

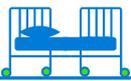
Half Circle



Number 73 - January 2013

(If this is hard to read, try increasing the picture size to 150%!!)

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: Eddie Moon - continuing treatment.

DAVE'S DIARY:

Happy New Year (2013) to the men and families of Charlie Coy. Would you believe it is just a mere 43 years since these events noted in my diary.

This entry is continued from the previous edition of Half Circle.

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional info from Battalion and Task Force logs, as well as explanatory or descriptive commentary, are in plain text:

26 Jan 70

Tet (the Vietnamese lunar new year which threatened increased enemy activity) is nearing (5-7 Feb) and in anticipation our unit is being redeployed nearer the villages of Route 2, and so it is farewell to the dreaded Mây Tào Mountains, and back to the Xuan Son depression and Binh Gia.

At 0900 hours we began to redeploy by choppers from our position on a fire trail in the western foothills of the massive Nui Be and lifted about 25 clicks south west, landing in an open kunai patch in the jungle to the west of the river Song Rai about 4 clicks south west of the Thua Tich military post (South Vietnamese) where our Fire Support Base ("Pat") was located for the operation. As soon as C & D Companies were extracted from the Mây Tào Mountain area the CO closed down the other temporary Fire Support Base, "Lynx" which had provided our artillery fire support while we were in the mountains.

The intelligence annex to 5RAR's later report of Operation Bondi 2 made reference to the enemy contacts we had in the Mây Tào Mountains, as follows:

9. Throughout Op Bondi 2 the enemy predicament caused by 1ATF operations became increasingly evident. Particularly in the North of the AO [where C & D Coys were operating], the confusion caused by the interruption of their communications routes, and almost complete loss of resupply routes, and the constant ambushing and artillery harassment has caused the Viet Cong to alter his immediate aim from the offensive operations to self preservation.

10. The extraordinary multiplicity of pre-emptive measures taken by 1ATF during the TET period probably caused the cancellation of a planned enemy offensive.

27 Jan

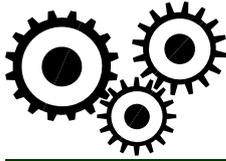
Stay loose, flexible and mobile! Again the plot changes and instead of heading north and west, we are now to go south to react to a sighting of a hundred-odd VC just east of Binh Ba (in the Dat Set region).

We covered 7 clicks the first day and 4 clicks the next, and everybody is completely shagged. The thick scrub is the killer. The scouts are almost dead on their feet.

We had the Task Force Commander Brigadier "Blackjack" Weir (who replaced the legendary "Sandy" Pearson) ordering us to go faster, speaking directly to me on our Company radio net whilst whirling above us in his helicopter, where the going was considerably easier. There are two points to make about this. First, if he had seen the bamboo forest at ground level instead of from his ivory tower, he may have eased off the verbals a bit. The scrub was near-impenetrable and full of thorns, but because it was so vast there was no skirting around it. You just had to plough on through. I regularly rotated the forward scouts who blazed a route with machetes. We were told speed was essential so we didn't try to be silent; but that was impossible in the circumstances anyhow. However we did take it more carefully and quietly as we drew closer to our destination. Secondly, if a Formation Commander talks directly to a Company Commander he bypasses the CO and interferes with the chain of command. He may have also spoken to "Genghis" (I doubt it) but Brigadier Weir kept haranguing me directly about our slow progress. I informed the CO of the bamboo forest conditions and felt confident he would accept my assessment and would know we wouldn't shirk the job to be done. Soon after this the Brigadier's nagging stopped. I suspect "Genghis" must have intervened. Thanks Boss.

⚡ **Post Script:** Major General "Sandy" Pearson AO, DSO, OBE, MC died in Sydney on 7 November 2012, aged 94, and was farewelled at a momentous memorial service with full military honours at his old school, Newington College. I personally consider him to have been the most distinguished and successful Australian Task Force commander of the Vietnam War. We of 5RAR were fortunate to have served under him in Vietnam for much of 1969.

