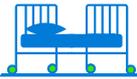


Half Circle



Number 158 – February 2020

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.



AT THE RAP: David Wilkins has advised that Peter Commerford's health has deteriorated. Consequently, Peter is now resident at the Ferndale Nursing Home, 33 Jersey Road, Mortdale NSW 2223. Cards and letters would be a nice gesture. Peter's family can read them to him.

We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be.



2789920 PTE Barry John Thompson

**50th Anniversary Commemorative Service - 1st February 2020 – Gunning NSW
2581**

The day finally arrived. The service has come and gone and it will now go down as part of history for the Thompson family and 5RAR.

The day was abnormally hot but this did not deter the members of "C" Company 5RAR from attending this rural locale in support of their mate. They marched on with a swagger to Barry's grave that brought a tear to ones eye. They received a standing ovation. Before the

ODE, Last Post, Reveille and National Anthem they moved to Barry's grave, linked arms, bowed their heads and paid their last respects. A very moving time for all.

To get to this point there were several members of 5RAR who contributed time, information, points of correction, constructive criticism, encouragement and support. I mentioned some at the Wake but there were too many to mention here but they know who they are, thank you. But there is always one person who deserves a special mention and we would be remiss if we did not mention Don Harrod. Right from the very first concept of this service 12 months ago Don proved to be a tower of strength and totally supportive. Nothing was a bother and his flow of information within 5RAR and the organisers was always appreciated. His eulogy was nothing short of outstanding. His support and kind words to Barry's sisters were just the right thing to help bring closure. Don, you're a legend.

We, as family and organisers, were grateful for the large support of others in the community who made the day a huge success. The Queanbeyan RSL sub-Branch who were the major sponsors, their President Matt Helm cited the Ode, representation from the Goulburn and Yass sub-Branches, the Gunning Lions Club also contributed, the Gunning newsletter helped broadcast the event, Canberra Veterans Motorcycle Club, Padre Pastor Dr. Wayne Lyons who did a sterling job with his prayers and benediction, the Quilts of Valour team, John Curtis from Junee (a member of 5RAR - first tour) provided the audio system, the Gunning Telegraph Hotel and those unnamed supporters who donated amounts of money.

The Australian Federation Guard provided eight personnel on the day. They did a sterling job. Unfortunately and due to the imminent bushfire threat on life and property Senator Jim Molan and members of the Queanbeyan Pipes and Drums could not attend.

Barry can now rest in peace, his sisters are grateful, members of "C" Company 5RAR have paid their last respects. What a journey.

Ed's note: I have published this letter from Helen Keed and Ray Seymour at their request. I do so with great humility. David Wilkins also made a great contribution. Thommo was one of our mates, and it was an honour, not a task, to see that he could be remembered. Don



Recruit G.F. Mateer, 10 Platoon, B Company, 1 RTB Kapooka, April 1967; third from the right in the second row.



Matt in 1969 as a member of Blue Schafer's 9 Section, 9 Platoon, C Company, 5 RAR.

LIFTING THE FOG OF WAR

Association and "Half Circle" readers will be familiar with my article on the close air support that 9 Platoon received from a 2 Squadron Canberra bomber on 21 September 1969:

<https://www.5rar.asn.au/soldiers/blondes-bombs-bunkers.htm>

After Bob Howe, a 2 Squadron Navigator, contacted me and assisted in identifying the aircrew that flew on that mission, this led to two follow-up articles detailing my meeting with the pilot of the Canberra:

<https://www.5rar.asn.au/soldiers/magpie-31-page-1.htm>

<https://www.5rar.asn.au/soldiers/magpie-31-part-2.htm>

Recently, Bob contacted me to seek my permission for the three articles to be forwarded to the Editor of an e-newsletter entitled "Phan Rang News" (Phan Rang of course was the US air base from where 2 Squadron operated throughout the Vietnam conflict; "Phan Rang News" is a US publication for personnel stationed at the air base and is edited by one Doug Severt, ex-USAF). Naturally, I agreed to the use of my articles and they were subsequently published in three consecutive editions of the newsletter.

While I was very pleased that my writings would reach a wider audience, what I didn't expect were the comments by the "Phan Rang News" editor, Doug, following the publication of the final article. Doug's words struck a chord with me and so I thought that it was worthwhile sharing them with 'my boys' as well as the wider Charlie Company readership: *"For Roger Lambert and John Whitehead the 'fog of war' has been lifted. It's taken nearly 50 years for it to lift, but if it wasn't for the tenacity of Bob Howe it would not have been possible and they would still be shrouded in fog.*

For the aircrews, Magpie 31 was just another mission, not dissimilar to all the previous missions and those yet to come. They flew to the designated target area, dropped their bombs and returned to their home base, and did the same thing the next day. They usually know what ground forces are being engaged and they get damage assessments from the Forward Air Controllers, but sometimes in the fog of war the human element is eliminated.

*For the troops on the ground it's just another air strike that they've called in and as long as it was timely and the bombs hit the intended target that would be the end of it, except for this **one** mission. For the aircrews flying bombing missions can seem surreal because they seldom, if ever, meet the ground pounders.*

Meeting face to face restores the human element. For the aircrew, they were thankful that they could deliver the bombs in the precise location and return to their home base safely and the ground commander was thankful that the enemy was kept at bay and his troops were safe and mission accomplished. They were real people performing in a professional manner. The “Blonde” still remains a mystery and probably always will.”

Roger Lambert

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from David Wilkins, Roger Lambert, Dennis Nevins, 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.**

***Is your membership of the 5RAR Association current?
Are your contact details up to date? If not, please
contact Gary Townsend (memberships) at
garyt.5rar@gmail.com***

In the next edition: more from Dennis Nevins’ diary.