decision had been made to appoint a new OC for C Company. So soon after 5 RAR's arrival in Vietnam was obviously not a desirable time to change an OC. The need to train together as a team for several months before going to Vietnam was paramount. It so happened I had never served together with any of the members of C Company before my arrival at Nui Dat on 20 April 1969. It was going to be quite a challenge but Brigadier Pearson (Commander 1 ATF) was keen for me to take it on.

I had served under Brigadier "Sandy" Pearson previously when he was Commander 1 RAR Battle Group, before I went on to be a rifle company commander at 4 RAR in January 1964. I served in that role with 4 RAR in West Malaysia and Borneo in 1966, before becoming Second in Command of 4 RAR.

Before arriving at Nui Dat I had an interesting staff job in HQ Australian Force in Vietnam (HQ AFV), based in Saigon, which I had been advised from a career point of view was a good posting. This job included the need for liaison visits to other headquarters including attachments, for example, to 18 ARVN Division and HQ ATF. (One of my more unusual achievements during my time in Saigon was to fulfill an urgent request from the OC of the SAS Squadron operating out of Nui Dat. He needed at least 20 “unders and overs”. These were grenade launchers that could be attached by an armorer above or below an SAS patrol member’s personal weapon. Such a weapon was particularly important in a hasty withdrawal situation. On a “liaison visit” to the huge U.S. base at Long Binh I managed to obtain the twenty weapons for the cost of a mere 20 slouch hats.)

There is a lot of competition for active service slots as a company commander and therefore it was unusual to get this chance twice. There was also the issue that I was several years older than most other rifle company commanders serving in Vietnam at the time. Nevertheless, due to the situation in C Company, Brigadier Pearson asked HQ AFV to release me and I came to Nui Dat at very short notice.

How did I feel about the move to C Company? I was very happy to again command a rifle company on active service despite the challenging circumstances. I considered it an honour to command Australian troops, particularly on active service.

A rifle company is the last opportunity to have a command where you have the opportunity to get to know all the men under your command – an established strength of 124 plus attached artillery and mortar observers and the company medic (who in this case kept a rabbit). What made it harder to get to know the names of all the men was the fact that every three months there was a changeover of about a quarter of all the National Servicemen.

I was to learn very quickly that the National Servicemen, who made up more than half my numbers, were excellent soldiers. They were often a little older and more mature than many of the regulars. When I had to decide, in consultation with the relevant platoon commanders, on a promotion to Lance Corporal or Corporal I put it quite out of my mind whether the best man for the job was a regular or a National Serviceman.

I recall that I was very fortunate to have Bill Titley as my Company 2 IC when I arrived in C Company. He was very loyal and a good source of background information on C Company and 5 RAR.

On the day after I arrived at C Company, the company had to rehearse for a landing using Landing Craft Medium (LCM) on a beach near Vung Tau in full view of the Long Hais. These hills were a formidable enemy redoubt. When we

arrived at the rehearsal area, with the water depth unknown, nobody, at least in our LCM, seemed very enthusiastic about jumping into the South China Sea. So it seemed appropriate that I should test the depth, and I jumped in, soon followed by Alan Miles, my trusty radio operator, who kept close behind me for the remainder of my time in Vietnam. There was an anxious wait until Alan, with his heavy load, returned to the surface! The occupants of another LCM reported that they were only in waist deep water but as they moved forward towards the beach the water threatened to be over their heads. Clearly there could be a safety issue particularly if the enemy became aware of our plans.

Later that night, the proposed landing was called off by a higher authority. Meanwhile the officer in charge of the LCMs who was 6 foot 4 inches tall offered to lend me a dry set of green uniforms for the trip back to Nui Dat, thus ensuring that I looked ridiculous in my ill-fitting clothes so soon after my arrival in the company.

One of the issues that was on my mind, and surely also on the minds of many others in Vietnam, was the fact that the Americans were starting to withdraw some of their units from Vietnam without replacement. This included all U.S. Units in our neighbouring IV Corps. This reflected a political unwillingness to take further heavy casualties.

To my mind, casualties would best be avoided by fighting the enemy on ground of our own choosing as in carefully sited ambushes. Rather than sweeping through areas seeking and destroying enemy bunker positions, leading almost inevitably to Australian casualties including from mines and booby traps. We used ambushes whenever possible but when on lengthy "Reconnaissance in Force" operations it was not always possible to maintain ambushes for substantial periods because it was unreasonable for soldiers who had been on arduous patrols all day.

Bill Titley was transferred to BHQ in early August. His replacement, David Wilkins, did not arrive until 29 October but again I was fortunate in obtaining another very good 2 IC until my 12 months in Vietnam were up on 23 December. When I flew home that day I felt the company would be in very good hands under David.



Major Claude Ducker, MC, MID,
OC C Coy 5RAR, 1969

C.H. Ducker



AT THE RAP:

Colin Summerfield – medical

Barrie Taylor – ongoing oncology treatment



TRAVELLING ABOUT:

Bob Hooper – travelling with his Probus club to Vung Tau, Nui Dat, Long Tan, five days in Cambodia, followed by twelve days in Vietnam, travelling from Hanoi to Saigon.

FROM COL ROGER WAINWRIGHT, PRESIDENT 5RAR ASSOCIATION AND 0C 8 PL C COY 1966/67:

“Doug Bishop (8PL 1966/67) and 5RAR Vic State Representative has alerted me to vandalism at the Geoff Levey Memorial Garden in Sunbury (Vic). The garden has been named to honour the service and work for veterans by Geoff Levey. CPL Levey was an integral part of CHQ C Coy 5RAR in 1966/67. A Lone Pine tree had been planted within the garden to commemorate a century of the Anzac tradition. These vandals (we can think of a lot of other words) smashed the tree to such an extent that it could not be saved. Arrangements are now being made to have the tree replaced, but the original tree had great significance. Geoff Levey, after his military service, joined and was president of the Sunbury RSL, and worked tirelessly for the welfare of veterans. He was badly injured in a car crash, recovered, and continued his work, which was rewarded by the award of the OAM. Unfortunately, Geoff died of cancer some years ago. Rest in Peace Old Digger, your efforts will never be forgotten”.

DENNIS NEVINS' DIARY: As we know, Dennis is re-writing all his Vietnam diaries in order that they may be kept, sent to the Australian War Museum or published. Dennis has an entry regarding FSB Polly, and is a bit stumped with its meaning. Can anyone help? Here is the transcript: *“At FSB Polly I mention no Tango Alfa's in this base would you have any idea what I was referring to?”*

A VETERAN'S WIFE

by Heather M. Tabers

A uniform I do not wear
A gun I do not carry
But I serve my country proudly
Through the man I chose to marry
I may not wear a dog tag
But I have a mission just the same
My husband defended freedom
And I'll defend his name
A purple heart I'll never wear
No ribbons adorn my chest
But this ring upon my finger
Shows that I'm truly blessed
My husband is a warrior
Both in battle and at home
He loves and guards us fiercely
No greater love I've ever known
When the shadows of his darkest days
Come back to haunt his mind
His wife will faithfully stand beside
And love he'll always find
A Veterans wife I'm proud to be
No greater honor could I know
Than to proudly love and honor
My husband, my hero

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com,
0418 423 313, with help from Bob Hooper, Jim and Lesley Lowry, Lynette Mulligan, Claude Ducker,
Dennis Nevins, Roger Wainwright, MAJ Tom Green, **and powered by the Lambs Valley Wine
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