(To be continued)



COGS IN THE WHEEL
The Company Signaller



Company Sig or Company Radio Operator, I could never work out which. For most of my time carrying the radio for “C” Company I was called “The Company Sig”. But the blokes from the Signals Corps were adamant that they were “Sigs” and us Infantry persons were “Radio Operators”. Whatever, we still had to do the same job of keeping communications open for the whole time the Company was on operations, rain, hail or shine.

The radio was known as the ANPRC 25. Wont go into details about the technical aspects of the radio (forgotten most of it anyway), plenty of information on the ubiquitous internet. Safe to say it weighed about 24lbs (or about 11kgs if you insist) and I had to carry the bloody thing.

Training in Australia before going overseas produced some wonderful ideas. Remember the “scrim” we covered our selves with as camouflage so as to appear invisible to any enemy that happened to be looking our way. To cover my radio and back pack I wore a cape covered with the stuff and immediately became known as “The Slug”. Thankfully it only lasted one day of the first operation. I bet there are still pieces of scrim hanging from the trees around Nui Dat!

On operations I had to make sure the radio was on and listened to 24/7. This meant that the hand set had to be next to my left ear all the time, my rifle in my right hand hooked over my ammo pouch. A wire hook was fashioned and the handset hung from the webbing on the left shoulder when not in use. Three different aerials were used with the set. A flexible “battle antenna” which was tucked into a webbing strap if the comms were good, a whip antenna which was used when comms were dodgy or in a night position and a dipole antenna which was used in bad conditions in night positions, usually slung over a tree. In ambush or night harbour positions pickets has to be arranged from whatever personnel were available, and I had to bed down within arms reach in case the person on the radio needed help which was often the case as I had to use very inexperienced operators as time went on.

As well as the usual ammo and rations I had to carry all the necessary codes and pro-formas for contacts, dustoffs ect.. all carried in a small photo album in one of my ammo pouches. The spare battery was carried by one of the other members of Company HQ, I think it was based on who Jack Lake didn't like that particular day. They were heavy!

One of the big disadvantages of carrying the radio was in contacts. My back pack was attached to the radio so when the stuff hit the fan I could not drop my pack and had to carry it through the contact. The Company OC Major Claude Ducker ordered me to find a solution to that problem. Sort of a quick release back pack. I never solved the problem and put up with it.

The radios were supposed to be waterproof but the handset were far from it. On one “practice” amphibious landing I stepped off the landing craft and disappeared under the South China Sea. Jack Lake was behind me and thought I had gone for good but using all my initiative I walked along the bottom of the sea and slowly emerged, battle antenna leading the way, and made my way up the beach. It resulted in a total loss of all comms. Lesson learnt and no amphibious landings were contemplated again!

Back at the base the comms still had to be maintained with the Platoons and BHQ. The radios were under the Company HQ in a large bunker along with telephones wired to the Platoons and BHQ and just as in the bush pickets had to be maintained. It was very claustrophobic down there by your self in the early hours of the morning but a lot safer than sitting on a gun picket out in the Platoon lines.

That's basically it but to finish I should mention our communications with our American friends. In particular one member of Company HQ who when talking to American chopper pilots would immediately break into the worst American accent I have ever heard. Couldn't help himself. No names, and no, it wasn't Claude, maybe I will tell you over a beer someday.

Alan Miles, Company Sig “C” Platoon.



FOUND: 2791197 Pte Dave Nicholls

Your editor recently had a call from Daniel Nicholls, the son of Dave who served in 7PL from August 1969 to February 1970. Dave is not very well at present, and would like to hear from any of his old mates. Please contact Dave through Daniel - email djnich74@gmail.com. The picture on the left shows Max Hedley (l) with Dave.

RIDE FOR HEARTKIDS: Major Dave French, PL COMD, Adjutant, OC Coy Company (Afghanistan), and more recently Ops Officer of 5RAR is to participate in the Ride for HeartKids in 2013. Here is Dave's story:

In 2006 my first son William was born and at six days old he underwent heart surgery to correct a narrow aorta which was restricting blood flow. This was a fairly 'simple' operation but pretty stressful for first time parents. William made a quick recovery and after short stints in intensive care and a cardiac ward we had him home just after he was two weeks old.

During that time we had some contact with HeartKids, an organisation that provides support to children who suffer congenital heart disease, their families and support to research to assist in treatment of those diseases. HeartKids is funded by both volunteers and full time staff and is represented in all states and territories. We were lucky to not need them for long but they provide excellent support to families who can be in hospital for months or may not have such a good result.

In October 2013 my mate Carl Jenkins (Ex-RAN but you can't hold that against him) and I will take part in Fitz's Challenge, a one day endure cycling challenge through the Brindabella Mountains in Canberra. At this stage we are looking towards the 165km leg the profile of which you can see in the attached picture. I think I agreed to this while under the influence of beer. In order to ensure I pony up and actually get the ride done it was decided we would do a spot of fundraising and that HeartKids would be suitable beneficiaries. So here we are. . .

So how can you help?

What we are asking for at this stage is for people to support and follow us as we train for this little adventure. We are not seeking donations at this stage, just that for those who are Facebook savvy to 'Like' our page 'Ride for HeartKids' or for those who don't use that form of social media to visit the Fundraising Page and keep an eye in that way.

We'll be posting training results throughout the year and then as the ride approaches asking for people to donate what they think our efforts and cause deserve and what they can spare. We have a modest \$2000 target to start with but the more money we get the further we will ride. Hell if we can get \$10000 we'll ride to Sydney.

Below are a few links for people to visit and see what we are on about. We appreciate any support that people that give. If nothing else it may provide some light relief for some to see a Major killing himself on a bike.

Cheers

Dave French

Facebook Page: 'Ride for HeartKids'

<https://www.facebook.com/RideForHeartKids#!/RideForHeartKids>

Go Fundraise Page: <http://heartkidsnsw.gofundraise.com.au/page/FrenchD>

Fitz's Challenge Homepage: <http://www.fitzs.com.au/>

Important information about the US Navy - Max Cameron reports:

The U.S. S. Constitution (Old Ironsides), as a combat vessel, carried 48,600 gallons of fresh water for her crew of 475 officers and men. This was sufficient to last six months of sustained operations at sea. She carried no evaporators (i.e. fresh water distillers).

However, let it be noted that according to her ship's log, "On July 27, 1798, the U.S.S. Constitution sailed from Boston with a full complement of 475 officers and men, 48,600 gallons of fresh water, 7,400 cannon shot, 11,600 pounds of black powder and 79,400 gallons of rum."

Her mission: "To destroy and harass English shipping."

Making Jamaica on 6 October, she took on 826 pounds of flour and 68,300 gallons of rum.

Then she headed for the Azores, arriving there 12 November. She provisioned with 550 pounds of beef and 64,300 gallons of Portuguese wine.

On 18 November, she set sail for England. In the ensuing days she defeated five British men-of-war and captured and scuttled 12 English merchant ships, salvaging only the rum aboard each.

By 26 January, her powder and shot were exhausted. Nevertheless, although unarmed, she made a night raid up the Firth of Clyde in Scotland. Her landing party captured a whisky distillery and transferred 40,000 gallons of single malt Scotch aboard by dawn. Then she headed home.

The U. S. S. Constitution arrived in Boston on 20 February 1799, with no cannon shot, no food, no powder, no rum, no wine, no whisky, and 38,600 gallons of water.



Two old mates meeting again – Terry Fitzgerald and Eric Hamlin. A couple more km's on the clock, but impossible not to recognise them!



Have we mellowed? NOT A CHANCE! Here is a photo of "Hard Man" Bill Hartley sitting on some bloke's knee! What's that in his hand? Probably a grenade or a gift that he's helped himself to!

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. Dave French commences his quest for a comfortable bike seat.
2. A picture of Ben Oram shaking hands with a Military Policeman. Yeah, right!

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423313, (02) 6842 4913, with help from Alan Miles, Daniel Nicholls, MAJ Dave French, Bill Hartley, Dave Wilkins, and Max Cameron.

Happy New Year to all old and current Tigers